

## **Beauty with the brains**

### **In Shazia Ilmi, a glamorous intellectual has at last graced the Anna Hazare struggle**

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Mahatma Gandhi was a totally non-glamorous individual; a very simple frail looking man with absolutely no attractive features, a total misfit in today's glamour-dominated world. Rather the Mahatma was an exact opposite of what could be termed as glamorous. But Mahatma Gandhi had tremendous strength of conviction behind him.

He was a product of the 19th century, which was a very conservative period in India. During the early days of his struggle, what to speak of television, there was no radio channel also. Mahatma Gandhi started his political activism in the far off South Africa, where racial injustices were the most glaring. His experiments with truth in South Africa, gave him a leg up when he started the freedom struggle for India in India.

A sea change has occurred in India since the days of Mahatma Gandhi. The people are more educated and better informed and thanks to cinema and television, people know a lot about the world. The presence of print media is more universal these days, but the evolving electronic media and the social networking sites have revolutionized all the struggles. The Arab Spring was ushered in by the social networking sites like Facebook and the television.

India was not left untouched by the Arab Spring. We all know about the scourge of corruption in India. Ninety nine percent of India is suffering from corruption and one percent privileged are benefiting from it. There is a strong nexus between the most corrupt politicians and the equally greedy bureaucrats. Investigations against corruption are difficult to start, the red tape and the apathy of the powerful comes in the way. Hardly any corrupt person is punished.

India's most powerful investigating agency, the CBI has totally been reduced to the status of a circus tiger. Its hiring and firing authority is the administrative head of the ruling party. Under the present dispensation, the de-facto appointing and removing authority of the CBI is the party president and not even the Prime Minister. There are thoroughly corrupt elements in almost all the political parties and they all desire to be shielded from full-blown investigations. On a mere phone call or a verbal message from the most powerful ruling politician, even the most serious probes and investigations can be put on the back burner. On the contrary, the opponents of the government and the anti-corruption crusaders can be harassed with utmost ease.

Anna Hazare has been taking on the corrupt in his home state of Maharashtra for decades in the past. At first, his own village resisted some of his struggles. But with the passage of time, the simple villagers started understanding the righteousness of Anna Hazare's struggle and now his entire village is at his beck and call. Anna Hazare is not a handsome or attractive person by any standards. Being glamorous is a far cry. But he has the strength of conviction behind him and that is what is galvanizing the entire nation behind his cause and struggle. He has high profile supporters like Kiran Bedi and Arvind Kejriwal, but none of them can be considered glamorous. When he broke his fast after his epic 12-day long fast at the Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi, there were two cute little Muslim girls, who gave him the juice to break his fast. The presence of these innocent tiny dolls was glamourised by the media. This showed how powerful the force of glamour can be. I was seriously thinking that Anna Hazare team desperately needs a glamorous face, who should be honest, steadfast and unblemished in his/her entire career. Otherwise, the powerful hands of the people in power and their corrupt associates will take no time in tarnishing the face of even the most glamorous of individuals. The search for glamour for the Anna Hazare team by now seems to be over. Shazia Ilmi, the glamorous face of Star News has entered Team Anna. She comes from a well-to-do, pragmatic and educated Muslim family of Kanpur. Her father runs a well-meaning Urdu newspaper there. None of the female folks in Shazia Ilmi's family has ever worked. But Shazia had big ambitions. First of all she attained top education and then joined Star News as a reporter and anchor. Even as a news anchor, there were seeds of activism in her. She loved to cover election-related stories as a reporter. Her coverage of the notorious Bihar elections was a highpoint in her career as a journalist. She enjoyed taking the corrupt head-on. As an anchor/reporter, she was well paid and was enjoying a decent status in the society. Her mastery over English, Hindi and Urdu served her in best stead. She can easily switch from English to Hindi to Urdu, this gave her an edge over the other colleagues. Professionally, she is very honest and straightforward.

Lately, Shazia Ilmi had been showing unusually high interest in the Anna Hazare Movement. She is, of course, convinced of its righteousness. Recently, she decided to sacrifice her lucrative career in the television news and vowed to plunge head long into the Anna Hazare Movement. Most of India's prestigious television channels, including Times Now, Headlines Today, Aajtak and NDTV 24X7 have been inviting her to their studios for getting Team Anna's point of view from her. Shazia Ilmi has been answering their queries in the most professionally articulate manner. She exudes confidence and glamour

and she answers all the questions with clarity and authority and in chaste language.

We wish Shazia Ilmi a very exciting time as an activist from Team Anna. There was a lot of hue and cry about the absence of minorities and Dalits in Team Anna. Now in Shazia Ilmi, a very pleasant face of a minority has taken the centrestage. Hopefully, a high-profile and reputed member of the Dalit community will soon join Team Anna. Anna Hazare is presently locked in a grim battle with the powerful forces of corruption in India. Let us hope India benefits from the outcome of this epic battle.

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