INDIA IMPATIENT FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE!

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NOT long ago, most of the key people behind the idea of AAP (Aam Addmi Party) were enlightened activists only, not sharpened politicians as they are today! They were there to bring in change by hitting at the roots of corruption and nepotism. They protested, they agitated and even they fasted to achieve what they wanted to but to no avail! The hardened politicians of the so-called mainstream parties would scold them by challenging to join electoral politics and know their worth!

GENESIS OF THE AAM AADMI PARTY:

As a result of the scolding and public humiliation, the idea of a political party with a difference emerged. Besides this, it is also recorded in the public memory that AAP came into existence because of the differences between Arvind Kejriwal and Anna Hazare, the two main pillars behind the popular IACM -- India Against Corruption Movement. Through this Movement, they together had been pitching for a Jan Lokpal (Ombudsman) Bill since 2011. However, on the question of whether or not to politicise IACM there were differing views. While Kejriwal strongly felt that not much success of the agitation route necessitated a direct political intervention, Hazare was of the opinion that the IACM should remain politically unaligned.

At last on September 19, 2012, Hazare and Kejriwal agreed to acknowledge that their differences were irreconcilable. Next month, on October 2, 2012 -- the birth anniversary of MK Gandhi – Kejriwal, the Mufflerman -- announced that he was forming a political party (AAP) and that he intended the formal launch to be on 26 November, coinciding with the anniversary of India's adoption of its Constitution in 1949.

Ultimately, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) or Common Man's Party came into existence on that day i.e. November 26, 2012 in Delhi and in March 2013 it was registered as a political party by the Election Commission of India. Kejriwal was chosen AAP's National Convener.

FIRST ELECTORAL TEST:

AAP's first electoral test was in the 2013 Delhi Assembly election. This election gave AAP an opportunity to emerge as the second-largest party, winning 28 of the 70 seats. With no party obtaining an overall majority and the largest party in the Delhi Assembly, Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP, with 32 seats refusing to form the government, AAP formed the minority government with the conditional support of the Indian National Congress (INC) that got only eight seats. Rest of the seats, two, were bagged by other candidates. Actually, AAP had shown its reluctance to take support of any party to form the government in Delhi, the national capital, but there were no options left.

Anyway, a significant part of the AAP agenda was to quickly introduce the Jan Lokpal Bill in the Delhi Assembly. Consequently, the AAP Government had to resign as it became clear that INC and BJP would not support this Bill. Corrupt corporates' hand was seen as the reason behind BJP and INC not supporting the Lokpal Bill. The corrupt corporates, including some of the power distribution companies, whom Kejriwal lambasted intensely, for obvious reasons, did not want Kejriwal and his party to succeed politically. Nevertheless, AAP left a legacy of 49 days clean government that still has deep imprints in the public memory.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION OF 2014:

AAP contested the Lok Sabha (Lower House of National Parliament) election fielding 432 candidates nationwide in the general election in 2014. Given that they were founded towards the end of 2012 only, had little or no monetary resources, depended solely on micro-financing and crowd-funding and had limited electoral experience, this was a big step! While only 19 candidates could save their electoral deposits, 47 candidates were able to stand third. The party won four Lok Sabha seats (Faridkot, Fatehgarh Sahib, Patiala and Sangrur) in the North Indian state of Punjab. Kejriwal, who contested against Narendra Modi of BJP and now Prime Minister, also lost the contest in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. The Punjab win surprised a many including several in the party!

NEW POLITICAL SCENARIO IN DELHI: THE HISTORIC ELECTORAL WIN OF 2015:

After the AAP Government's resignation, the party devoted it's time to grow exponentially and reach out to almost every nook and corner of the Delhi metropolis. The social media and interface with the public in one manner or the other remained the main tools of their efforts.

Now, in the 2015 Delhi Assembly election, all ruling parties -- from BJP to INC – were determined to defeat AAP in the election. Also, certain Indian multinational companies that supported these two ruling parties with huge funds also wanted AAP to face defeat as they

feared their economic interests would get hurt if this party succeeded in the Delhi Assembly election.

But, the people as well as the democratic political forces, including the Communists, were behind AAP and with such a large support-base it was able to sweep nearly all seats, winning 67 of the 70. It has been a political tsunami, a clean sweep, a thunderstorm and a sandstorm at the same time. There is no parallel in the Indian political history of what AAP did in the Delhi Assembly election in 2015. And this win, in fact an overkill, made February 10 (the day the election results were announced) a red letter day that shook up the entire political arena of India -- no matter how faulty is the first-pass-the-post system of election!

