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BEHIND THE WHISTLE: UNDERSTANDING INDIA'S PROTECTION FOR TRUTH-TELLERS

AUTHORED BY: SHRUTI BALIGA

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic hall of power, where choices are made and fortunes are built, the darker side of human nature often rears its head. Corruption, fraud, and malfeasance thrive in the absence of accountability, casting a long shadow on the credibility of institutions. Yet, amidst these shadows of darkness, there arises an ethereal yet powerful voice of the whistleblower. Imagine having the truth in your hands like a sword, ready to pierce the facade of dishonesty and corruption, and being the sole voice in a throng. Imagine having the guts to speak up and reveal the truth despite being surrounded by friends, coworkers, and organizations that profit from the wrongdoings.

Whistleblowers are those courageous warriors who risk their comfort, sometimes even their professions, in hope that justice prevails. The expression “whistleblower” itself evokes images of unsung luminaries who dare to stand up for truth against all odds. However, even the strongest of hearts need protection. The Whistleblower Protection Laws, in India, serves as a shield, offering these luminaries with safeguard to combat the mighty forces of corruption.

India, with its vibrant democracy, rich cultural heritage, and growing economy, faces a perpetual battle in combating corruption. Corruption has its influence practically every aspect of public life, whether it be political, governmental, or business. From inflated contracts to embezzlement of funds, the scale of fraud in India is staggering. However, people who dare to expose such misconduct frequently face threats, intimidation, and career collapse. This is where the significance of a robust whistleblower protection law becomes evident. Despite some shortcomings, the Whistleblower Protection Act of 2014 offers much-needed safeguard to those who put everything on the line to expose the truth. It establishes a legal framework that that relieves whistleblowers of the fear of reprisal when they expose corruption and unethical behaviour in government agencies and institutions.

WHAT IS WHISTLE BLOWING?

The term "whistleblower"¹ came from the referee's whistle, which is usually used to indicate misconduct or unlawful activities. This figurative use of the word was made popular by social activist **Ralph Nader** at the start of the 1970s. He came up with the phrase to provide an unbiased appellation for revealing misconduct that had no negative connotations. In essence, whistleblowing is the act of disclosing or unveiling the misconduct or unethical activity occurring within a company. The formal definition of a whistleblower is "making a disclosure that is in the public interest," often involving an employee reporting unlawful behaviour to public authorities, such as regulatory bodies or law enforcement. It's akin to a police officer blowing a whistle to alert others to a crime in progress. Ralph Nader, in 1971², framed whistleblowing as an act where employees report their organization's involvement in corrupt, illegal, or harmful practices for the benefit of the public.

Whistleblowing is not a single act, but a process. The four primary elements of whistleblowing are the person who made the disclosure, the complaint or revelation, the entity involved, and the recipient of the disclosure (such as a regulatory body). Whistleblowing is ultimately done to protect the public interest by bringing wrongdoings to light in an effort to prevent harm or corruption. For instance, although the public may be curious in an official's personal life, this does not constitute whistleblowing unless it involves malfeasance that compromises morality or public safety. Whistleblowing basically happens when an employee acts in the public interest by reporting actions, they regard to be unlawful or beyond the bounds of ethical conduct inside their company.

LEGACY OF WHISTLEBLOWING

The concept of whistleblowing, which has deep Indian roots, was first introduced in Kautilya's Artha shastra, a classic work that addresses public administration, political ethics, and statecraft.³ Whistleblowing as a legal concept began in England in the 7th century, when the term **qui tam** first used.

