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## A Citizen Pillar Against Corruption: India

Every citizen can rise to be part of the 5th Pillar to make sure the other four pillars of democracy are working properly for people.

—*Vijay Anand, president, 5th Pillar*

Changing an entrenched system of corruption embedded in the government, private sector, and other societal realms can seem daunting if not impossible. The sheer dilemma of where to begin given so vast a challenge, and the seeming difficulty of melding near-term visible change with long-term societal transformation, can hinder civic initiatives before they even start. The burgeoning 5th Pillar movement in India is charting a path through this conundrum by building upon the legacy of a trailblazing forebear, the Right to Information movement, and through a set of innovative, complementary nonviolent methods.

### **Context**

The Right to Information movement began as a bottom-up struggle linking access to information with government transparency, powerholder accountability, and the basics for survival, such as wages and food. At the forefront was the grassroots social movement organization (SMO) Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (Union for the Empowerment of Peasants and Laborers), otherwise known as MKSS.<sup>1</sup> The national struggle grew out of a civic initiative in a destitute village of approximately forty families in Rajasthan in 1997.<sup>2</sup> What began as an antipoverty effort of laborers to receive minimum wages due to them took a turn. “We determined that the underlying problems affecting working conditions and

wages in Rajasthan during this time were corruption and nepotism,” said MKSS veteran Sowmya Kidambi.<sup>3</sup> In order to counter powerholder claims that the laborers had not completed their work assignments, MKSS began demanding access to local administration records, such as time measurement books, labor lists, copies of bills, and vouchers.<sup>4</sup> When the authorities refused, the Right to Information movement was born.

Over the years it conducted numerous people power campaigns involving a multitude of tactics, from hunger strikes and *dharnas* (short and extended sit-ins) to leafleting, picketing, street theatre, songs, truck *yatras* (journeys), and the Ghotala Rath Yatra (Chariot Rally of Scams), a traveling spoof of political campaigning. MKSS is perhaps best known for creating the *jan sunwai* (public hearing). The movement was a source of inspiration for Integrity Watch Afghanistan’s community-monitoring initiatives (see Chapter 8), and its nonviolent methods were adapted by Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI) in Kenya and neighboring African countries (see Chapter 10). In 1998 the movement achieved its first large-scale victory: consultations with the newly elected Rajasthani government to draft a provincial Right to Information Bill. In 2000 the bill was passed. Concurrently, in 1996, members of the MKSS core were instrumental in founding the National Campaign for People’s Right to Information, which fought for a citizen-centered national Right to Information Act (RTI) through engagement with powerholders, nonviolent action, and networking with civil society organizations (CSOs) and civic groups.

The historic legislation was passed in October 2005. Shekhar Singh, a civic activist and academic, encapsulated the impact: “Usually the laws are for the government to control the people, but this law [India’s Right to Information Act] turns all that around: it’s for the people to evaluate the government.”<sup>5</sup> It grants India’s citizens access to information in any form held by public authorities, such as documents, log-books, emails, contracts, or legal opinions.<sup>6</sup> Information can also be sought about nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) receiving funding from the state. The law’s stipulations are astoundingly user-friendly, a reflection of the Right to Information movement’s bottom-up input into its content. There is no official form. Citizens can request information on a sheet of paper from a government department by asking one or more questions.<sup>7</sup> With the right questions—therein lies the key—it’s possible to document fraud, overcome corruption, hold officials accountable, and ultimately foster good governance.<sup>8</sup> In spite of incessant efforts to weaken the law and create obstacles for regular people, such

as increasing RTI filing fees, a 2011 global rating of access to information laws ranked India's act the third strongest in the world.<sup>9</sup>

During the two and a half years after the RTI became law, an estimated 2 million applications were filed, 400,000 from rural locales and 1.6 million from urban settings.<sup>10</sup> A report from the province of Karnataka found that the number of RTI petitions and appeals jumped from 10,485 in 2005–2006 to 177,259 in 2009–2010.<sup>11</sup> While this growth is encouraging, research from 2008 indicates that an even greater potential exists for public awareness and use of the law to curb corruption and gain accountability. A civil society study focusing on ten states and the Delhi National Capital Territory found that 45 percent of randomly selected urban respondents and only 20 percent of focus group participants in 400 villages knew about the RTI.<sup>12</sup> A report commissioned by the Indian Department of Personnel and Training found that 33 percent of urban dwellers and 13 percent of rural residents were knowledgeable about the legislation.<sup>13</sup> It concluded that “the Act has not yet reached the stage of implementation which was envisaged.”<sup>14</sup> Since 2005, numerous civil society efforts and even government-civic partnerships have sprung up around the country to raise public awareness and encourage regular citizens to use the RTI Act to fight state malfeasance. And then there is 5th Pillar, which has integrated RTI into a larger movement empowering regular people to thwart corruption.

## **The 5th Pillar “Eruption Against Corruption”**

### *Origins*

In 2001 Vijay Anand was an IT entrepreneur in the Washington, DC, area.<sup>15</sup> Concerned about social conditions in India, he and other like-minded NRIs (nonresident Indians) created the AIMS India Foundation, a charitable organization to foster socioeconomic development through projects on rural education, infrastructure, and health care. Over the next three years, as the urban, university-educated Anand began visiting rural areas during trips home, he started to realize that the dire conditions many of his fellow citizens faced were not simply because they lacked a school, well, or clinic. Corruption was a core obstacle to genuine socioeconomic improvements. “I found that several elements of society were not allowing development to happen,” he recalled. There was not a culture of people making demands of powerholders, nor did many civil servants have a sense of responsibility for their jobs and duty to

their obligations. “It made me think that government officials need to be made accountable in order to get long-term change.”

In 2004 Anand connected with M. B. Nirmal, a social entrepreneur and activist, who earlier had been formulating an informal anticorruption group in Chennai called 5th Pillar. Anand was taken by his ideas and formally launched 5th Pillar in the state of Tamil Nadu, along with a US-based nonprofit international headquarters, to encourage participation and funding from the Indian diaspora. Its name is derived from the four pillars of democracy. In addition to the legislature, executive branch, judiciary, and media, a healthy democracy needs a fifth pillar: an active, engaged citizenry striving for a country free from corruption. Anand moved back home in 2007 in order to build the civic initiative and start fieldwork. “I wanted to do more on a large scale and came back to India work in social activism,” he said.

#### *Vision, Mission, and Overall Objectives*

5th Pillar’s vision is, quite simply, to realize freedom from corruption.<sup>16</sup> The struggle is viewed as a continuation of the Indian independence movement. Anand avows, “India won freedom from the British occupation, and now it must win freedom from corruption.” Its mission statement reads, “Encourage, enable, and empower every citizen of India to eliminate corruption at all levels of society.”<sup>17</sup> The civic initiative’s overall objective is to create a national culture of civic responsibility and intolerance of graft. It sees its efforts as a “second freedom movement after decades of independence.”<sup>18</sup> “Everyone can be freedom fighters of India through noncooperation, nonviolence, and self-defense against bribery,” explained Anand.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Initial Challenges and Strategies*

5th Pillar’s leadership core faced a number of critical, existential challenges at the outset. First, they wanted to build an ongoing social movement rather than a finite campaign. Second, they did not want to sacrifice the movement’s overarching vision of societal transformation, yet they understood it would be impossible to fight the entire venal system and take on all forms of corruption. Thus, the group had to find a way to distill tangible objectives from maximalist, long-term aspirations; narrow down the struggle arena and targets to a manageable size; link corruption to common grievances and injustice in order to mobilize people; articulate clear demands; and strive for visible, incremental successes. 5th Pillar also had to tackle three psychological barriers: cynicism about the government, hopelessness that things could change, and fear of cor-

ruptor reprisals, the latter a reality for activists as well as regular citizens.<sup>20</sup> Last, 5th Pillar leadership wanted to lay the foundation for systemic change down the road. “If we collectively as a nation say no to bribe, eventually it will end,” Anand said. By pulling the plug on bribery, the entire system of corruption would start to unravel.

To this end, 5th Pillar adopted a dual-track strategy that emanated directly from its vision and mission statement:

1. *Motivate regular citizens to confront corruption through awareness-raising, direct assistance, practical education, nonviolent tactics, and tools (both extrainstitutional and institutional).* What kind of corruption? The core members understood they had to identify a form of graft that was not only pervasive but also that touched the lives of the majority of the population. They decided to zero in on bribery. For the regular person, extortion by civil servants, government officials, and the police is a tangible grievance—a direct source of oppression that results in the denial of rights, public services, and state entitlements, which for the poor can impact their very survival. Two defining methods around which nonviolent tactics revolved came to underscore this strategy: RTI empowerment and the zero-rupee note.

