

Full Length Research

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) - A Turning Point for Democracy in India

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Democracy means 'government of the people, for the people, and by the people'. It means democracy is not limited to just a process of election, but also fulfilling social and economic aspirations of the people. India is a big democratic country and in an every democratic country there is a need for good governance. Such governance includes transparency, accountability, rule of law and public participation in government system. There can only be one explanation for India's unimpressive economic record- million citizens living in poverty due to the political corruption and instability that can so easily be seen at all levels of government. Unfortunately, there are very few means for the citizens to fight the corruption in the current system. An Indian political part, Aam Aadmi Party, has displayed an outstanding courageous and democratic attitude. The common people wanted to fight the corrupt system by entering into it. Yes there are glitches and some people who give party a bad name but that doesn't mean to hit the credibility of AAP. Arvind Kejriwal had announced holding Mohalla Sabhas (Community Assembly) across 27 assembly segments where AAP candidates had won in the Assembly polls in December 2013. The MLA funds are serving throughout the people of the assembly by taking their opinions. This is the footstep of real democracy in India.

Keywords: Arvind Kejriwal, Aam Aadmi Party, Democracy, Anti-Corruption, Swaraj, Jan Lokpal Bill, Civil Society

INTRODUCTION

India is a very large country full of diversities – linguistically, culturally, and religiously. At the time of independence it was economically underdeveloped. There were enormous regional disparities, widespread poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and shortage of almost all public welfare means. Citizens had enormous expectations from independence. Sixty-five years after Independence, the promise of Swaraj is yet to be redeemed and the Democracy has been reduced. Factors such as education, corruption, women's issues, student politics, leadership strategies and the design of political institutions affect national and local politics. Some other factors such as the

caste issue, environment policy, new long-term investment in the economy by foreigners etc., also have a bearing. As with Indian democracy, political parties represent different sections among the Indian society and regions, and their core values play a major role in the politics of India.

The people of India who are suffering from the corruption and religion based politics of mainstream parties; the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is a breath of fresh air and a ray of hope. The entire nation was agitated about corruption and government inaction on several critical issues including corruption, poverty, and unemployment. The

common people were resigned to the situation as something too large to be handled, but the price rise and high cost of living were major burdens. In 1947, the country gained its independence but today the corrupted system has captured the middle class people and destroyed their freedom. The most popular and simplest definition of corruption is that it is the abuse of public power for private benefit. This is the definition used by the World Bank. Corruption in India (Corruption in India from Wikipedia 2014) is a major issue that adversely affects its economy. Political parties are perceived to be the most corrupt institutions by Indians, according to 2009 Global Corruption Barometer. The Barometer, a global public opinion survey released by Transparency International, found that 58 per cent Indian respondents identified politicians to be the single most corrupt individuals. The survey in India, conducted at the national level between October and November 2013, also indicated that the perception of government effectiveness in relation to addressing corruption had improved from 2007. Almost 8 per cent of the respondents in India consider that corruption in the media affects the lives of the people. The media, while not being perceived as clean, scored best with just over 40 per cent of respondents labeling the sector as corrupt, globally. According to Transparency International, judicial corruption in India is attributable to factors such as “delays in the disposal of cases, shortage of judges and complex procedures, all of which are exacerbated by a preponderance of new laws”. Almost 3 per cent respondents in India consider the judiciary to be corrupt. In cities and villages throughout India, “mafia raj” consisting of municipal and other government officials, elected politicians, judicial officers, real estate developers and law enforcement officials, almost all, involves in corruption. Anti-corruption tools such as the Right to Information Act (RTI, 2005), Jan-Lokpal Bill, Social Audit, Citizens’ Charters and use of technology are wonderful tools to check and control corruption in India. The level of corruption is slowly ruining the Democracy.

For the first time, a civil society movement has transformed itself into a political organization and challenged established political parties. Arvind Kejriwal formed the political party in November 2012 after breaking away from his mentor Anna Hazare. Nobody expected the AAP to capture the imagination of the people of Delhi so quickly and transmit the current waves among people of different parts of the country. It became thorn in the side of the political ambitions of the established Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress.

Manish Shishodia, a senior leader and minister in the first AAP cabinet in Delhi, subscribes to this view. Speaking with *The Diplomat*¹. The journalist-turned-politician says that “we came to channelize the frustration of the people towards the system. There is so much anger among the people against the present political establishment that the moment the people saw an alternative in us

they supported us.”

So, is the AAP a reactionary anti-establishment party or does it have an ideology and vision beyond anti agenda? Can the AAP be a real national political alternative or can it be a turning point to sustain Indian democracy?

