

Aam Aadmi Party in Indian Politics: Some Innovative and Erroneous Acts

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Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) not only changed election politics but altered the nature of party politics. It generated new interest and enthusiasm among the people about politics but failed to sustain the same. Its hurried decisions and self-proclaimed anarchic style of functioning created problems for the party. Though AAP understood the pulse of people but failed to understand the pulse of Indian politics. It may take long for AAP to regain the confidence of people. The future trajectory of AAP depends on how best it is able to spell out alternative policy directions and how best the party is able to organize itself with clarity in its future endeavor. Much depends on the performance of AAP in upcoming Delhi election. The outcome of Delhi Assembly elections will determine the future of AAP in Indian politics.

The emergence of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) marked the beginning of a new chapter in Indian politics. It also marked a change in the nature of party politics. The rise of AAP in Delhi and its subsequent decision to contest for 2014 general election definitely sent a strong message to the existing political formations that they need to change. It also compelled for more participatory and democratic governance. While AAP brought turmoil in Indian political system it also faced challenges from

within. While AAP was seen as a party of hope and change, its continuation and existence in Indian politics is questioned by many. Whether the AAP phenomenon, which succeeded in enthusing new interest in politics among the people can sustain it? Whether AAP will be able to provide an alternative to existing parties or will end up being one among many other existing parties? With these broad questions the present paper tries to analyse the change AAP brought in the nature of party politics. It also attempts to analyse the challenges and prospects of AAP in Indian politics.

The unfolding of events in the 21st century are often viewed as churning of Indian democracy. While on the one side India recorded high GDP growth on the other side there were challenges of inclusive development. The neoliberal reforms along with growth also had to address several challenges. Under the pretext of neoliberal reforms state protected the corporate sector. This raised critical questions about the strategies and policies adopted by government by way of protest movements. With the growing frustration and disbelief in political parties acting as channel between peoples' interest and government actions the role of civil society increased. The right based policies initiated by civil society in recent years are often pointing towards lack of new insights and directions among the existing political parties. Massive support gathered by Anna Hazare movement is a clear indication of the fact that people are frustrated and needed change. Indian politics has reached a point where any civil society initiative for a public cause would have gathered vehement support by the people. The Anna Hazare movement just triggered these sentiments of the people which were further harnessed by AAP.

Anna Hazare's movement is special in many ways. It attracted large number of supporters not only from Delhi but from different parts of India. It also saw urban middle class and youth participation in large numbers. The movement was also special because it culminated not only in bringing Lokpal and Lokayukta Act but also in the emergence of a new party called AAP. The AAP is seen by many as a party of hope

and change. The new party succeeded in tapping the frustration among the people especially among the middle class and the youth. The AAP not only changed the nature of electoral politics but also the nature of party politics in India. However, it also became the victim of its own haughty and erroneous acts. Though AAP understood the pulse of people it failed to understand the pulse of politics.

Different Perspectives

The emergence of AAP is seen by many as the beginning of new chapter in Indian politics. To many others it has not demonstrated a healthy growth. Kumar Anand (2013), Shukla S.P. (2013), Suhash Phalsikar (2014), Gopal Guru (2014), SrirupaRoy (2014), AnandTeltumbde (2014), V.Krishna Anant (2014) and others wrote about AAP from different perspectives. For some the popularity of AAP is a momentum and may not succeed in making any dent in Indian politics. For many it is only a media hype. However, there is no denial of the fact that emergence of AAP brought a new enthusiasm among the voters. Though, AAP has been criticized by many for its style of functioning it raised crucial questions about Indian democracy and party system. Its success in Delhi Assembly elections and its increasing popularity made people believe that the party is there to stay. There was a time when AAP was seen as breaking the existing two party formations and providing third party alternative at national level. Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, predicted significant changes in Indian politics if the Aam Aadmi Party performs well in the Lok Sabha elections. As observed by Maidul Islam, "under a neoliberal regime, the old contract between the state and the people has been redefined with the social welfare schemes targeting mainly the poor and not including this section of the middle class which emerges from the public sector, small trade and the professions. In a world where the public sector is rapidly vanishing to make way for the corporate, sections of this old middle class are now looking for a political alternative that could articulate their grievances"(Ramani, 2013).

A Party with Difference

No doubt AAP emerged out of a movement against corruption.