2. *Strive for long-term change by instilling anticorruption ethics in youth and postsecondary students, who will become India’s future workforce, civil servants, decisionmakers, and leaders.* The cornerstone is the Freedom from Corruption campaign.

### ***RTI Empowerment***

5th Pillar is a progeny of the MKSS, the Right to Information movement, and the passage of the RTI Act. 5th Pillar is fulfilling MKSS’s vision that regular citizens may use the legislation as a tool to access information and curb corruption as it affects them in their everyday lives. The movement has designed a defining method (a set of complementary activities) with three objectives. The first is to maximize the legislation’s use in order to impede graft and stop bribery. The second is to enable people to obtain public services (for example, water and electricity), entitlements (such as tax refunds and pensions), and antipoverty assistance (including rural employment schemes, education scholarships, and ration cards). The third objective, Anand said, is to make RTI “known and used by as many people as possible in the shortest time.”

Education is one of 5th Pillar’s main RTI tactics. The group seeks to provide training in submitting RTIs as widely as possible. It started initially in its home state of Tamil Nadu; has branched out more re-

cently to Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and two districts in Rajasthan; and aspires to cover the entire country. Six days a week at its Chennai headquarters and Coimbatore branch, it convenes free RTI clinics that provide immediate assistance; every Saturday, training-of-trainers workshops are conducted at those two locations.

In conjunction with its youth Freedom from Corruption campaign and student chapters, 5th Pillar conducts workshops at colleges and universities, while district coordinators throughout Tamil Nadu organize sessions in rural towns and villages, including with marginalized communities. The content covers the RTI process, the steps for filers to take, information collection and site inspections, penalties for corrupt officials, and a strategic approach to asking questions. “The act is to get information, so you need to use creativity and strategy to ask the right questions to stop corruption,” explained Anand.

For example, a below-poverty-line mother is unable to obtain her food ration card unless she pays a bribe. In an RTI petition she could ask such questions as, What is the name of the official handling my ration card application submitted on X date? How many ration card applications were pending as of that date? How many ration card applications have been processed since that date by that official? On what date can I get my ration card?

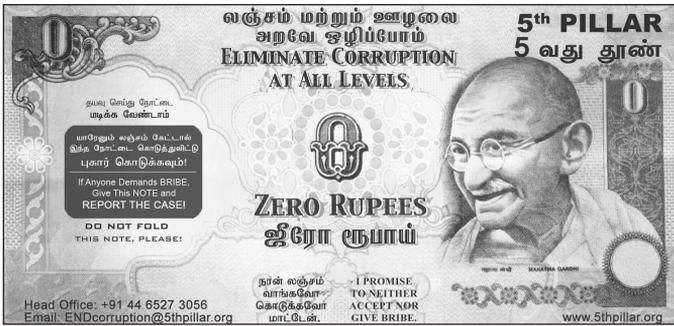
5th Pillar helps people write and submit RTI applications, which are invaluable services for the illiterate, semiliterate, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups. As importantly, the movement files RTIs on behalf of citizens who are too intimidated to approach the relevant state office or who fear reprisals. Such considerations are common among government whistle-blowers—honest officials who want to expose graft within the system—as well as among the poor, tribal groups, marginalized groups in the caste system, and rural communities generally, where there is less anonymity than in urban settings. For grand corruption perpetrated by higher-level officials or police forces, 5th Pillar developed a network of volunteer RTI filers around the country. According to a former team member, they are often retired civil servants disgusted by avarice, who are far removed from the scene and thus cannot be easily tracked down or attacked by the corruptors. The movement also offers assistance to those who wish to approach the state government’s Vigilance Department or the Central Bureau of Investigation’s (CBI) Anti-Corruption Bureau. It educates people about how to make a report about extortion to the Vigilance Police for a sting operation, and offers psychological support if the person is fearful. 5th Pillar will even contact the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Commission on behalf of citizens who want to make reports or launch a sting operation.

In many instances, reported Anand, simply filing an RTI generates enough pressure, as the possibility of an investigation and disciplinary action inhibits corrupt officials. 5th Pillar posts “success stories,” including tough cases, on its website and in its monthly Tamil-language magazine, *Maattram* (Change). When an initial RTI petition does not lead to a rectification of the matter, the movement often launches RTI appeals for citizens.

**Zero-Rupee Note**

In 2001 an acquaintance of Anand, University of Maryland physics professor Satinder Mohan Bhagat, came up with a novel tool to sensitize Indians and the diaspora about corruption and to counter bribery demands when he traveled back to India. He created the likeness of a fifty-rupee note, but with a difference. It had no denomination and proclaimed, “Eliminate corruption at all levels.” 5th Pillar’s core team adapted the pseudo-currency, translated it into five of the country’s

Front and Back of the Tamil Version of the Zero-Rupee Note



<p><b>Encourage, Enable and Empower Every Citizen of India to Eliminate Corruption at All Levels of Society</b></p> <p>“சமுதாயத்தின் அனைத்து தரப்பிலிருந்தும் லஞ்சம் மற்றும் ஊழலை அறவே ஒழிக்க ஒவ்வொரு இந்திய குடிமகனுக்கும் ஊக்கமளித்து சாத்தியப்படுத்தி அதிகாரம் அளிப்போம்”</p>		<p><b>Use RTI Act 2005</b> Right To Information Free training on our website!</p> <p><b>பயன்படுத்தும்பவர்</b> தங்கள் ஆய்வு உரிமைகளைப் பி. 2005 இன்மீது பயிற்சி பெறலாம்</p>
	<p><b>5th PILLAR</b> 5 வது தூண்</p>	
<p>41, Circular Road, United India Colony, Kodambakkam, Chennai - 600 024 41, என்.சூன் வீட்டு புறம்போக்கு, இந்திய ஒன்றிப்பு, கோடம்பக்கம், சென்னை - 600 024</p> <p>Phone: +91 44 6527 3056 / +91 94451 64555 Fax: +91 44 4213 3677 / Website: www.5thpillar.org Email: ENDCorruption@5thpillar.org</p>	<p><b>Regional Chapters</b> Delhi : delhi@5thpillar.org Mumbai : mumbai@5thpillar.org Bengaluru : bi@5thpillar.org Hyderabad : hyd@5thpillar.org Kolkata : kolkata@5thpillar.org</p>	<p><b>Local Chapter:</b></p>
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Source: “Zero Rupee Note,” 5th Pillar, www.5thpillar.org. Used with permission.

major languages (Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, and Telugu), posted it on the movement's website, and created a secondary site ([zerocurrency.org](http://zerocurrency.org)) that offers downloadable and printable zero-currency bills for virtually every currency in the world.

The zero-rupee note has multiple purposes. First, it serves as a “nonviolent weapon” for ordinary citizens to refuse to pay bribes, explained Anand. When extorted, citizens give this instead of the actual banknote. At the same time, the note sends a message of “nonviolence and noncooperation to corruption,” he added. The flip side of the zero-currency note provides information about 5th Pillar. This strategic decision about the design shows corruptors that the citizen is not alone but is part of a larger movement that will hold the official accountable. Such solidarity in turn alleviates people's fear to oppose corrupt officials, thereby emboldening them to refuse to pay bribes.

