

In the spotlight – Anna Hazare

Anna Hazare, 72, is one of India's well-acclaimed social activists. A former soldier in the Indian army, Anna is well known and respected for upgrading the ecology and economy of the village of Ralegan Siddhi, which is located in the drought prone Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra state.



- Today, Anna is also the face of India's fight against corruption. He has taken that fight to the corridors of power and challenged the government at the highest level.
- For Anna Hazare, it is just another battle. And he has fought quite a few. Including some as a soldier for 15 years in Indian Army. He enlisted after the 1962 Indo-China war when the government exhorted young men to join the Army.
- In 1978, he took voluntary retirement from the 9th Maratha Battalion and returned home to Ralegaon Siddhi, a village in Maharashtra's drought-prone Ahmadnagar. He was then 39 years old.
- The erstwhile barren village has metamorphosed into a unique model of rural development due to its effective water conservation methods, which made the villagers self-sufficient. Earlier, the same village witnessed alcoholism, utter poverty and migration to urban slums.
- Inspired by Hazare's unique approach of salvaging a hopeless village, the Maharashtra state government has implemented the 'Model Village' scheme as part of its official strategy. Hazare is now synonymous with rural development in India.
- He had once contemplated suicide and even wrote a two-page essay on why he wanted to end his life. Anna Hazare was not driven to such a pass by circumstances. He wanted to live no more because he was frustrated with life and wanted an answer to the purpose of human existence.
- The story goes that one day at the New Delhi Railway Station, he chanced upon a book on Swami Vivekananda. Drawn by Vivekananda's photograph, he is quoted as saying that he read the book and found his answer - that the motive of his life lay in service to his fellow humans.
- He found farmers back home struggling for survival and their suffering would prompt him to pioneer rainwater conservation that put his little hamlet on the international map as a model village.



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- The villagers today revere him. Thakaram Raut, a school teacher in Ralegaon Siddhi says, *"Thanks to Anna's agitations, we got a school, we got electricity, we got development schemes for farmers."*
- Anna Hazare's fight against corruption began here. He fought first against corruption that was blocking growth in rural India. His organization - the *Bhrashtachar Virodhi Jan Andolan* (People's movement against Corruption). His tool of protest - hunger strikes. And his prime target - politicians.
- His weapon is potent. In 1995-96, he forced the Sena-BJP government in Maharashtra to drop two corrupt Cabinet Ministers. In 2003, he forced the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) state government to set up an investigation against four ministers.
- Maharashtra stalwarts like Sharad Pawar and Bal Thackeray have often called his style of agitation nothing short of "blackmail".
- But Anna Hazare has soldiered on relentless. From one battle to another in his war against corruption.
- He fought from the front to have Right to Information (RTI) implemented.
- He is now fighting for the implementation of the Jan Lokpal Bill, an anti-corruption bill drafted by leading members of civil society that envisages speedy action in corruption cases against everyone, including ministers and senior bureaucrats.