Derived from the Latin phrase *qui tam pro domino rege quam pro se ipso*, meaning "he who sues for the king as well as for himself," it encouraged private citizens to report misconduct for both the welfare of the nation and personal benefit. As an effective means to guarantee

¹ Sikha Patheja, "system of whistleblowing in India" 4 Issue 7 IJSR

² Sikha Patheja, "system of whistleblowing in India" 4 Issue 7 IJSR

³ Kautilya, The Arthashastra 298 (L.N Rangarajan trans., Penguin Classics 1992)

adherence to laws, the British Parliament began employing qui tam acts more frequently around the 14th century. But when professional police forces grew and public prosecutor's roles expanded in the late 19th century, enthusiasm for qui tam rules had drastically waned. While qui tam enforcement declined in England, it was bolstered in the United States by the **False Claims Act of 1863**.⁴ Furthermore, a resolution passed by the **Continental Congress in 1777** marked a turning point in the legal protection of whistleblowers, as Samuel Shaw and Richard Marven, who had exposed the inhumane treatment of British prisoners of war by Commander-in-Chief Esek Hopkins, were shielded from criminal libel suits.⁵

FORMS OF WHISTLEBLOWING

Whistleblowing comes in many forms, each with its own ethical and legal ramifications. The activity of unveiling misconduct or unethical behaviour to top officials within a company is known as **internal whistleblowing**, and it usually entails issues like disobedience or insubordination. Conversely, **external whistleblowing**⁶ involves informing other stakeholders, including regulatory bodies, public interest organizations, and media outlets, about such concerns. In addition to this, **Alumni whistleblowing** occurs when former employees discover organizational wrongdoings, whereas **open whistleblowing** entails disclosing the identity of the suspected whistleblower. Furthermore, **personal whistleblowing** focuses on acts that affect an individual, whereas **impersonal whistleblowing** addresses harm to a wider population. Other forms include government whistleblowing, which reveals the immoral actions of public officials, and corporate whistleblowing, which concentrates on wrongdoing within multinational corporations. There is an important role for all types of whistleblowers.

DECODING WHISTLEBLOWING REGIMES IN INDIA

The journey of whistleblower protection laws in India has been marked by both courage and tragedy. There have been both heroic and tragic episodes. Engineer **Satyendra Dubey**'s gruesome murder in November 2003 is among the most heartbreaking instances of how acts of violence and vengeance against whistleblowers have permanently altered the legal environment. Dubey had exposed corruption in the National Highways Authority of India's Golden Quadrilateral project, and his untimely death underscored the dangers whistleblowers face. This tragedy was soon followed by the murder of **Shanmughan Manjunath**, an officer

⁴ J.R Beck, The False Claims Act and the English Eradication of Qui Tam Legislation

⁵ Stephen M. Kohn, The Whistleblowers of 1777, N.Y Times, A23

⁶ Whistleblower Protection Legislation in India: A Critical Analysis Dr. Seema Gupta

of Indian Oil Corporation, who was killed for shutting down a petrol station involved in selling adulterated fuel. These deaths cast a harsh light on the perilous consequences faced by whistleblowers and propelled the demand for stronger protection. These tragic events catalysed the public discussion surrounding whistleblower protection in India. In response, the Supreme Court issuing a Writ Petition, which instructed the Central Government to set up procedures for handling the complaints and safeguarding the whistleblowers from victimization. The **Public Interest Disclosure and Protection of Informers (PIDPI) Resolution 2004** was subsequently passed, designating the Central Vigilance Commission as the primary body responsible for managing these complaints. In parallel, The UN Convention Against Corruption, which India signed in 2005, reinforcing the nation's obligation to protect whistleblowers. Another important law that was passed in 2005 was the **Right to Information (RTI) Act**⁷, which allowed citizens to get information from public agencies. This pivotal law, immensely empowered whistleblowers by enabling them to gather crucial evidence to support their claims. This legal tool made things more transparent, but also placed whistleblowers in greater jeopardy.

The **Companies Act of 2013**⁸ marked a further advancement to this legal regime by introducing provisions for the establishment of anti-corruption groups in public offices. These bodies were tasked to manage the corruption allegations and guaranteeing the safety and security of employees who divulged such information. Notwithstanding these advancements, it was indisputable that a specific statute was required to meet the unique difficulties faced by whistleblowers. This gap was ultimately addressed with the enactment of **The Whistleblowers Protection Act, 2014**, a historic piece of legislation that aimed to establish a thorough framework for whistleblower protection in India.