Movement members hand them out at busy public spaces such as train stations, bus stops, cinemas, government offices providing services to citizens, and even weddings—the latter considered to be particularly auspicious occasions. Anand estimated that up until mid-2012, they had disseminated zero-rupee notes and movement materials at over two dozen marriage celebrations in Chennai and various districts. The district coordinator covering Coimbatore has systematically blanketed Tamil Nadu's second-largest city with the zero-currency note. 5th Pillar also disseminates the anticorruption currency at its events, workshops, and street actions. Since 2007, over 2.5 million notes have been distributed throughout Tamil Nadu, in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Rajasthan, as well as the Delhi capital area and Mumbai.<sup>21</sup> In its 2011 Annual Report, 5th Pillar stated, “Thousands of citizens have handed out the Zero-Rupee Note under circumstances of demands of bribe and have found to their pleasant surprise that the erstwhile corrupt official/employee yields instantaneously to their request without the bribe.”<sup>22</sup>

### *Youth Engagement*

5th Pillar directs much of its outreach to youth in general, particularly targeting postsecondary students. “The general idea,” explained Anand, “is to empower them to obtain their fundamental rights when they turn eighteen without paying bribes. Then when they leave college they know they have power and can use that power to obtain rights and state services without a bribe.” In March 2009 the group formed a Students Against Corruption unit that conducts campus outreach about 5th Pillar to support establishment of campus chapters and to empower students to fight corruption. It also developed a pamphlet for schoolchildren. Stu-

dents are involved in many of its street actions. The ongoing Freedom from Corruption campaign consists of comprehensive workshops on college and university campuses across Tamil Nadu, and more recently in other states. Originally launched in 2007 it cumulatively has reached over 1,600 colleges and universities.<sup>23</sup> Each workshop encompasses mutually reinforcing elements:

- *Anticorruption awareness presentation.* Focusing on India's greatness versus limitations, why Indians need to fight corruption, causes of malfeasance, consequences of it, and reasons for targeting bribery.
- *Zero-rupee note.* Discussion of its meaning and power over bribe-demanders, followed by distribution to participants.
- *Essay contest.* As a lead-up to a 5th Pillar visit, student chapters often hold anticorruption essay contests, with the winners announced at the event.
- *RTI Act presentation.* Overview of the legislation and how citizens can use it.
- *Recruitment drive.* Invitation to participants to raise their hands if they are interested in giving a similar presentation to students and other groups.
- *Small-group exercise.* Participants are divided into groups of five, and they identify questions they either want to ask of 5th Pillar representatives or want to answer themselves. Each group then shares its results with everyone.
- *Pledge.* Toward the end of the workshop, students are invited to take an anticorruption pledge. In unison, they declare, "I promise to neither accept nor take [a] bribe, and to encourage, enable, and empower every citizen of India to eliminate corruption at all levels of society."
- *Signature.* Very often a large banner of the zero-rupee note is unfurled and students affirm their commitment by signing their names on it.

Discourse plays a central role in the youth initiatives. The 5th Pillar team emphasizes three themes. First is *freedom*. Indians may be rid of British colonial rule but they are still oppressed by corruption. For example, during a workshop at the Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) in April 2010 Anand exhorted, "You are the freedom fighters of India. We were slaves to the British for 190 years, and we are now slaves to corruption." *Patriotism* is the second theme. If people want to show

their love for India, they need to fight corruption; India cannot achieve her full potential and greatness as long as endemic corruption exists. “It’s in our hands to free ourselves,” Anand declared at the event. Third is to *be the change*. Building upon the quote attributed to Mohandas Gandhi, “Be the change you want to see in the world,” the workshops emphasize that it’s up to its youth to change India. At VIT, Anand exhorted the students, “We need you! Sixty percent of India is younger than thirty years. If you take a stand you will make India take a U-turn for the better!”

At campuses where a 5th Pillar student chapter already exists, movement representatives spend time with the group prior to the workshop. Together, they also meet with selected faculty and senior administration officials, thereby cultivating their support and gathering input about how corruption impacts the education sector. Along with the workshops, 5th Pillar supports the establishment of new campus chapters, recruits members to the movement from campuses, and more recently, participates in major campus events. For instance, in May 2011, movement members had a prominent role at SRM University’s Technology Management Festival in cooperation with the institution’s administration and student body. 5th Pillar, a few other civil society organizations, and students held an anticorruption rally. The movement had a stand in the duration of the four-day gathering, provided input and speakers for a panel discussion, recruited 150 new student members, signed up 500 youth for the e-newsletter, and made plans with students to return later in the year to establish a new chapter on campus. “We want to start this as a silent revolution,” Anand said. The long-term objective is to “keep it going ten to 20 years,” he added.

### *Nonviolent Tactics*

In the five years since 5th Pillar was launched, the Chennai core has regularly carried out a variety of nonviolent tactics, many of which complement or build upon its ongoing Freedom from Corruption campaign, the two defining methods of RTI empowerment, and the zero-rupee note. The tactics include the following:

- *Human chains*. Twice a year 5th Pillar stages high-profile mass actions at Marina Beach in Chennai, mobilizing anywhere from 500 to 1,500 postsecondary students, civic actors from other CSOs, Scouts, people from the National Service Scheme and Youth Red Cross, and regular citizens. According to K. Banukumar, a retired senior civil servant and 5th Pillar’s executive director, they engage in a series of activ-

ities from fun stunts, such as kicking the corruption ball and hugging the anticorruption ball, to leafleting, distributing zero-rupee notes, signing names on giant zero-rupee banners, and taking an anticorruption oath.

- *Dharna*. This nonviolent tactic, steeped in cultural resonance, is described as “peaceful agitation.” It can consist of sit-ins—employed frequently by the Right to Information movement—but also, said Banukumar, “nonviolent exhibition and protest with slogan shouting.” For example, in early 2009 a dharna was held in front of the Tamil Nadu government guest house to save the RTI Act from being weakened and to change a corrupt commissioner in the State Information Commission, the agency authorized to carry out the RTI Act.<sup>24</sup> 5th Pillar earned widespread media coverage and the governor’s attention. Another dharna made a direct appeal to Tamil Nadu’s chief minister and the State Information Commission to increase punishment for corrupt officials and, once again, to save the RTI Act.

- *Flash street corner meetings*. Movement activists or student chapters set up a mini-table at a busy public intersection, gather a crowd, talk for ten minutes, hand out leaflets and zero-rupee notes, and then disband.

- *Signature collections*. Either in tandem with dharnas or at other nonviolent actions, 5th Pillar encourages regular people to sign their names to zero-rupee banners alongside specific anticorruption appeals and demands.

- *Commemorations*. 5th Pillar’s leadership core and local chapters across Tamil Nadu annually observe the International Anti-Corruption Day on December 9. In 2010, street actions were carried out in Chennai, Cuddalore, Dharmapuri, Erode, Pondicherry, Madurai, Mannargudi, Tirunelveli, Tuticorin, Vellore, and Villupuram.

- *Tie-ins*. 5th Pillar often cooperates with social service camps conducted in rural areas in Tamil Nadu, either through colleges, universities, or the National Cadet Corps. Postsecondary students adopt a village for a week of community service. At some of the camps, the movement’s district coordinators or the Chennai core convened one-day anticorruption trainings for villages.

- *Cultural activities*. The movement stages plays with an anticorruption theme in Chennai. Audiences up to approximately 1,000 people include supporters, volunteers, and the general public. Suhasini Maniratnam, a popular Tamil actor and director, performed a one-woman play at a diaspora fund-raiser in Washington, DC. 5th Pillar has also held anticorruption poetry contests, and student members have held

plays at college festivals or cultural programs. Anand reported that during spring 2012, students from the Digital Film Institute in Chennai created an anticorruption video and song highlighting 5th Pillar.

- *Phone hotline.* At the Chennai headquarters, the movement runs a hotline that anyone can call to report instances of corruption, ask questions, or get information.

- *Anticorruption gear.* In addition to the zero-rupee notes, on occasion, when the movement has the financial capacity, it gives out special 5th Pillar items such as T-shirts, water bottles, and reusable shopping bags. It also produced a user-friendly RTI Act manual and a traffic-fine awareness pamphlet, which members hand out to regular people on the street, in lines, and at weddings—the latter through donations from relatives of the bride or groom.

District branches and local chapters, often launched by youth, also conduct their own “self-designed, self-motivated” tactics, said Anand. The actions are marked by creativity and daring, as social stratification and intimidation can be stronger in rural settings, which have less anonymity than urban centers. A few chapters set up information awareness booths at weddings and gave out zero-rupee notes to guests. T. Jayaselvan, administrative manager at the Chennai headquarters, recalled how another local coordinator leafleted ordinary people standing in a long queue. Every Monday the public can submit complaints to the district collector that either directly or indirectly pertain to corruption—for example, delayed state services, difficulties in receiving disability or old-age pensions, and issues with land titles.<sup>25</sup> As approximately 200 aggrieved citizens waited their turn, the activist gave them brochures and zero-rupee notes. Another rural area coordinator conducted a public meeting in the town of Radhapuram, then launched a procession on the same day to Ooralvaimozhi, a nearby village. Locals walked nineteen kilometers with placards, handed out zero-rupee notes, convened a public meeting, and held an anticorruption pledge-taking session.