The AAP Movement

An ordinary middle-class man becomes the face of the anti-corruption movement, fighting for the common people cause: Arvind Kejriwal, an IITian. Some members of the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement² decided to form a group and change from being a forum of social activism into a political party. Naming itself Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), it contested the New Delhi. Legislative elections in 2013 and emerged as a political force, going on to form a government with outside support on January 2014. The AAP has changed the traditional face of Indian elections, with the fervor of anti-corruption touching a chord among the great Indian middle class.

The AAP (meaning Party of the Common People³, whose acronym translates to the Hindi- You) is a phenomenon for several reasons. It was started by a first-time politician and is not the offshoot of an age-old party. It started by accepting public donations – from former law minister Shanti Bhushan and a group of about 20 Indians residing in the USA. The party can be viewed as a spiritual child of Anna Hazare, the indefatigable crusader against corruption⁴.

The founders of the AAP were all a part of the IAC movement which was agitating for the enactment of the Lok Pal Bill to enable the setting up of ‘people’s courts’ to investigate and try cases of corruption among public servants. The founders of AAP were all a prominent part of Hazare’s fast at the Ram Lila maidan demanding immediate passing of the Act. The Anna Hazare ‘anti-corruption’ movement caught the imagination of people everywhere, from 2011. While Hazare was firm in his belief that this movement should not be politicised, Kejriwal and a few others felt that agitation alone could not bring about the desired change in the system while working from within could. In other words, they felt the need of the hour was to enter the political system themselves, and thus the political party emerged in October 2012 and was

¹ The Diplomat is the premier international current-affairs magazine for the Asia-Pacific region.

² The 2011 Indian anti-corruption movement was a series of demonstrations and protests across India intended to establish strong legislation and enforcement against perceived endemic political corruption. The movement was named among the “Top 10 News Stories of 2011” by *Time* magazine.

³ Common people who are suffered by corruption and by corrupted government system

⁴ Bhama Devi Ravi – Chennai, Aam Aadmi Party: A Milestone in Indian Politics, the New Indian Express, 20 January 2014

officially launched in November 2012. The Election Commission (EC) of India recognised the AAP as a political party in March 2013. The AAP chose the broom as its election symbol in the 2013 Delhi election. On December 28, 45-year old Kejriwal was sworn in as Chief Minister of Delhi. The swearing-in ceremony was held at the Ram Lila Maidan, making it possible for millions of ordinary people to witness it. The AAP refused to work like a traditional party. With a focus on clean politics, the fledgling group went through an exhaustive process to select its candidates. The newbie's made sure that what they lacked in experience, they made up for in visibility, using the Gandhi cap and the humble broom as their calling card. For the first time, a large number of professionals rolled up their sleeves and plunged into campaigning, a sign that politics was no longer anathema for them. On 23 March 2013, Kejriwal began an indefinite fast in an attempt to mobilize people against inflated power and electricity bills at a house in Sundar Nagri, a low-income group resettlement colony in North-East Delhi. During the protest he urged Delhi citizens not to pay the "inflated" water and electricity bills. The AAP also demanded an audit of power and electricity supply in Delhi by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India⁵.

AAP Promises for Delhi Elections

The AAP made an impressive debut in the Delhi elections based on its promise of free water to every household with a water meter (up to 20 kilolitres). The AAP's major premise is that the promise of equality and justice that is enshrined in Constitution has not been upheld by successive governments. The common man, who was enslaved by an oppressive foreign power, remains enslaved by the political elite. Drawing on the Gandhian concept of Swaraj⁶, the AAP promises that the government will be directly accountable to its people. It will hold public meetings, as a way of getting to know people's grievances. In short it will be a government for the people and not a government for the government. Taking on electricity and water cost in Delhi, Kejriwal promised that he would bring it down if he formed a government. His argument was that a nexus between private companies and the government was the cause for higher than justifiable prices. The AAP was very vocal in condemning the 'rape culture' in Delhi and called for better law enforcement. He also promised enactment of the Jan Lokpal Bill by forming the government.

An Endorsement for Change

The result in Delhi was a total rejection of the ruling party and an endorsement for change. Even though the established BJP with substantial resources garnered more seats, for a new entrant the AAP did amazingly well.

Kejriwal has thus far stayed true to his promise of Swaraj; he has referred crucial issues to the people for their decision. For example, on the question of whether to form a government by accepting support from the Congress party, the AAP held a series of meetings and a collection of views through SMS. These steps were not only consistent with the party's stated values but were also a politically smart move.