Why AAP is so significant is because it tried to re-establish the core principle on which political parties are found. It is seen as a party with difference. It adopted new strategies for elections which tried to bring party close to the people. An assurance of intra-party democracy placed AAP distinct from other political parties. Political parties are a link between people and government. In the representative democracy the interest and demands of the people are represented through political parties. Political parties through its strong organizational wing establish bridge between people and political parties. As stated by Rajani Kothari (1976) party structure at various level should permit a great deal of participation of intermediate elites and the ordinary people through a system of internal democracy, so that the high level policy and planning processes remain sensitive to the needs and demands of people. However, from the period of Indira Gandhi populist measures and personality cult dominated the politics of the day. The erosion of strong organizational wing and intra-party democracy alienated the party from the peoples' needs and demands. This fact was very well brought out in the work of Atul Kohli (1991) who analysed how erosion of democracy within the party and with weakening of organizational wing of the party Congress lost its touch with people which affected its performance in many states. This is a fact realized by Rajiv Gandhi but hardly any concrete steps were taken to strengthen the organization of the party. This is also true of many other parties in India. However, populism, mobilization of primordial loyalties were often used by political parties as strategies for gaining and maintaining power. As pointed by Atul Kohli (1991) political parties ceased to function as arenas for accommodation and resolution of conflict by which political parties leave serious authority vacuum. Unresolved conflicts often are fought out on the streets which became common features of Indian democracy in recent years. They also demonstrate growing alienation of political parties from people. Assurance of intra-party democracy placed AAP distinct from other political parties.

The Vision Document prepared by AAP provides details of how transparency, accountability and intra-party democracy is ensured by

the party. It assured that no candidate of their party will be nominated without considering the views of common people. People accused of crime and huge corruption will not be nominated by AAP. All officials of the party will be subjected to a strict code of conduct and party will have its own internal Lokpal which will have retired judges and other prestigious persons. It also assured that no members of the same family are allowed in the committees of the party. It provided for right to recall if any representative's functioning is found unsatisfactory. Similarly members of any committee can remove the Convenor, Secretary or Treasurer.

During the formal announcement of the party on 2nd October 2012, Kejriwal declared that, "our politics is not for power, we want power to change politics" (Tripathi & Ramakrishnan, *The Game Changer*, 2014). He also reiterated that they will show that how politics can be done honestly and the party has taken up the responsibility of breaking relationship between money, power and politics. For AAP the nexus between these renders people helpless and marginalized. After the formal announcement of AAP as a political party Yogendra Yadav who later joined AAP commented that this is a defining movement for Indian democracy when 'swaraj' can actually become a reality. He said, "time had come when real issues such as corruption had become topics of political discourse" (Tripathi & Ramakrishnan, *The Game Changer*, 2014). AAP presented itself as *khas politics of aamaadami* which does not believe in harping on primordial loyalties. Thus, the party projected itself as a party of common man who had been neglected and marginalized by political establishments.

AAP brought the issue of service delivery and clean governance into the forefront of political debates by linking them to the basic necessities of common people. Its leaders identified themselves as one among the people and provided practical examples by working for them. They have earned credibility through their work in campaigns for the poor and the environment, for peasant and worker mobilisations, in human rights movements, for judicial activism, in student/youth organisations,

in the fields of education and media, and in political reform work (Kumar, 2013). The interventionist stories to some extent contributed to AAPs popularity. As observed by Srirupa Roy (2014) interventionist stories are narratives about seemingly intractable problems encountered by the archetypal ordinary citizen, that are solved by the timely, simple, but effective intervention of an AAP party worker which addressed issues of infrastructural breakdown and inaccessibility, targeted non-delivery of government services and focused on access to the law and hence the basic constitutional entitlements of citizenship.

The increased voter turnout at elections reveals that AAP enthused new interest among the people about politics. In 2008 Delhi State Assembly election total turn out of voters was 58 per cent whereas 66 per cent voters turned out in 2013. Similarly, the total turn out of voting has also increased in Lok Sabha election in Delhi. In 2009 Lok Sabha election total turn out of voters in Delhi was 52 per cent whereas 64 per cent voters turned out in 2014 Lok Sabha election (Ranjan & Kumar, 2014). The manner in which he (Arvind Kejriwal) has galvanised the lot for whom politics was merely a matter of gossip into a real political vortex and made his supporters wield broomsticks that hitherto just symbolised the unmeritorious underdogs is simply fantastic (Teltumbde, 2014).

New Initiatives

Use of social media paid dividends for AAPs overwhelming popularity during Delhi Assembly elections. Social media and IT team of AAP using a technology called "call patching" made people call voters in Delhi from any part of the world. "The party website had a phone number that was connected to a cloud server, and once somebody called on this number, he would further be connected to the phone number of a voter from the 25 lakh plus database. The number was operational on 100 lines simultaneously, which means 100 people could simultaneously talking to 100 voters using one single number" (Tripathi, Call Trick, 2014). The credit goes to AAP for mobilizing large number of individuals to join and work for the new party. There was a time when AAP enlisted around

1 lakh voters every day. It combined both traditional and modern method for campaigning.