#### *Private Sector and Civil Society Outreach*

The Chennai core frequently conducts anticorruption presentations to the business community through Lions Club and Rotary Club chapters across Tamil Nadu and more recently in Bangalore (Karnataka), as well as at Chambers of Commerce, including the American Chamber of Commerce–India Tamil Nadu chapter.<sup>26</sup> The content is largely tailored to middle-class, middle-aged businesspeople and entrepreneurs. As with the youth workshops, Anand and his colleagues begin by addressing

how graft is holding back India's development, overall greatness, and international stature. They directly tackle the fear factor, prevalent in the private sector. Businesspeople not only face lower-level bureaucratic malfeasance but even extortion demands from more senior officials and the police, who threaten to harm their enterprises if they do not comply. Often generating a lively exchange with groups, 5th Pillar teams encourage people to share their experiences as well as voice their concerns about filing RTIs and the efficacy of the zero-rupee note.

The Chennai activists also discuss the negative impact of middle-class complicity in bribery. Addressing one such group, Anand explained, "The person who can afford to bribe affects one hundred people who cannot afford this, as this reinforces the bribe-demander and increases the cost of bribes." Finally, the activists encourage participants to become members of 5th Pillar, and they appeal for help, including monetary support; advertisements in movement publications; in-kind donations, such as equipment, printing, and professional services; and contacts with other business groups and postsecondary institutions in order to increase outreach and awareness.

As with the Freedom from Corruption workshops, discourse is central to these presentations. The core messages are as follows:

- Those who want to fight corruption, including businesspeople, are not alone. They are part of a larger movement [5th Pillar] that will help them and stand by them. "Together we can achieve change."
- The private sector can say no to graft—with simple, practical solutions, such as RTI petitions and zero-rupee notes.
- The state is beholden to its citizens. The people put powerholders in positions of power, and government employees are there to serve the citizens, not vice versa.

5th Pillar also teams up with other CSOs and civic initiatives on anticorruption efforts—for example, India Against Corruption and Transparency International India. "Our model is to partner with different organizations for different areas of change," said Anand. In April 2011, 5th Pillar co-convened with Transparency International India the All-India Anti-Corruption Summit in Delhi. In August 2011 the movement held numerous activities in Tamil Nadu in solidarity with the Gandhian activist Anna Hazare and joined his national mass mobilization for the Jan Lokpal (citizens' ombudsman) bill for the creation of an independent anticorruption body to investigate corruption cases.<sup>27</sup> In Chennai, Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Erode, and Pallavaram, 5th Pillar held several

one-day fasts, symbolizing Hazare's hunger strike, and the more challenging "relay fasts," where individuals fast in blocks of three to five days. The Pondicherry branch held a daylong rally on August 16. In Coimbatore, Anand went on a hunger strike for twelve days, from August 17 to 28, in solidarity with Hazare. He was followed by Rajkumar Velu, who was then the head of the city's 5th Pillar branch, and Kesavan, an executive committee member. They began on August 20 for a dozen days. Coimbatore was also the site of two mobilizations.

In conjunction with the commencement of the hunger strike, a day-long citizens' rally was held, featuring music, anticorruption pledges, symbolic fasts, and an evening candlelight vigil. On August 24, approximately 5,000 students from thirty-six colleges formed a three-kilometer line on both sides of a road.<sup>28</sup> Others took part in one-day fasts, and activists collected signatures for a petition to the prime minister demanding implementation of the Jan Lokpal bill. 5th Pillar's Chennai core and India Against Corruption rallied an estimated 6,000 people for a Jan Lokpal march along Chennai's Marina Beach, recollected Anand. Candlelight vigils were held in both Chennai and Pondicherry.<sup>29</sup>

## **Movement Attributes**

### *Duality and Discourse*

5th Pillar has a dual nature. On the one hand, it is projected as a social movement, amassing India's second wave of freedom fighters. It emphasizes that people have the collective power to gain freedom from corruption, which is the enemy within rather than an external invader. On the other hand, 5th Pillar presents itself as an organization that serves as a partner and resource for the "common man," the expression used in India to denote regular citizens—hence, the RTI trainings and assistance activities, such as submitting RTI petitions for those who are too scared or lack the wherewithal to do so. "We want people to think of 5th Pillar as the equivalent of the Red Cross for natural disasters," reflected Anand. "We want them to feel confident and assured they can come to us if they want to say no to bribery."

The movement's discourse cultivates a sense of collective ownership in the struggle, from its eponymous name, 5th Pillar, to its mission statement, to slogans, such as "You are all 5th Pillar. You take the initiative and we'll stand by you"; "5th Pillar—Corruption Killer"; "5th Pillar—All of us who want a corruption-free nation"; "Be the Change—Together We Can"; and "It's up to us to gain our freedom."

The messages carry through on its website, placards at street actions, leaflets, and the ubiquitous zero-rupee note, which has many incarnations, including the pseudo-banknote, T-shirts, water bottles, and massive banners on which hundreds can sign their names to pledge against bribery. The anticorruption struggle is also infused with patriotism. From T-shirts to videos to public events, the movement conveys two core messages: India can never fulfill its potential to be a superpower while plagued by corruption, and to love India is to fight corruption, individually by refusing to demand or take bribes, and collectively by acting together to “eliminate corruption at all levels.”

Ownership is built into 5th Pillar’s two defining methods: filing RTI petitions and using the zero-rupee note to say no to bribery. Backed by the power of numbers, both methods revolve around regular people carrying out individual acts of defiance. At the same time, these acts are empowering because they can produce visible outcomes for those who engage in them, as when a police officer or civil servant refrains or backs off from bribe demands.

### *Unity*

For 5th Pillar, unity is bound together with ownership of the struggle. The movement is not built upon an alliance of organizations but upon what Anand described as a “coalition of citizens”—volunteers, members, and regular people who through 5th Pillar are filing RTI petitions, using the zero-rupee note, and changing their mind-set about corruption. At the same time, the Chennai core recognized that it must strategically involve particular sectors in society, hence its deliberate targeting of

- *Youth and university students.* A generational change of attitudes and practices is needed to diminish corruption.
- *The private sector.* Given their influence, connections to power-holders, and frequent encounters with horizontal corruption.
- *Rural communities.* Oppressed by graft in their daily lives.
- *Indian diaspora.* As many nonresident Indians have tasted life without endemic corruption and have become less tolerant of it.

Nonetheless, Jayaselvan reported that at the local level, 5th Pillar coordinators do organize meetings with community-based organizations in order to create awareness about the RTI Act and the zero-rupee note. As previously mentioned, the movement has, on a case-by-case basis, joined forces with other civic initiatives both in Tamil Nadu and nation-

ally, to protect the RTI Act and push for a strong Jan Lokpal anticorruption bill's passage in Parliament.

### *Digital Technology*

5th Pillar's website serves multiple objectives: as a resource center on civilian-based action to curb corruption, from learning about the RTI Act and filing an RTI petition, to checking official fees for public services, obtaining contact information for Vigilance Offices across India, and using the zero-rupee note against bribery demands. The site also serves as the digital face of the movement for target constituencies, including regular people, students, media, and the diaspora. As of June 1, 2012, it had 581,510 visitors. Anticorruption videos and segments from events are cross-posted on 5th Pillar's website and YouTube.

According to Anand, the movement also maintains a blog, as well as a 45,000-person e-mail list, a 900-member Yahoo! group, and Facebook groups in various languages and parts of the country. The latter has multiple purposes. First, Facebook offers an online forum for discussion. Second, members can post problems, share success stories, and report incidents of corruption. Third, Facebook enables efficient communication and information sharing across various chapters. By June 2012 there were approximately 18,000 to 20,000 Facebook members in total. Information and communication technology tools are maintained by volunteers, with the exception of one paid staff member working part of the time on the website. "Specific individuals are the 'owners' of each online tool," explained Anand. For instance, a Washington, DC-based member in the leadership core handles the blog and the online version of the *Change* publication.

The Chennai core also linked up with kiirti.org, "a technology platform to enable collection and aggregation of governance issues through phone, SMS, email, and the Web." The plan was to create a digital tool that provided citizens with multiple low-risk methods through which to post instances of corruption and poor governance. However, the effort did not take off. When asked why, Anand said there wasn't funding to run the platform, volunteers with digital skills are already helping with other ICT efforts, and there are bandwidth limitations. In the meantime, Janaagraha, a civic organization in Bangalore, launched something similar: [ipaidabribe.com](http://ipaidabribe.com). It has taken off in India and is inspiring new applications in countries around the world.