A. Provisions under The Companies Act, 2013

The Companies Act of 2013 provides a thorough structure intended to combat corruption and fraud in enterprises. Contrary to the 1956 Act, this Act establishes an enhanced corporate monitoring framework designed to plug legal loopholes and avert scandals, hence introducing stricter compliance procedures. Under **Section 177(9) and 177(10)**, read in conjunction with 4, **Rule 7 of the Companies (Meetings of Board and its Powers) Rules, 2014**,⁹ requires listed

⁷ RTI act, 2005

⁸ Companies Act of 2013

⁹ Companies act, 2013

companies, those accepting public deposits, and companies borrowing funds exceeding Rs. 50 crores from banks or public financial institutions are mandated to create a whistleblower mechanism. By empowering directors and staff, the authority to notify management of any unethical behaviour, this method fosters better accountability and transparency.

In addition to this, **Sections 206 to 229** of this Act grant inspectors the discretion to examine firm documents and recommend additional actions if required. They also provide an exhaustive procedure for examination, research, and inquiry. **Section 211** established the major Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO), which has the authority to probe serious fraudulent activities, including the power to arrest individuals involved in such offenses. The Act additionally increased the burden on the auditors, requiring them notify the Central Government as whistleblowers, any suspicions of corporate misconduct.

The legal landscape is further strengthened by mandatory compliance for certain categories of companies under **draft rule no. 12.5 and Section 177(9)**, which require the installation of surveillance equipment for specific businesses. This is a critical safeguard against financial embezzlement and other fraudulent acts. **Schedule IV and Section 149(8)** of the said Act highlights the independent directors' responsibility to ensure the watch mechanism's efficacy and report any misconduct. The Companies Act of 2013 mandates that companies follow these stringent procedures in order to enforce proactive compliance, provide transparency, encourage moral behaviour, and punish dishonest behaviour.

B. Provisions under SEBI

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) encouraged listed companies to implement a whistleblower policy in accordance with the Principles of Corporate Governance under **Clause 49 of the Listing Agreement** in its circular dated August 26, 2003. This optional clause allowed companies to provide a mechanism for employees to report unethical activity, potential fraud, or violations of the company's ethical standards. Such a mechanism would, in turn, include safeguards to prevent victimization of individuals who utilized the reporting system, while also offering direct access to the Chairman of the Audit Committee in exceptional circumstances.

Over the time, many businesses willingly adopted the policy as corporate governance norms, seeing its importance in upholding integrity and transparency. Following this, SEBI implemented the **SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations,**

2015,¹⁰ which required listed companies to establish a whistleblower channel for directors and employees under Regulation 22. This law mandates that a company's corporate governance report include details about its whistleblower policy and the number of complaints that have been filed and handled through the system in order to encourage transparency and compliance in the business sector.

C. Provisions under The Whistleblower Protection Act, 2014

With the added protection of shielding those who disclose wrongdoing from harm, the **Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014** (WPA, 2014) offers a strong legal framework for the filing and examination of complaints about corruption, abuse of authority, or misconduct by public servants.

Any individual or group, including public servants, has the right to file a complaint with the **State Vigilance Commission (SVC)** for state government employees or the **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)**¹¹ for central government personnel. A disclosure made under this Act must be in the public interest, done in good faith, and supported by the complainant's affirmation of a reasonable belief in the veracity of the claims. The disclosure process may be conducted either in writing or electronically, and should be directed to the Competent Authority. However, the Competent Authority will not act on a disclosure if the identity of the complainant is not revealed, or if the complainant's identity is proven to be false or incorrect. Additionally, disclosures about the Special Protection Group (SPG) are expressly exempt from the Special Protection Group Act of 1988. Additionally, unless the complainant consents to disclosure, the Competent Authority must carry out investigations in compliance with Chapter III's requirements while keeping the complainant's identity confidential. If the Competent Authority concludes after investigation that the charges are baseless or irrelevant, the complaint may be given an opportunity to make their case before the case is closed.