The initiative by AAP called *chandekachaddar* also been appreciated by people. All donations and details of all expenditures of AAP were put on the party website. These new initiatives definitely identified AAP as a party with difference. The innovative campaign methods used by AamAadmi Party, such as 70 different manifesto's for 70 different constituencies of Delhi, volunteer based campaigning and crowdsourcing of funds, have changed the political landscape of Delhi (Mahaprashasta, 2014).

With these new initiatives of campaigning AAP had taken over major vote base of Congress in Delhi and to some extent of left and BJP. "The Congress lost whopping 15 per cent points, polling only 25 per cent of the votes. The BJP too, lost 3 per cent points, getting only 33 per cent. In contrast, the AAP, in its very first election, secured 30 per cent votes" (Ramakrishnan, 2013). AAP won seats in reserved constituencies and migrant dominated colonies which show that people voted for AAP across traditional caste and class lines.

It goes to the credit of Arvind Kejriwal that four promises made in the manifesto are fulfilled in just four days after becoming the Chief Minister of Delhi. After the victory in Delhi, AAP was seen as a party which has potential to challenge the political establishments at the centre. Thus AAP changed the nature of electoral politics. Political parties raised different issues at the time of election and converted them into electoral issues. In India the issues of caste, class, language, communal issues were politicized and were used by political parties as electoral issues to attract voters. During elections political parties are not throwing up far reaching debates on crucial issues of public importance. The debates were centered on populist or immediate issues. AAP has cut across these primordial issues and brought the issue of governance at the center stage with an emphasis on *swaraj* and service delivery. It left behind Congress and BJP with its new strategies of campaigning. The election issues are not the creation of the party but originated after

consulting the people. The emergence and success of AAP in Delhi is a message to the established political formation that populism or vote politics is not sufficient condition in the long run to win elections. People were fed up with the rhetoric's of political parties and required a party which can deliver. AAP has leaders who worked for protecting the interest of people which helped the party to identify itself with the common man. AAP not only changed election politics but also changed party politics. However, BJP was quick enough to respond to this changing nature of party politics by appealing to the sentiments of new and rising India with its new development and governance model. AAP's mistakes abetted BJP to appeal to the voters in the general elections of 2014.

Some Erroneous Acts

After attaining huge success in Delhi and tremendous response it received from people AAP decided to contest 434 seats to the Lok Sabha elections. However in 414 seats, i.e. 96 per cent of AAP's candidates lost deposits. Arvind Kejriwal's resignation as Delhi's CM was considered to be the biggest mistake of AAP. AAP failed to show in Delhi that their model of governance can work. It is also a mistake on part of AAP to decide to contest around 400 seats to Lok Sabha elections. As a new party AAP should have taken time to establish and prove itself in one or two states. It was also equally important that AAP should have created strong internal organization and well thought out strategy to elect candidates for contesting election. AAP's self-declared anarchical style of functioning was not accepted by its voters due to which many of its voters deserted from AAP in Lok Sabha elections.

After the results of Lok Sabha elections its membership went down drastically. From 3,50,000 volunteers nationwide last October, it is now down to less than 50,000 (Unnithan, 2014). The party which harped on internal democracy was charged with functioning in a undemocratic manner. There were accusations from party members that leader is not allowing any dissent within the party. There were apprehensions among the party workers that AAP will turn into another personality cult driven

party. Restricting decision making to a small group created dissatisfaction among the party workers.

Madhu Bhaduri one of the founder member of AAP criticized AAP high command for not allowing dissent. Such allegations by their own party members created adverse impact on AAPs image building. The internal conflicts of its leaders was very much evident with Shazialmi's resignation followed by YogendraYadav's resignation from the party's National Executive membership claiming that party is getting into a personality cult which later he withdraw. The tension between YogendraYadav and Manish Sisodia is also a reflection of growing differences among the leaders. The party's claim on internal democracy came under question by its own party workers. Palshikar rightly pointed out that, "a party that seek to adopt very open procedure for designating its office holders runs the risk of being hijacked on being taken over by those who may have different ideas from those of the founders and more active members" (Palshikar, 2013).

Inspite of its huge popularity and success in Delhi elections AAP failed to sustain it. It's decision to contest Lok Sabha election did not yield results in favour of AAP. Critiques raised apprehensions over the manner in which AAP functioned. For AAP "solutions are simple, intervention narratives repeatedly declare, everyone and anyone can repair our broken democracy. But such an unqualified emphasis on the "everyman" character of effective citizenship - something that anyone and everyone can be or do - threatens to dissolve the distinction of AAP. After all, why join the part if problems can easily be solved by one and all?" (Roy, 2014).