### *Leadership and Organization*

In order to operate in India, 5th Pillar has the legal status of a trust registered in New Delhi, with operational headquarters in Chennai.

Overall strategy and decisions are made by a twelve-person executive committee. Its members communicate and brainstorm via email and social media (for example, SKYPE, Google Groups, and voice conference calls) and usually make decisions unanimously. In total, there are six paid staff—four in Chennai and two in Coimbatore. They handle general administration and management, RTI activities, the Freedom from Corruption campaign, fund-raising, and coordination of 5th Pillar chapters and local coordinators. At this juncture, all other staff are volunteers.

Over time, the movement has developed a process to recruit local coordinators. Candidates must first join as members and become involved in local activities. After the core observes someone's performance, that person may be invited to be a local coordinator. "We tell people to come, volunteer, and after six months we'll evaluate you," Anand explained. Those invited to become local coordinators must also go through training before they can become "office-bearers" of 5th Pillar. The Chennai team even convened a public speaking workshop for volunteers.<sup>30</sup> It also organizes an annual event for local coordinators, cleverly coinciding with a high-profile public outreach effort. Various activities are held that day, to which citizens are also invited. 5th Pillar brings in special guests, including anticorruption activists from other parts of India and overseas; in 2008 an RTI activist from Mumbai targeting police corruption was featured.

5th Pillar's international and national branches, as well as local district and Students Against Corruption chapters, act autonomously. As a result, some branches and chapters are more active than others. "They decide what they want to do, and 5th Pillar Chennai headquarters supports them as requested," explained Banukumar.<sup>31</sup> Such support can include training in using the RTI Act, cooperating on events and street actions, teaming up for coordinated mobilization involving multiple chapters, funding, and distributing anticorruption items. "Initially we wanted strict guidelines and policies for local chapters, because other NGOs have had problems with staff or coordinators who jeopardized the reputation of the organization," recalled Anand. "But as time passed, the people who joined 5th Pillar were different than others who go to work for NGOs for personal objectives, which happens a lot in India."

The movement is made up of members, many of whom are active volunteers, who all must sign 5th Pillar's anticorruption pledge. For in-country individuals, the fees are 200 rupees for new members and 100 rupees for annual renewal. There is also a category of nonpaying members, for those of very limited means. Nonresident Indians contribute a yearly fee of US\$50. In sum, by June 2012, there were over 1,500 mem-

bers. Citizens are recruited through myriad activities and street actions, referrals, media coverage, word of mouth, and the official website. Anand estimated that approximately 75,000 to 80,000 people were affiliated with 5th Pillar at that time.

The movement is funded through donations, modest membership dues, in-kind contributions, advertising in *Maatram* (Change) magazine, and for the first few years, Anand's personal savings. It faces a constant monetary challenge.

Perhaps because Anand himself was part of the Indian diaspora, he recognized the potential roles this constituency could play in the home-grown civic initiative. Hence, involving NRIs was an early priority, beginning with the aforementioned establishment of the Washington, DC, base for international activities. It focuses on fund-raising, networking, and spreading the anticorruption message across the diaspora. "NRIs are more willing to support and fund [5th Pillar]; their level of confidence [in fighting corruption] is higher because they live in a developed country," he surmised. Also, they may not be as vulnerable to reprisals from corruptors.

In the ensuing years, new chapters have been formed in Basel, Eindhoven, Dubai, New York, the United Kingdom, and Zurich. Each NRI group decides what it wants to do. The Eindhoven contingent, for example, engaged its contacts to start up a local chapter in the state of Uttar Pradesh. 5th Pillar in the United States also joined the global Dandi March II, a diaspora mobilization that organized street actions on March 26, 2011, in conjunction with activities in India to support the Jan Lokpal anticorruption bill. It was inspired by Gandhi's 240-kilometer Dandi March in 1930 against the British salt tax.<sup>32</sup> The Washington group held a march with a dharna in front of the Indian embassy.

### *Solidarity and Outreach*

5th Pillar has not cultivated support from public figures and celebrities, thus far missing a potential source of solidarity, media coverage, and public exposure. However, one endorsement it garnered is from the actor Maniratnam, who considers herself a "well-wisher of 5th Pillar." A video interview with her, available on the Internet, garnered 12,465 hits as of October 11, 2013, far more than any other video on the movement's website and YouTube channel.<sup>33</sup>

5th Pillar does not have a distinct communications strategy and plan. Over the years, it has tried to maximize the channels through which it conveys messages, given its modest resources. In April 2010 a Tamil media coordinator was hired to develop strategies for local print

and visual media, and who serves as editor of the movement's monthly magazine. Anand reported that he personally handles the international media, along with Shobila Kali, the head of the Washington, DC, office. They have received significant coverage from major Indian newspapers such as *The Hindu* to *The Economist* magazine and *National Geographic*. Anand is the international face of the movement. He has been a speaker at the Fourth Conference of States Parties (CoSP) to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and the Fourteenth International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC).<sup>34</sup> In the digital realm, he presented at Pop Tech 2010; TEDxVelemaal on February 9, 2010; and TEDxLeeds on February 12, 2012.

*Maatram* magazine is printed monthly and is also available online. Launched in May 2009 its stated aims are "to convey the activities of the organization to the people; to make bribe-takers realize that it is not anymore possible to receive bribe; to create confidence among the people that things could be done even without bribe."<sup>35</sup> Approximately 60 to 70 percent of the content is informational, from pointers on how to say no to bribery to news of arrests of corrupt officials, RTI Act and zero-rupee note success stories, forthcoming activities, and general information about how to become a member or develop a chapter. A special student section contains reports from chapter coordinators, poetry about corruption, and interviews with new student members. Finally, an innovative feature of the magazine offers step-by-step guides to interacting with various state offices for common procedures—for example, registering recently purchased property and obtaining land titles and ration cards. An online English-language magazine, *Change*, was attempted, but has been defunct since February 2011 due to funding constraints. Anand reported that in spring 2012, a member volunteered to start translating *Maatram* into English for non-Tamil speaking individuals on the e-mail list.

5th Pillar's newest venture is a one-hour, prime-time television talk show with Makkal TV, a popular Tamil channel. *Vizhithozhu Thamizha* (Wake Up, Tamilians) aired every Sunday for six months, from September 2013 to February 2014. According to 5th Pillar's website, each program covered "one government department or area of governance, the procedures citizens should be aware of, the actual fees for each certificate or service, the details of where to complain in case of bribery, corruption, delayed governance."<sup>36</sup> It featured panels of experts and relevant government officials responding to comments and questions from the audience. Designed to empower citizens with information and advice, while not exactly a *jan sunwai*, the shows offered the potential to

wield social pressure and gain accountability since the powerholders must answer to the public via the audience.

## Outcomes

### *Zero-Rupee Weapon*

5th Pillar encourages feedback from people who use the zero-rupee note. Anand stated that they have received hundreds of letters, phone calls, and emails reporting positive results, but keeping track once the pseudo-currency goes into circulation is impossible. At this juncture they only have anecdotal evidence, but he maintains that they have not received a single reported instance in which the official did not relent.

#### **Success Stories: Zero-Rupee Note**

Mr. Ashok Jain got his car towed in Chennai. When he went to the C1 police station, he was asked Rs 800 as fine. He was ready to pay the amount in return for a receipt, which they were not willing to give. After much talking and convincing, he called his friend Vinod Jain. When Vinod came to the station and saw what was going on, he handed a zero-rupee note to one of the policemen who was asking for bribe. They realized that he was a part of the 5th Pillar organization and without any further questions they asked him to pay the marked fine of Rs 150 and handed him the receipt immediately. The zero-rupee note reminds people of an organization that is willing to back them up in a dire situation relating to corruption, which motivates them to stand their ground when faced by corrupt officials.

One such story was our earlier case about the old lady and her troubles with the Revenue Department official over a land title. Fed up with requests for bribes and equipped with a zero-rupee note, the old lady handed the note to the official. He was stunned. Remarkably, the official stood up from his seat, offered her a chair, offered her tea, and gave her the title she had been seeking for the last year and a half to obtain without success. Had the zero-rupee note reached the old lady sooner, her granddaughter could have started college on schedule and avoided the consequence of delaying her education for two years.

In another experience, a corrupt official in a district in Tamil Nadu was so frightened on seeing the zero-rupee note that he returned all the bribe money he had collected for establishing a new electricity connection back to the no longer compliant citizen.