The AAP's success in Delhi has opened the floodgates in terms of people's desire to become a part of this movement. Prominent personalities are joining the party every day, including high profile professionals. The winning candidates, on the other hand, sell themselves to the highest bidder and are engaging themselves for the service of society. All this is going to change in India now, for the common man has risen and taken the broom in his hand to change the corrupt system. AAP's victory in Delhi is a step in this direction. This AAP phenomenon will not be limited to Delhi alone. The fragrance of this wonderful movement will spread across India before long and change the way politics is conducted here.

Debutant Aam Aadi Party's victory in the recent Delhi Assembly elections had set a good example of strength of democracy in India, said Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. Addressing the key note session of a jam-packed session at the opening day of seventh edition of a Jaipur Literature Festival, Dr. Sen said "the ice cream has been broken for the party, even though it had a long way to go"⁷. "They have a long way to go, but the ice cream has been broken and the dire need to witness some administrative reforms, can't be denied", added the Dr. Sen who had been vocal about his criticism for Bharatiya Janata Party Prime Minister Candidate. Praising the new party which shook the politics of the country, Dr Sen said, "It sent an example of how grassroots problems could be rightly raised at electoral issues. Democracy is an important part of our country; we have to put it to apt use, the power of democracy has skillfully been used recently by Aam Aadmi Party"⁸.

Challenges Ahead

While the AAP has been quick to deliver on promises there are many challenges ahead. First, it is still a one-man party, being carried forward by the charisma of its leader Kejriwal. It is essential to find credible leaders in order to move ahead. To find leaders with impeccable backgrounds and a selfless drive to serve the nation is indeed the first challenge.

The second and more important challenge is to find an economic model that will deliver not only a clean government to its people but also a continuously improving stan-

⁵Source: DERC website.

⁶Swaraj can mean generally in Hindi as self-governance or "self-rule" through individuals and community building

dard of living – in other words, Growth. It is said that good economics is bad politics. The converse may be equally true. It is a long-term challenge for the people's party and people's government to deliver economic growth.

Professor Badri Raina of Delhi University, in an article in the magazine *Mainstream*, warns that "in the days ahead, the AAP may need to consider a party with only 'honesty' for its agenda may find it hard to go far enough in either comprehending the nuts and bolts of a caste and class-based democracy or realizing transformations that may have a lasting yield for the honestly laboring citizenry. For both replacing the Congress as well as providing an alternative to the BJP, the AAP will need to articulate clearer political positions and take ideological stands. Its willingness and ability to do so will perhaps decide whether it will grow to become a national force. Not doing so may have been strength but may soon turn into a liability".

AAP effects leading to the democracy

1. **AAP effect in Mumbai:** Shiv Sena promises free water in Mumbai⁹

2. **AAP effect on Railway Protection Force: MUMBAI:** An AAP volunteer has filmed two Railway Protection Force (RPF) officials allegedly extorting money from an accused inside Kalyan railway court.¹⁰

3. **Anti-corruption helpline launched in Delhi:** Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had launched a helpline for people being harassed by corrupt government employees, Madhya Pradesh CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan followed suit. Power franchisee SNDL too had started a toll free number to prevent private agents and corrupt staffers from looting staffers.¹¹

4. **AAP effect UP:** Close on the heels of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had led Delhi government's decision seeking audit of power distribution companies' (discoms) accounts by Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), a similar demand has been raised in Uttar Pradesh¹²

5. **AAP effect in Uttarakhand:** Former Uttarakhand chief minister Ramesh Pokhariyal Nishank removed red beacons and hooters from his official vehicles in the light of a recent Supreme Court order limiting their use only by persons holding constitutional posts¹³

⁷Amartya raises the bar at Jaipur Lit Fest', The Free Press Journal, January 18, 2014.

⁸ PTI Inputs, Amartya Sen says Aam Aadmi Party win good for democracy, Indiatoday AxisRemit Online, 17 February 2004.

⁹The Economic Times, ET Bureau, Januar 7, 2014).

¹⁰The times of India, Mumbai, Jan 8, 2014

¹¹Aljazeera news, anti-corruption helpline launched in Delhi, January 9, 2014

¹²Business Standard, Demand for audit of discoms rises in UP, January 2, 2014, Lucknow

¹³IBN Live, AAP Effect?? Nishank removes beacons, hooters from his official vehicles, January 2, 2014

6. **AAP effect Congress Youth:** Taking a cue from Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which connected with youth through its fight against corruption, Congress party has now fielded its youth wing National Students Union of India (NSUI) to mobilize youngsters through its new campaign 'Youth against Corruption. Members of NSUI had raised the demand for passage of six other anti-corruption bills which they feel would complete the framework to fight corruption¹⁴