Under **Chapter IV of the WPA, 2014**, the Competent Authority is granted significant investigatory powers to facilitate inquiries regarding public interest disclosures. The Authority may summon individuals, including public servants, to provide necessary information or produce relevant documents, a power that complements the broader investigative authority vested in bodies such as the Central and State Vigilance Commissions. In the course of its

¹⁰ Sebi (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015

¹¹ Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014

duties, the Competent Authority shall hold civil court powers as stipulated in the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908. These powers encompass the ability to compel the attendance of witnesses, order the production of documents, and accept affidavits as evidence. Such proceedings are deemed judicial in nature and are recognized as civil court proceedings for all legal purposes.

The Competent Authority is also empowered to request assistance from police or other governmental bodies to expedite the inquiry process. However, certain matters are exempted from the Competent Authority's purview. These include disclosures related to matters that have already been resolved by a court or tribunal, those already subject to public inquiries under the Public Servants (Inquiries) Act, 1850 or the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952, and disclosures concerning events that transpired more than seven years prior. Disclosures involving national security, foreign relations, public order, defamation, and matters of public morality are expressly excluded from investigation by the Competent Authority.

To safeguard those who make disclosures, **Chapter V of the WPA, 2014** offers robust protection against retaliatory actions. It ensures that public servants or individuals who have made disclosures are not subjected to retaliation. If victimization occurs, the Competent Authority is authorized to intervene and issue directives to rectify the situation, including restoring the whistleblower's position and imposing fines for non-compliance. The Act also imposes penalties for those who destroy, falsify, or fail to submit required reports in a timely manner. Additionally, individuals found guilty of intentionally disclosing the complainant's identity without consent face penalties, including imprisonment. Public servants found responsible for filing false or frivolous complaints may also face severe fines and imprisonment.

Pursuant to **Chapter VI of the WPA, 2014**, penalties are enforceable for non-compliance with the directions of the Competent Authority during a preliminary inquiry. If a public authority or individual fails to submit a requested report or explanation within the specified time frame, a daily penalty of Rs. 250, up to a maximum of Rs. 50,000, may be imposed. A similar penalty is imposed if the report is found to be incomplete, misleading, or falsified. Importantly, prior to the imposition of any penalty, the Competent Authority is mandated to grant the concerned individual an opportunity to be heard. Furthermore, any individual who discloses the identity of a complainant—whether intentionally or negligently—may face imprisonment for up to three years, alongside a fine not exceeding Rs. 50,000. Public servants who make false,

malicious, or frivolous disclosures are subject to a penalty that could include up to two years of imprisonment or a fine of Rs. 30,000.

The Head of a Department is responsible for offences committed by their subordinates, unless they can prove innocence and due diligence in overseeing their department's actions. Similarly, an officer in charge of a company will be held accountable for the company's violations unless they can demonstrate that they acted without knowledge or negligence. Any individual adversely affected by a penalty imposed by the Competent Authority may appeal to the High Court within sixty days. The High Court holds the discretion to relax this period for valid reasons.

D. Whistle Blowers Protection Bill, 2015

The Whistle Blowers Protection Bill of 2015, introduced in the Lok Sabha on 11th May 2015 and passed on 13th May 2015, currently remains under review in the Rajya Sabha. This Bill seeks to amend the Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014, introducing a set of ten specific categories of information that are exempt from disclosure, as outlined below:

- Information pertaining to India's sovereignty, strategic, scientific, or economic interests, or material that could instigate an offence.
- Records and deliberations of the Council of Ministers.
- Information prohibited by a court order or that could lead to contempt of court.
- Breach of legislative privilege.
- Trade secrets, intellectual property, or commercial confidence (where disclosure would harm a third party).
- Information disclosed in a fiduciary capacity.
- Information received from a foreign government.
- Information that would compromise a person's safety.
- Information that could disrupt ongoing investigations.
- Matters relating to personal privacy.