*Source:* "Success Stories," 5th Pillar website, <http://www.5thpillar.org>.

He believes a key reason is that corruptors rely on the public's fear. "When they actually face nonviolent defiance from citizens—backed by a grassroots civic initiative—they in turn become scared, because bribery is a crime." Prosecuted civil servants face punishment, including suspension, fines, and even imprisonment. 5th Pillar's website, *Maattram* magazine, brochure, and blog all publicize victories.

An information technology recruiter from Coimbatore started using the zero-currency each time he had to deal with state agencies. In an instance involving a tax official who refused to process documents without a 500-rupee "fee," he recounted, "I handed over the zero-rupee note, which I always keep in my pocket. She was afraid and didn't want to take it. She completed the job immediately and said she was sorry and asked me not to take it forward."<sup>37</sup>

An unanticipated outcome of the zero-rupee note has been its use by honest officials. Anand recounted how some civil servants have taken to prominently displaying the zero-rupee in their office to signal that they do not extort, nor do they want people to offer them bribes.

### *Wielding the RTI Act*

The Chennai core makes known individual success stories that are shared with 5th Pillar, but "there are practical difficulties to track everything," said Jayaselvan. However, 5th Pillar can assess the outcomes of RTI petitions it has filed on behalf of citizens. Anand reported that 90 percent of cases the movement takes on reach a "successful conclusion." The following two instances are illustrative not only of the power of the RTI Act but the innumerable ways in which endemic corruption is linked to impunity and debasement of the rule of law at the local level, and their impact on regular people.

### *From Individual to Incremental Victories*

Each time corruption is thwarted through the zero-rupee note or the RTI petition process, a person or a community experiences a visible victory and gains tangible justice—such as government services and documents to which they are entitled, observance of rule of law in local affairs, and accountability of state authorities—creating a sense of empowerment that propels further action. For instance, after approaching 5th Pillar, a software professional working in Chennai filed an RTI petition to obtain his income tax refund, which had been pending for three years. He was successful. Thus emboldened, he then used the legislation to obtain information about the delay in road construction outside his workplace. "To his surprise, the road was laid immediately in the days following

**Illegal Sale of Property Using Forged Documents  
Was Rectified by Filing RTI Petition**

Samuthiraraj from Karisalkulam village in Kovilpatti Taluk of Tuticorin District was robbed [of] his family property by miscreants in cohesion with corrupt government official, Rajendran who apparently registered the forged documents and sold it to another person. Similar crime was committed with 10 other people from the same village and its surroundings. Samuthiraraj and the other victimized approached the District Registrar, Taluk officer and Sub Registrar of Kovilpatti Taluk, pleading with them to intercept the wrong doings, and return their rightful property. Their pleadings were brushed aside as they were reluctant to take action against their fellow official Rajendran, who had recently been promoted as the District Registrar of Periyakulam. Samuthiraraj, who came to know about our organization, sought our help to solve this issue.

5th Pillar Chennai office filed an RTI (Right to Information) petition on behalf of the victim Samuthiraraj on January 12, 2010. The forged documents and the sale of the property were cancelled on 1st February 2010. Not only Mr. Samuthiraraj, but all the other 10 affected villagers' forged sale documents were cancelled. This is a remarkable success to the RTI Act itself. Our RTI coordinators directed the next step of reclaiming their documents with their name, by guiding them through the next step of procedure to follow. This is a very motivating incident for the residents of this village, and has instilled confidence on the RTI Act. The only sorry side of this story is, both the rightful owner as well as the buyer are cheated whereas the middle men loot away.

*Source:* "Success Stories," 5th Pillar website, <http://www.5thpillar.org>.

his RTI petition," reported Anand. What is more, the man then became involved in the movement. He started as a (volunteer) public relations coordinator and promoted 5th Pillar to peers and colleagues. "He is now working for the same company but from the Japan office, and is still in touch, actually using RTI repeatedly from Japan, taking advantage of online tools and the Chennai HQ team," he added.

The Chennai core understood that change could not happen in one fell swoop. Incremental victories lay the path toward systemic transformation of systems of corruption. For 5th Pillar, these smaller-scale successes are essential, as they bring visible change at the grass roots. Anand recounted one instance in which a district coordinator, Adhi Narayanan, created a flyer comparing the official fees versus bribe prices for government services. He made 1,000 copies and

**Encroachment of Public Road Was Remedied  
by Demolishing the Construction**

Mr. Tamilselvan from Tirupattu accosted 5th Pillar Chennai Office to file an RTI (Right to Information) petition, to [confront] an influential person who had started construction of his building by encroaching the public mud road. Local residents filed complaints to local and higher authorities, but no action was taken and the construction was going ahead on full swing. An RTI petition was filed on behalf of Tamilselvan from 5th Pillar, for which we got a reply, acknowledging the encroachment, but no actions were implemented to stop the construction. An appeal to the previous RTI petition was filed by the RTI coordinators of 5th Pillar, addressing the situation with direct questions regarding encroachment, and the time frame for the implementation of the rectifying measures. We received a reply, and the building was demolished to the relief of all the local residents.

*Source:* “Success Stories,” 5th Pillar website, <http://india.5thpillar.org>.

leafleted the area outside the Regional Transportation Office, which issues licenses, vehicle registrations, permits, and vehicle “fitness” certificates. The commissioner of this office called him for a meeting, asked him to stop, and told him to submit a formal petition with his complaints to Tamil Nadu’s Regional Transportation Department. Narayanan responded that he wanted to make a point: everyone knows what’s going on, and the commissioner should take action to stop bribery in the office. The outcome was remarkable, Anand recounted. Regular people were able to enter the Regional Transportation Office, when before only so-called brokers went in—an illegal yet well-established practice. Moreover, citizens could exercise their prerogative to fill out and submit forms and directly interact with civil servants.

As 5th Pillar grew, it began to receive anonymous reports and even leaked information concerning government graft. This information is suspected to have come from whistle-blowers within the corrupt system who are too frightened to go public. The Chennai team conducts inquiries and follows up if wrongdoing is apparent. Follow-up often consists of filing RTI petitions in such a way that the wrongdoer learns that his or her graft is no longer a secret and has been leaked. This creates fear in the wrongdoer, who then reverses the illicit activities—for example, in contracts—so as to avoid punishment.

*Global Inspiration*

Interest in 5th Pillar's strategies and activities is growing around the world. In November 2013, officials from the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) visited the movement's Chennai headquarters for a briefing and knowledge-sharing session about the zero-currency note.<sup>38</sup> Anand reported that the World Youth Alliance Latin American team and a Ghanian CSO also contacted 5th Pillar about the zero-rupee note. Mariam Andan Al-ariqi, a young Yemeni activist, was one of the 2012 International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) Social Entrepreneurs award winners. She and other youth have since launched a campaign to give out 5,000 "honest-riyal" notes in schools and universities.<sup>39</sup> In 2007 Pro Public, an anticorruption and accountability NGO in Nepal, printed out and distributed the Nepali version of the zero-currency note.<sup>40</sup>

**Case Analysis***Noncooperation*

The Gandhian tenet of noncooperation with oppressors lies at the heart of 5th Pillar's strategies and tactics. Gandhi's insights originally applied to governments and occupiers; 5th Pillar has extended the strategy. Systems of corruption cannot function smoothly unless the people in it go along with the prevailing behavior. In the context of bribery, this behavior can include demanding or even offering bribes, paying them, or turning a blind eye to such illicit practices. When regular people renounce corruption and no longer acquiesce to corruptors' demands, the system is not sustainable. 5th Pillar started this process and seeks to build a national noncooperation movement consisting of citizens who say no to bribery in their daily lives. This approach is embodied in the movement's anticorruption pledge to "neither accept nor give [a] bribe."

The movement's noncooperation strategy is expressed through the defining methods of the zero-rupee note and RTI petitions. Both tools—one extrainstitutional, one institutional—empower citizens to resist extortion, disrupt the corrupt status quo, and overcome abuse of power and impunity. 5th Pillar seeks to turn their usage into mass non-violent actions. What is unique is that these tactics are carried out individually under varied circumstances rather than en masse in a coordinated or synchronized manner. Nevertheless, each individual action is backed by the power of numbers, emanating from 5th Pillar and the

thousands of members, volunteers, and fellow citizens who make up the movement.

The movement conducts a diverse range of nonviolent initiatives in tandem, including the Freedom from Corruption student campaign and street actions designed to build public awareness and pull people to its side. Anand and the Chennai core identified, beyond the general public, key groups in society to target and engage—namely, postsecondary students and youth, rural poor, and the private sector.

