



Rise of the Common Man

With the mainstream national political parties losing to a greenhorn Aam Admi Party (AAP), a political coup d'état was witnessed in the Delhi Assembly elections. AAP actually overshot its own expectations by bagging as many as 67 seats in a 70 member Assembly. Many established, mainstream parties were decimated in the process. It was a fictional David vs. Goliath battle where the former always wins the day owing to latter's arrogance. The truth, however, remains that in the run-up to the elections, few political pundits were willing to believe that AAP would ever win even a respectable number of seats after Arvind Kejriwal resigned as Delhi's Chief Minister after a few months in office, not to speak of being in a position to form the government for the second time in a row.

Everyone felt that AAP should have consolidated on its gains before quitting prematurely or before plunging in parliamentary politics all over the country without also consolidating its organisational base. But it is here that the mainstream parties were missing the wood for the tree. They refused to see the writing on the wall when AAP won 28 seats during the last Assembly elections in Delhi and they continued doing so thereafter. While everyone had his calculations, AAP had its own. Learning from its mistakes, it slowly but steadily picked up the thread to do a gruelling ground-work to achieve the jaw-dropping feat while others allegedly took the voters for granted.

The Indian political landscape has been slowly changing with a conscious and a much mature Indian voter refusing to eat out of hackneyed political palms. The voter has always responded to the needs of the time and returned a government which it found most suitable to represent its interests. The time of the one-party dominant system (also called the Congress system by the ilks of Rajni Kothari and Atul Kohli) was long replaced by the multi-party coalition politics in the late eighties, reflecting the plural character of the Indian society. This system continued for quite some time till the voter got real disgusted. The coalition governments were often found deficient in delivering on the various developmental goals; hence, the reversal to the single-party system in the search for good governance.

The thumping victory handed to AAP by Delhi voters irrespective of caste, language, region and religion gives a lot of hope for the future of our democracy as the latter has been found

on discount in recent times. While we have had a democratically elected government at all levels, the 'demos' and its interests were often sacrificed at the altar of political constraints which was nothing but a euphemism for selfish political conveniences. A democratic India was actually undemocratic at all the levels beyond its governments at the Centre, states or local bodies because once elected, most of the parties or formations in power would usually not care two-hoots for the interests of the people. The mainstream political parties have been alleged to treat the voters with utter contempt. The lip service paid to the people's welfare seldom got translated to actual public service. And where it has been, voters have also returned them back to power.

The common voters have been fed up with the populist politics to cater to a particular vote bank thereby throwing the larger interests to the winds. The politics of divide and rule no longer finds favour with the new-age electorate or neo-Indians. The neo-Indians are thoroughly fed up with the cantankerous divisive and disruptive politics of the day. The voter has been equally pissed with the monarchical, dynastical and feudal manner in which some political parties have been running their business. In fact, it has been one of the biggest criticisms of post-independence Indian party system that it has never been in sync with the political system of the country. While our political system is democratic, most of the political parties running the democratically-elected government are allegedly undemocratic with no system of regular intra-party elections to the various party positions.

The various party positions in most parties are allegedly filled by the so-called 'High Command' or 'Party Supremo' through a decision-making mechanism which has always been opaque. And more often than not, these positions have allegedly gone to the kins or trusted courtiers, who have evinced the ability different from those required for running a system of governance. In fact, a criminal record, a penchant for vandalism and such other negative qualities are often considered the desideratum before you could think of entering Indian politics. And this was why, the common man was slowly moving away from participatory politics, not to speak of a saner person deciding to contest or ever making it to the portals of parliament on his own given the massive play of money and muscle-power.

Even though the monarchy ended long back, the same made its comeback through democratic politics, where some families and dynasties evolved their 'democratic fiefdoms'. Just because they happened to be close to the dominant political family, things were easier for the scions of these families. The common man never knew how to make it to the rarefied precincts of politics even if one wanted to do so. The common man lives with an impression that either you have to be in the 'good books' of the dynasts or feudal lords or you should be having oodles of moolah before deserving a political party ticket to contest. Of all the electoral reforms effected by the Election Commission of India or by the subsequent Supreme Court judgments, the reforms in the Indian party system have been long overdue.

Be it the parties or the candidates, the mainstream dramatis personae have often forgotten the voters once they have won the elections, with the voters left high and dry. Once elected,

these leaders allegedly do a 'Houdini', being nowhere in sight. The voters keep running from pillar to post to get even their rightful work done and feel crestfallen when confronted with the irksome bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo.

It is here that AAP made a refreshing difference. They were seen to be visibly working among the people. Most of AAP workers are young educated voters who don't threaten voters into voting, but try to convince them through workable solutions to their problems. AAP was seen to speak the lingo of the common man and its 49-days political sojourn in its first avatar gave a glimpse of the shape of things to come. Hence, the massive landslide victory for it. Having said that, the electoral victory was the easier part of the political game; AAP's real test would be to deliver on a slew of poll promises it made in the run-up to the elections. It remains to be seen how AAP delivers on the huge popular expectations. Whether it slowly adopts the modus operandi of the mainstream parties or trails a new blaze also remains to be seen. Its success or failure will really decide the fate of the AAP brand of politics.

What happens in future, only time will say? But one thing can be said very safely that AAP has changed the entire discourse of Indian politics, giving the classical Indian politician a run for his money? The mainstream political parties, almost all of them, need to do a serious soul searching to remain in the game otherwise it won't be far when they or their politics shall soon become obsolete. 'Shape up or ship out' is the message on the wall which they can ignore only at their peril. You can no longer take the proverbial common man for granted.

Salient Points

- The Indian political landscape has been slowly changing with a conscious and a much mature Indian voter.
- The coalition governments were often found deficient, hence, the reversal to the single-party system in the search for good governance.
- Thumping victory to AAP by Delhi voters irrespective of caste, language, region and religion gives a lot of hope for the future of our democracy.
- The politics of divide and rule no longer finds favour with the new-age electorate.
- Most of the political parties running the democratically-elected government are allegedly undemocratic with no system of regular intra-party elections.
- Even though the monarchy ended long back, the same made its come-back through some families and dynasties evolved their 'democratic fiefdoms'.
- Of all the electoral reforms effected by ECI, the reforms in the Indian party system has been long overdue.
- AAP made a refreshing difference. Most of AAP workers are young educated voters who don't threaten voters into voting, but try to convince them.
- AAP has changed the entire discourse of Indian politics. The mainstream political parties need to do a serious soul searching.

Glossary

Greenhorn: inexperienced person

Gruelling: exhausting

Hackneyed: made commonplace

Euphemism: the substitution of a mild, indirect, or vague expression for one thought to be offensive

Two-hoots: Anything at all

Cantankerous: disagreeable to deal with

Desideratum: something wanted

Crestfallen: discouraged

Mumbo-jumbo: senseless or pretentious language