The Whistle Blowers Protection Bill of 2015, rather than augmenting the protections offered to whistle blowers, seems to take a regressive step by imposing stringent restrictions on the types of information that may be revealed. By adding layers of prohibitions, the Bill narrows the scope for public interest disclosures, ultimately weakening the original intent of

empowering whistle blowers.¹²

In addition to this, the Bill fails to address the core need for safeguarding whistle blowers' personal security, a glaring omission given the numerous cases of severe retaliation faced by whistle blowers, including loss of life. Furthermore, the Bill introduces a convoluted procedure for the investigation of complaints, requiring external government verification before any inquiry can proceed. This unnecessary complication extends timelines, increases discretionary powers, and diminishes the independence of the Competent Authority, further weakening the effectiveness of the whistle blower protection mechanism.

LOOPHOLES IN THE LEGISLATIONS

Restricted Protection:

The WBPA provides legal protection solely for those who expose corruption within government and public sector organizations. Private sector employees, however, remain unprotected, leaving them exposed to retaliation without the benefit of statutory safeguards.

Deficiencies in the Independent Mechanism:

Although a National Whistleblower Protection Authority (NWPA) is intended to be established under the Act to address complaints and grievances, this agency has not been successful, mostly because of inadequate budget, a lack of administrative ability, and compromised autonomy. Delays in establishing and enforcing this authority undermine the Act's overall efficacy in offering whistleblowers substantial protection.

Bureaucratic and laborious processes:

Potential whistleblowers are discouraged by the Act's complicated and bureaucratic complaint filing procedure. The lengthy procedures needed to register accusations and go through the government present significant challenges, especially when it comes to public institution corruption.

Inadequate reprisal Safeguards:

Although the WBPA has provisions protecting whistleblowers from reprisal, including as harassment, demotion, and loss of employment, these protections are still not consistently

¹² Whistle Blowers Protection Bill, 2015

enforced and are only partially effective. Due to the absence of an effective and well-supported enforcement system, many whistleblowers still endure punitive actions like firing, threats, and social exclusion.

Lack of Anonymity:

Whistleblowers usually run the risk of being exposed during investigations, even though the Act places a strong focus on protecting anonymity. A whistleblower's identity may be revealed through inadvertent disclosures or confidentiality violations, which could result in threats and retaliatory harm.

Absence of Penalties for Malicious Complaints:

People who file false or malicious complaints are not subject to any severe penalties under the WBPA. Without these safeguards, the system might be abused, damaging someone's reputation and resulting in unnecessary inquiries against innocent people.

Uncertain Definition of "Public Interest":

The Act creates uncertainty by protecting whistleblowers by depending on the nebulous and arbitrary notion of "public interest." Because of this ambiguity, whistleblowers are unsure if their acts are protected, which leads to legal disputes and uneven enforcement of the law.

Absence of Training and Public Awareness:

The poor use of the WBPA is due to the general public's and government officials' ignorance about it. Inadequate training of authorities who deal with whistleblower allegations exacerbates the issue by resulting in ineffective case handling.

Political and Institutional Interference:

Whistleblower cases frequently entail political influence, particularly when political organizations or the government are involved. This jeopardizes the integrity of investigations, delays justice, and exposes whistleblowers to political reprisals, further complicating their protection.

Lack of Efficient Enforcement Action:

Despite the provisions of the WBPA, its effectiveness is undermined by their non-enforcement. Whistleblowers typically continue to experience reprisal because of inadequate resources, poor

implementation, and a lack of institutional support.