### *Holistic Approach*

The movement takes a comprehensive approach to social change based upon the following elements:

- *Awareness-raising* is built into all 5th Pillar activities. Its 2011 Annual Report states, “We see awareness campaigns as a way to reduce citizen apathy to corruption and hence educate the general public with ways to combat corruption.”<sup>41</sup>

- *Values regarding integrity and attitudes toward corruption* are targeted alongside illicit practices.

- *Generational change* is deemed necessary in order to achieve far-reaching systemic transformation. To this end, 5th Pillar made a strategic decision for several reasons to target youth. “More innovation and practical, results-oriented ideas come from the young generation,” Anand pointed out. Second, young people are generally less set in their ways than the older generation. “Students, because of their enthusiasm, are prepared to accept a new way of thinking about corruption straight away,” explained Banukumar. Third, youth can influence the older generation around them. Finally, postsecondary students are future powerholders; they can either become upholders of integrity or corruptors. “After ten years the students of today will become bureaucrats and politicians,” observed Anand. “If we impact them now, 50 percent of corruption won’t be there. To reach 100 percent, we need ten more years.” Thus, 5th Pillar presently seeks to transform people before they assume positions of responsibility. In doing so, it draws the present and future together in the struggle.

- *Behavior change* is sought both on the part of those perpetrating corruption and those oppressed by it.

- *Incremental victories* are achieved at multiple levels, from individual acts of noncooperation (via the zero-rupee note) and disruption (through RTI petitions), to movement victories, such as curbing corruption exposed by whistle-blowers and systematic mass outreach and empowerment.

*Intangibles*

The one prevailing characteristic of 5th Pillar is synergy. Recruitment, defining methods, tactics, and messages function in harmony with one another, thereby making the movement greater than the sum of its parts. A case in point is the Freedom from Corruption campaign. While having a long-term goal of seeking to build integrity among tomorrow's officials and decisionmakers, 5th Pillar also has short-term objectives. It encourages young people to use the zero-rupee note, file RTI petitions, and train fellow citizens. Concurrently, during these campaign activities, it recruits members and fosters the establishment of new college chapters, thereby growing the movement and furthering longevity. As for the current generation of adults, the movement's strategy of individual empowerment—through the pseudo-currency, RTI process, and 5th Pillar support and solidarity—undermines corruption in the present.

Virtually every tactic is linked to other tactics. For instance, street actions invariably involve handing out the zero-rupee note and encouraging people to contact 5th Pillar for help filing RTI petitions. RTI workshops also introduce citizens to the zero-rupee note. Signature collections are taken on giant banners with the image of the zero-rupee currency. The anticorruption pledge made by students, volunteers, and members is one and the same as the pledge on the pseudo-currency. Anticorruption paraphernalia, such as placards, T-shirts, and water bottles, bear the note's image. Core messages—whether dharna slogans, presentations, or short online videos—invoke freedom, patriotism, and collective power. As a result, the movement's various components are complementary and reinforcing, creating momentum, synergy, and parsimony, as precious time, resources, and opportunities are maximized rather than squandered.

5th Pillar deliberately maintains a balance between negative and positive overtones, from its discourse to defining methods to various nonviolent tactics. When referring to corruption, the group does not shirk from using strong language, images, and even symbolic actions, such as kicking the corruption ball. However, balance comes from positive associations, affirmations, and symbolic actions, such as hugging the honesty ball. At movement events, Anand and fellow activists emphasize that the struggle is not about targeting individuals or exacting revenge but about ending corruption and gaining freedom. 5th Pillar's approach calls to mind a key element of Kingian nonviolence, which expands upon the Gandhian insight that means ultimately determine ends. Under conditions of oppression, Kingian practitioners explain that aggression is a common impulse. If that aggression is directed toward

the oppressors, it can produce violent behavior and continue the negative status quo. Nonviolent struggle channels societal aggression away from physically harming or seeking revenge on the perpetrators toward constructively changing the unjust system. While justice should be sought and the behavior of the perpetrators is not accepted, Kingian practitioners maintain the necessity of treating them as human beings.<sup>42</sup>

### *Empowering Honest Powerholders*

Civil resistance scholarship maintains that not all those on the oppressor's side are equally loyal; when applied to the anticorruption context, not all those within a corrupt system are equally venal, and in fact, many wish to behave with integrity. This dynamic is evident in the 5th Pillar context. The movement inadvertently provides officials and front-line civil servants a way out of corrupt systems. It affords them protection, stemming from the power of numbers, when they display the zero-rupee note at their worksite or leak documents and information to 5th Pillar.

Moreover, retired or former civil servants and state officials—such as Aruna Roy, cofounder of the MKSS and a leader of the Right to Information Movement, often play significant roles in civic anticorruption initiatives, giving them more authority. 5th Pillar's Banukumar is a retiree who, in spite of his formal responsibilities, initially volunteered and then began to draw a modest salary well below that of his past professional level (joint director of agriculture) in Tamil Nadu. When asked why he devotes his time to the movement, he said, “I want a clean India. I witnessed how rural activities and the ownership of rural land are soaked in corruption. It's a distortion of the rule of law.” This cohort—those who are still working within the state and those who have retired—offers a source of knowledge, skills, resources, and people power so far largely untapped. 5th Pillar has not yet strategically assessed how to maximize this latent source of noncooperation, increase avenues out of corrupt systems, empower honest officials and civil servants, or overcome their fears to take action.

### *Leadership and Organization*

Anand's vision, drive, international exposure, and personal devotion to the cause have made him the face and de facto leader of 5th Pillar. Although low-key and modest, he exudes a depth of conviction that captures media and public attention and has brought benefits to the group. He is able to generate trust, enthusiasm, respect, and support—all necessary to build a strong internal team and corps of volunteers, as well as

win support and new recruits for the struggle. On the other hand, reliance on a charismatic leader can have drawbacks. In Anand's case, back in 2010 he seemed pulled in many directions and involved in minutiae, which can distract a leader and claim time that could be spent on strategic priorities. Charismatic leaders are vulnerable to attacks aimed at discrediting them and the civic initiative. A physical attack on Anand would probably backfire, generating outrage and aiding the movement. While such an attack fortunately has not happened, the more corruptors are threatened by 5th Pillar, the greater the possibility of such reprisal. As well, civic initiatives too closely bound to a leader may become rudderless and potentially face collapse, should the person no longer be able to sustain this role. Perhaps more importantly, charismatic leaders may cause others to display less initiative because they follow rather than innovate. The history of civil resistance has successful movements with and without charismatic leaders.

Anand reported that he has recognized and addressed this challenge. By 2012, regular day-to-day activities and recruitment of new leaders, coordinators, and volunteers were being conducted without his involvement or influence. He was freed to direct his energies to larger movement issues and focus on interactions with the Chennai headquarters and the executive committee, while meeting with regional coordinators and leaders during the half-yearly team meetings.

### *Social Movement or SMO?*

5th Pillar defies categorization. Like Addiopizzo in Palermo, it established a formal identity recognized by the state. This status was necessary to operate and to collect contributions; it also created an organizational infrastructure through which the civic initiative could function on a long-term basis. In this respect, 5th Pillar can be considered a social movement organization (SMO). On the other hand, its nature and activities are those of a social movement, built upon a base of volunteers, citizen mobilization, and a variety of nonviolent actions to wield people power. This dual nature carries no contradiction; rather it illustrates the many shapes and forms that civic initiatives take in reality.

### *Challenges*

Unlike many civic initiatives that focus on a specific aspect or manifestation of corruption and are of a finite duration, 5th Pillar's struggle seeks transformative social change and thus has an indefinite time frame. As a result, the leadership core has identified two major challenges: sustainability and funding. Both are critical because, as Anand remarked, "We can't change corruption overnight." Sustainability—how

to maintain people's involvement—is an ongoing challenge with several implications. Without new recruits coming in, building numbers is impossible, as some people inevitably become less active or leave, in turn impacting the movement's resilience, resources, creativity, and capacity to wield people power.

Funding is an ever-present concern. Donors often overlook effective social movements and SMOs because they don't fit the traditional model of an NGO or CSO that conducts finite projects.