Calling the emergence of AAP as a disturbing phenomenon Prabhat Patnaik (2014) observed that its appeal to people is directed entirely to their sense of morality rather than to their intellect. He called it dangerous for two reasons. Firstly an appeal entirely to a moral sense rather than to the intellect is anti-democratic in itself because the essence of democracy is to make the electorate think about issues and make informed decisions and secondly it exempts morality itself

from being susceptible to the exercise of the intellect and hence makes it open to Talibanesque interpretations (Patnaik, 2014).

AAP failed to provide a national vision. Corruption became the main issue of AAP. There was no clarity over ideology of AAP. To sustain in national politics AAP required to go beyond anti-corruption and spell out its policies. As an AAP leader stated without wanting to be named, "the party was ideologically fuzzy by design so that it could attract from all streams well-meaning people committed to the large well-being of society" (Tripathi & Ramakrishnan, *The Game Changer*, 2014). Kejriwal said: "Our goal is to remain solution-focused. If the solution to a problem lies on the left we are happy to consider it. Likewise if it is on the right (or in the centre) we are equally happy to consider it. Ideology is one for the pundits and the media to pontificate about" (Teltumbde, 2014). No clear stand on the issue of ideology came under criticism from many and demanded that it should spell out parties ideology soon if the party wants to sustain in national politics for long. However, V. Krishna Ananth (2014) observed that, "AAP is based on an idea that cries to be nurtured into an ideology. While there is no urgency to doing this, it cannot be wished away, as a section seems to want to".

One of the fears expressed over the concept of 'swaraj' advocated by AAP is that it may further isolate the marginalized sections. As observed by Palshikar, (2014) Democratic societies have yet to arrive at a satisfactory response to this dilemma - local power is the essence of democracy but local powers are more conservative, blind to the injustices of the local environments and antithetical to individual rights and entitlements. Against this backdrop, the ideas of expanding democratic involvement of the citizens are not only romantic, they also tend to undermine political equality. No doubt AAP has shown signs of satisfying the middle class but the challenge before AAP is how best it is able to serve the poor and the marginalized sections.

AAP with its pro-people idealism emerged as the second largest party in Delhi Assembly election. But it has not much to show by way of how its governance methods are different from the other political party.

The initiatives taken by AAP, after assuming power in Delhi are seen as party in hurry. AAP claimed that it is the first party in India which delivered to the maximum within 49 days of it being in power but its self-proclaimed anarchic style of function brought disgrace to the party. After the general election results the biggest question in-front of the party is "what next?". In an interview to 'India Today' magazine Yogendra Yadav stated that at present with the rise of BJP with unprecedented majority there is a vacuum in the opposition. While Congress is not in a position to fill this AAP will take on Modi and BJP. He also claimed that, the National Executive meeting has come out with a clear road map for the party to move forward. According to him, the challenge ahead is, one-that we don't lose our nerve; two-to build our organization from below; three-to clarify our policy positions and orientation; and four- to go back to the people and if necessary, apologize for some of our mistakes. There is a good possibility that the AAP will get a chance to be at least a catalytic agent, if not a perfect transformer, in creating new initiatives for better democracy, provided it keeps moving to establish living links with the "aamaadami" and "aamaurat" in a well-organised and time-bound manner, irrespective of the dismissive responses of the political class (Kumar, 2013).

While arguing for undermining the use of ethical relativism as precondition for initiating new politics Gopal Guru (2014) observed that, ethical relativism seems to suggest, since everyone is more or less corrupt, then why talk about it? It suggests that if everyone is corrupt, and guilty of some prejudices there is no need to fight against it. So he wanted new politics to acquire the moral capacity to acknowledge the burden of the past mistakes, and demonstrate that such mistakes would not be repeated again.

AAP became victim of its own lofty claims. The party which claimed to be different from other parties failed to use the opportunity when in power. While its decision to resign disappointed many. There is no doubt that AAP as party created much hype but has little to show by way of performance. However what also matters is the impact it

created on electoral and party politics of the country. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) not only changed election politics but altered the nature of party politics. It generated new interest and enthusiasm among the people about politics but failed to sustain the same. Its hurried decisions and self-proclaimed anarchic style of functioning created problems for the party. Though AAP understood the pulse of people but failed to understand the pulse of Indian politics. It may take long for AAP to regain the confidence of people. The future trajectory of AAP depends on how best it is able to spell out alternative policy directions and how best the party is able to organize itself with clarity in its future endeavor. Much depends on the performance of AAP in upcoming Delhi election. The outcome of Delhi Assembly elections will determine the future of AAP in Indian politics.

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