PATHWAYS TO REFORM

The integrity of a nation's institutions is paramount in ensuring public trust, economic stability, and good governance. In this regard, strengthening whistleblower policies is a crucial step towards fostering transparency, accountability, and combating corruption. The following recommendations are designed to transform India's legal and institutional framework for whistleblower protection, creating an environment where individuals can report wrongdoing without fear of retaliation and where justice prevails in every instance of misconduct.

Amend the Whistleblower Protection Act: The Whistleblower Protection Act, 2014, requires significant refinement to address its current limitations. The law should be revisited and amended to introduce more explicit and comprehensive procedures for the protection of whistleblowers, including preventive measures against termination, harassment, or even violence.

Penalize Retaliation: Retaliation against whistleblowers should be explicitly criminalized, with severe penalties for actions such as wrongful termination, harassment, or discrimination. Special provisions should be enacted to penalize those who abuse their position to silence whistleblowers.

Expanding Coverage: Protection must be extended beyond the public sector to include private sector employees who expose corporate wrongdoing. Legal provisions should ensure these whistleblowers are granted the same rights, including access to legal support and financial assistance when needed.

Anonymous Reporting Channels: Create robust, anonymous channels for the reporting of misconduct, which should include national and regional helplines, secure digital platforms, and encrypted communication systems. These should safeguard the identity of the whistleblower and ensure their safety throughout the process.

Independent Oversight Body: An independent, impartial, and fully empowered agency should be established to investigate all whistleblower reports. This body must operate free from any political, corporate, or governmental influence, ensuring that investigations are conducted in good faith and without bias.

Mandatory Timeframes for Investigations: It is imperative that all complaints are investigated without undue delay. Set clear timeframes for investigation and resolution, holding authorities accountable for any failure to act within the prescribed period.: It is imperative that all complaints are investigated without undue delay. Set clear timeframes for investigation and resolution, holding authorities accountable for any failure to act within the prescribed period.: It is imperative that all complaints are investigated without undue delay. Set clear timeframes for investigation and resolution, holding authorities accountable for any failure to act within the prescribed period.

Financial Compensation for Whistleblowers: A compensation scheme should be introduced to ensure that individuals who suffer financially due to their whistleblowing activities are supported. This fund would cover legal costs, loss of income, and other financial burdens imposed on the whistleblower due to retaliation.

Active Role of NGOs and Civil Society: Civil society organizations should be empowered to assist whistleblowers, offer legal advice, and advocate for stronger protection policies at both the national and local levels.

Media Involvement: Media organizations should be encouraged to report on whistleblowing cases while ensuring that whistleblowers are shielded from retaliation or public vilification.

Mandatory Internal Whistleblower Policies for Corporations: All corporations and public institutions should be required by law to have comprehensive whistleblower protection policies. These policies must be aligned with national standards and subject to regular audits.

Frequent Independent Audits: Conduct regular audits of both public and private sector organizations to identify potential risks and encourage the early reporting of misconduct.

NOTABLE CASES OF WHISTLEBLOWING

In the realm of governance and public service, there exists a unique breed of individuals whose commitment to truth transcends personal peril—whistleblowers. These courageous individuals, armed with nothing but the righteousness of their cause, have exposed some of the darkest

corners of corruption and mismanagement within India's vast bureaucracy. Among them, six stand as shining exemplars of integrity and resilience, sacrificing their lives to uphold the pillars of transparency and justice.