## Lessons Learned

### *Societal Transformation*

Social movements—with maximalist goals to break apart endemic systems of corruption—can be conceived along a series of six interrelated dimensions. First is *time frame*, which refers to short- and long-term objectives, strategies, and tactics. Achieving visible, short-term victories that feed into long-standing goals is essential. As 5th Pillar demonstrated, nonviolent actions may be directed upon immediate victories, future gains, or even both simultaneously. The second dimension is *targets*, including corrupt powerholders, corruptees, honest powerholders, citizens, and particular cohorts (for example, youth). The third dimension is *social mores*, with a focus on changing values about integrity, attitudes toward corruption, and norms of appropriate behavior held by powerholders and regular people. Another dimension is *behavior*, namely, changing the conduct of powerholders and citizens. Next is *people power dynamics*, which involve noncooperation, disruption, and winning people over to the movement. The final dimension relates to the *power equation*, that is, altering the relationship between powerholders and the grass roots.

Societal transformation also involves education. Like Integrity Watch Afghanistan's community-monitoring initiatives (see Chapter 8) and MUHURI's social audits in Kenya (see Chapter 10), education can be a source of empowerment. 5th Pillar incorporated training for regular people and youth to use the RTI Act and workshops designed to inoculate postsecondary students—future powerholders and civil servants—from corruption by impacting their values about integrity and attitudes toward corruption.

### *Mobilization and Tactics*

The 5th Pillar movement provides five valuable lessons regarding mobilization and tactics. To challenge endemic corruption, public

awareness-raising is a necessary component. As with Addiopizzo in Italy (see Chapter 6) and Egyptians Against Corruption (see Chapter 10), a consistent lesson is that effective awareness-raising depends on discourse that resonates with regular people and emanates from their sociocultural context.

Second, awareness-raising on its own, however, does not necessarily lead to change. 5th Pillar combined it with citizen empowerment and mobilization incorporating a host of nonviolent tactics. Third, to mobilize citizens and to win support, effective nonviolent actions need to be relevant to the local context, including culture, social norms, and even history.

Similarly to Addiopizzo, 5th Pillar provides ways for people to say no to extortion—in this case, public sector bribery. Thus, a key lesson for anticorruption advocates is that tactics of noncooperation with the oppressive system—for example, the zero-rupee note—can harness the power of no.

Finally, when identifying societal groups to target, one important consideration is the multiplier effect, namely, the capacity of a cohort to impact others around them or society at large. Thus, in many societies youth have a multiplier effect by influencing adults in their immediate circles or social settings. At the societal level, it could be religious figures or a group of highly respected or popular personalities, from retired statesmen and women to athletes and pop stars.

### *Top-Down and Bottom-Up*

In the civil resistance realm, though, the focus is normally on the empowerment of regular people. Anticorruption movements such as 5th Pillar point to the importance of developing additional strategies that support honest powerholders and tactics empowering them to refuse to engage in corrupt practices.

A final lesson is that India's trailblazing RTI Act presents a new paradigm for anticorruption legislation, rules, and regulations—top-down measures that empower regular people to disrupt corruption, challenge impunity, and gain accountability. In contrast to traditional institutional mechanisms to combat corruption, which are usually punitive in nature and rely on state power to exert control, these methods involve bottom-up power and transform the relationship between the state and citizens.

### **Notes**

1. A social movement organization (SMO) is a nonstate entity that is part of a social movement. It can provide multiple functions to the movement,

such as identity, leadership, strategizing, and planning, but the movement is not bounded by the SMO; nor are SMOs essential for social movements to flourish.

2. For an excellent case study of the Right to Information movement, see Sowmya Kidambi, *Right to Know, Right to Live: Building a Campaign for the Right to Information and Accountability* (Minneapolis: Center for Victims of Torture, 2008), [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org).

3. *Ibid.*, 6.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Lina Khan, "India Makes Remarkable Strides Towards a More Perfect Democracy," [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com), April 2, 2010, 3.

6. *Ibid.*

7. "How to Use the Right to Information Act," 5th Pillar, n.d., handout.

8. For information about the RTI application process, see "Right to Information Act," 5th Pillar, <http://www.5thpillar.org>.

9. "Global Right to Information Rating," Center for Law and Democracy, September 28, 2011, [www.rti-rating.org](http://www.rti-rating.org).

10. "Safeguarding the Right to Information: Report of the People's TI Assessment 2008," RTI Assessment and Analysis Group (RaaG) and National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI), New Delhi, October 2009, 7.

11. Karnataka Information Commission, Third Annual Report, 2009–2010, 29.

12. "Safeguarding the Right to Information."

13. PriceWaterhouseCoopers, "Final Report: Understanding the Key Issues and Constraints in Implementing the RTI Act," Department of Personnel and Training of India, 2009.

14. *Ibid.*, 4.

15. This case study is based on interviews with the following 5th Pillar members during April 2010: Vijay Anand, cofounder and president; K. Banukumar, executive director; T. Jayaselvan, administrative manager; as well as subsequent written communications with Anand. The section title is a slogan printed on a 5th Pillar brochure.

16. 5th Pillar brochure, April 2010.

17. Mission Statement, 5th Pillar website, <http://india.5thpillar.org>.

18. 5th Pillar brochure, April 2010.

19. Vijay Anand, personal communication with author.

20. A 2011 study released by the Asian Centre for Human Rights asserts that RTI activists who are not part of an organization "are among the most vulnerable human rights defenders of India." Furthermore, a civil society assessment of RTI usage found that 40 percent of rural respondents cited harassment and threats from officials as the most important constraint from filing RTI petitions, while 15 percent of urban respondents stated that harassment from officials and lack of cooperation were the most significant constraints (*RTI Activists: Sitting Ducks of India* [New Delhi: Asian Centre for Human Rights, 2011], 1).

21. *Ibid.*

22. 5th Pillar Annual Report of 2011 to the UNCAC (United Nations Convention Against Corruption) Coalition, copy provided to the author.

23. I witnessed a Freedom from Corruption workshop at the Vellore Institute of Technology University on April 7, 2010.

24. Not surprisingly, after the RTI Act was passed, efforts to dilute it began, from increasing the number of government agencies and departments exempt from the legislation to increasing the filing fees, thereby making it more difficult for poor people to submit petitions.

25. The district collector is the head of the district administration. There are thirty-two districts in Tamil Nadu.

26. I witnessed a 5th Pillar presentation at a Rotary Club chapter in Chennai on April 9, 2010.

27. "What Is the Jan Lokpal Bill, Why It's Important," NDTV, August 16, 2011, [www.ndtv.com](http://www.ndtv.com).

28. 5th Pillar Annual Report of 2011 to the UNCAC.

29. In January 2013 Anna Hazare rejected the new draft of the Jan Lokpal bill put forth by the central government. Soon after, he launched a Janatantra Yatra, an eighteen-month campaign around the country to rally people to pressure powerholders for the passage of a strong bill (D. S. Kumar, "Anna Hazare's Janatantra Yatra Reaches Roorkee," *Times of India*, April 17, 2013, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>; "Anna Hazare Rejects New Lokpal Bill Draft Proposed by Government," *Hindustan Times*, January 31, 2013, [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com)).

30. 5th Pillar, "Effective Public Speaking Workshop for 5th Pillar Volunteers," blog entry, September 24, 2007, <http://blogs.5thpillar.org>.

31. Naming customs in India are complex, and people commonly have only one name.

32. The Dandi March is also known as the Salt Satyagraha or Salt March.

33. Suhasini Maniratnam, 5th Pillar TV, May 7, 2007, interview by Vijay Anand, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLb4qZUyfJc>.

34. Anand was invited to speak at a People's Empowerment Special Session that I coordinated.

35. 5th Pillar's *Maatram* (Change) magazine, 5th Pillar website, <http://india.5thpillar.org> (accessed May 12, 2012).

36. 5th Pillar, <http://www.5thpillar.org/programs/vizhithethu-thamizha>.

37. Yasmeen Mohiuddin, "Zero-Rupee Note Tackles India's Corruption Culture," *Daily Telegraph*, February 10, 2010, [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk).

38. E-mail announcement from 5th Pillar, October 31, 2013.

39. "Beating Bribery: Small Change," *The Economist*, December 7, 2013.

40. "Anti-Corruption Day Observed with Fanfare," Propublic, n.d., <http://www.propublic.org>.

41. 5th Pillar Annual Report of 2011 to the UNCAC, 1.

42. Bernard Lafayette Jr. and David Jensen, *The Nonviolence Briefing Booklet* (Galena, OH: Institute for Human Rights and Responsibilities, 2005).