IDEOLOGY AND ISSUES:

Kejriwal said, AAP refuses to be guided by ideologies and that they are actually entering politics to change the system: "We are Aam Aadmis (common people). If we find our solution in the Left we are happy to borrow it from there. If we find our solution in the Right, we are happy to borrow it from there." So, AAP has yet to take a clear-cut ideological course.

The CPIM -- Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPM General Secretary Prakash Karat during the 2013 Delhi Assembly election had, however, compared AAP with the Communists. "The virtues that AAP claims for itself -- a clean image, incorruptibility, denial of perks and privileges of power, and funding based on people's contributions -- are all part of the style and practice of the Communists from the outset," Karat had written in an article in People's Democracy, the party's organ. Karat gave examples of crowd funding, Left leaders leading simple lives and refusing government accommodation. However, it is also important to note Karat when he questioned why AAP was silent on several policy issues.

Whatsoever, AAP, for the time being, promises equality and justice that forms a part of the Indian Constitution and its Preamble! AAP is of the view that the very intent of the Indian Constitution has not been fulfilled and that the Independence of India has replaced enslavement to oppressive foreign powers and the political elite. The party thinks that the common people of India remain unheard and unseen except when it suits the politicians.

As people understand, AAP wants to reverse the way that the accountability of government operates and has taken an interpretation of the Gandhian concept of Swaraj as a tenet. It believes that through Swaraj the government will be directly accountable to the people. The concept of Swaraj, obviously, lays stress on self-governance, community building and

decentralisation of power. Besides, Jan Lokapal legislation, right to reject and recall the elected candidates if not liked remained other core areas of their agenda.

For obvious reasons, the AAP manifesto in the 2014 parliamentary election underlined the role of Gram Sabhas (village councils) in decision-making at their respective levels and their integration in the overall governance process. The AAP manifesto for the 2015 Delhi Assembly election promises to do many things -- e.g., passing a Swaraj Bill and setting up pithead power plants to supply power to Delhi. Obviously, Swaraj or Self-Governance Bill is okay but the pithead power plants are not good for the health of those for whom these are meant for.

There is no doubt that AAP's proposed Swaraj Bill is aimed at strengthening grassroots self-governance in Delhi's community neighbourhoods. The local committees are designed to deal with local issues; however, they can also be used as platforms for Delhi's polity to participate in decisions like participatory budgeting process, which started first in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 1990 and then spread over to some 1,500 towns around the world including a few Indian towns like Pune, Bengaluru, Mysore, etc.

PEOPLE WILLING FOR POLITICAL AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE:

The 2015 Delhi Assembly election results have explicitly demonstrated that the citizens were impatient for change – the new politics! In a nutshell, change has been the constant thread in this election and that is why the young voters came out in significant numbers to vote. In fact, the overall increase in voting percentages is actually symptomatic of the change that citizens desire.

There is no doubt that the Delhi election outcome is also about the aspirations of the Indian citizens. This desire was also expressed in the 2014 Lok Sabha election as well but quite differently. Consequence: A clear message to the political parties that either they have to plug into people's aspirations and ideas of change or they would be voted out by the voters! The proof of this that the high-profile rallies of BJP and INC could not yield anything.

On the other hand, AAP's approach was to depart from the ostensible show of power and hierarchies. Its leaders had a direct connect with the people and they struck a direct working connect with the voters. This was evident in numerous road shows and rallies that the party organised around Delhi.

The 2015 Delhi Assembly election can easily be termed as a sub-national election, Delhi being the national capital and metropolitan in character. As a result, the metropolitan citizens of Delhi did not accept the politics of personal attack, basically on Kejriwal. How would the voters forget the change they had experienced, albeit minor, during AAP's stint in the Delhi Government in 2013?

Today, AAP has an absolute majority to actualise its manifesto and people's aspirations courtesy the incredible election verdict. And, of course, the challenges are as many! A paradigm shift from the agitational to action mode may help the party. Another positive aspect is that the Delhi victory of AAP will put pressure on Modi for delivering. If AAP comes up to its promises, only then the signature poll-tune *Paanch Saal Kejriwal* (Five years for Kejriwal as chief minister) would be meaningful!

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