1. **Satyendra Dubey:** A beacon of honesty within the corridors of the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI), Satyendra Dubey exemplified moral fortitude when he uncovered egregious financial irregularities within the prestigious Golden Quadrilateral Project under the leadership of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Tasked with overseeing the construction of a critical stretch of the NH 2 in Koderma, Jharkhand, Dubey's whistleblowing led to the suspension of three engineers involved in malfeasance. Tragically, Dubey paid the ultimate price for his integrity, being gunned down in cold blood on November 27, 2003, as he returned from a wedding in Varanasi. His valiant stand was posthumously recognized with the Whistleblower of the Year award by the London-based organization Index on Censorship.
2. **Shanmugam Manjunath:** A determined officer of the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Shanmugam Manjunath's unwavering resolve to combat corruption took him to the heart of Lakhimpur Kheri, Uttar Pradesh, where he exposed the illegal sale of adulterated fuel. His actions, which included sealing two fraudulent petrol pumps and conducting surprise raids, led to his tragic demise on November 19, 2005. Shot six times by the very individuals he had sought to expose, Manjunath's martyrdom remains a powerful reminder of the price of integrity in a world rife with corruption.
3. **Lalit Mehta:** A social activist and engineer, Lalit Mehta was a tireless champion of the Right to Food movement in Jharkhand. His investigative work uncovered widespread corruption in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme, a vital lifeline for rural employment. With a courage that resonated with truth, Mehta initiated a social audit of the scheme but was tragically murdered before he could fully unveil the corruption festering within the system. On May 15, 2008, Mehta's life was violently cut short as he was ambushed while traveling in Chhatarpur, Madhya Pradesh, yet his legacy continues to inspire the fight for accountability.
4. **IPS Narendra Kumar Singh:** Known for his fearless commitment to justice, IPS officer Narendra Kumar Singh took on the notorious sand mafia in Madhya Pradesh, where illegal sand mining was devastating local ecosystems. Despite repeated threats to his life, Singh doggedly pursued the culprits, even after multiple warnings. His determination to prevent the illegal transport of mined stones led to his untimely death

on March 8, 2012, when he was run over by a tractor, driven by members of the sand mafia. His martyrdom is a testament to the unwavering courage of those who stand for the law, even in the face of imminent danger.

5. **Sanjiv Chaturvedi:** A distinguished officer of the Indian Forest Services (IFS), Sanjiv Chaturvedi's quest for justice began with his exposure of illegal tree felling in Uttarakhand. However, his most notable contribution came during his tenure as Chief Vigilance Officer at AIIMS, where he courageously investigated over 200 corruption cases, uncovering unauthorised foreign trips and illegal activities among high-ranking doctors and administrative officials. Chaturvedi's tireless commitment to uncovering corruption has set a high bar for integrity within public service.
6. **Vijay Pandhare:** As Chief Engineer in the Maharashtra Water Resource Department, Vijay Pandhare's revelation of massive corruption within the state's irrigation projects shocked the nation. His letter to the Chief Minister, revealing that over Rs. 120 billion had been spent on lift irrigation projects—of which 99 percent were rendered non-functional—led to political upheaval and the resignation of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. Pandhare's courageous act brought the rot of mismanagement and corruption into the public eye, leading to systemic reforms and placing him among the champions of accountability in public service.

These brave whistleblowers, through their selfless dedication and ultimate sacrifice, have not only exposed the rampant corruption within India's governmental systems but have also ignited a flame of awareness and activism. Their stories are a powerful reminder that integrity, no matter the cost, is the bedrock of a just society.

In the grand scheme of India's fight against corruption, whistleblowing is the unsung hero, a tool with the power to disrupt the status quo and expose malpractices hiding in the shadows. The Whistle Blowing Policy aims to provide a shield for those brave enough to step forward, but the gap between intention and reality is still far too wide. The promise of protection is often overshadowed by fears of professional and personal repercussions, leaving many reluctant to speak out. This gap highlights the need for urgent reforms to ensure that whistleblowers are not only legally protected but also socially and professionally supported.

For this policy to truly thrive, India must evolve its approach to whistleblowing—building not just laws, but a culture where truth-tellers are valued, not vilified. This means strengthening protection laws, ensuring anonymous channels, and fostering an environment where

whistleblowers are seen as heroes, not victims. Furthermore, it's time to move from awareness to action—swift investigations and zero tolerance for retaliation will ensure that those who blow the whistle can do so with confidence. India has the opportunity to lead the charge in creating a system where integrity is safeguarded, and justice is the endgame.