7. **AAP's effect on 1984 anti-Sikh riots:** Kejriwal meets Lieutenant Governor over demands for SIT probe. Senior Supreme Court lawyer HS Phoolka, who fought cases for the anti-Sikh riots victims, said, "If Congress supports SIT in Gujarat riots, then why not SIT for 1984 riots? What could be a better proof of the involvement of the government?"¹⁵

8. **AAP effect in Mumbai MP:** Congress MP Sanjay Nirupam's hunger strike to make reduction in electricity bills just liked in Delhi¹⁶

9. **AAP effect in Central Govt.:** With AAP stressing the idea of public participation in governance, the central government is considering a proposal to make it mandatory for Union ministries to seek public opinion before framing laws¹⁵

10. **AAP effect Madhya Pradesh:** Taking a cue from Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) experiment to make separate manifesto for every assembly constituency, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan promised to make separate development plan for every district of state with the participation and help of common man¹⁵

11. **AAP effect Chhattisgarh:** Chhattisgarh Chief minister Raman Singh is trying making efforts to usher in more transparency in functioning, adopt 'zero tolerance' against corruption and also plans to launch flagship programs in all departments to reach out to the masses.

AAP Delhi Government performance – a big change in Democracy¹⁷

In the seven weeks since its stunning victory in the assembly polls, the Kejriwal government has come in for heavy criticism over a series of stand-offs with the authorities — including its law minister's 'vigilante' action against Africans and the CM's own dharna demanding greater control over the police. Here is a detailed report card of the AAP government in Delhi — their actions and controversies.

¹⁴The Times of India, Indore, AAP Effect: NSUI comes up with 'Youth against Corruption' campaign, December 31, 2013

¹⁵Taruka Srivastava, Cool Age, Proof that AAP has changed the face of Indian Politics, Xavier Institute of Communications, Mumbai, March 14, 2014

¹⁶NDTV Mumbai, Saurabhi Malik, AAP effect in Mumbai: Congress MP Sanjay Nirupam's hunger strike over power bills, January 23, 2014

¹⁷AAP Website, Global NRI Support Group

Education:

- Setup helpline for admission in schools. No donation is allowed.
- Cancelled examination for admission of teachers to primary schools after getting news that the exam papers were leaked. The exam would take place again in a month.
- AAP conyed to BJP ruled BJP-ruled municipal corporation of Delhi that there are provisions to strip civic bodies of their powers, hinting AAP government could do so if - MCD did not grant "No Objection Certificate" (NOC) for opening new schools.
- Removed departmental quota in admission.
- Delhi govt launches education helpline to redress grievances related to school admissions
- AAP volunteers check 500 schools in Delhi

Electricity:

- 50% subsidy on Electricity
- CAG Audit against Power distribution BESCOs Approved
- Discoms to be penalized for unscheduled power cuts
- People can write to Government about defect in power meters, 10,000 letters will be randomly selected and their meters will be checked.

Water:

- Free 20K litre/month water promise fulfilled in 48 hours for with meters, self financed by Delhi water board. Any overage above 20K litre customers has to pay full price.
- Delhi Jal Board restructuring on the very first day including Delhi Jal Board CEO and 8 Officers
- Delhi Jal Board seizes 22 tube-wells in South Delhi. This is related to water mafia.
- To address the issue of water crisis in the national capital, Delhi government has decided to revive the "non-functional" rainwater harvesting systems in schools to raise the ground-water level. Around 800 government-run schools have RWH pits and more than 50 per cent of them are non-functional.
- Delhi water board officials suspended on corruption. Sting operation is done by HT news and AAP took the action immediately and inquiry is ordered by Education minister Manish Sisodia.

Women safety:

- Surprise late night time spot checks visits by Rakhi Birla, Women and Child Development Minister. Bus

stands, Auto stands, Police stations checked.

- Vishakha guidelines (Vishaka Guidelines were stipulated by the Supreme Court of India, in Vishakha and others vs State of Rajasthan case in 1997, regarding sexual harassment at workplace) implemented by AAP, the first political party to do so.

Anti Corruption:

- Arvind Kejriwal orders FIR against Sheila Dikshit, Former chief minister of Delhi, regarding CWG scam.
- Three top govt officials K.K. Goswamy (Deputy Secretariat land and building division), Kiran Taneja (MCD), JL Kathuria (MCD) arrested on corruption charges.
- Chief water analyst Vinod Kumar, meter reader Atul, Patwaari Sunil caught on camera taking bribe suspended in 30 minutes of telecast of news Aaj Tak Channel.
- AAP Govt suspends 3 Delhi Jal Board officials and shifts 800 others.
- Biometric attendance system/devices for Babus
- Arvind Kejriwal seeks 40 Anti-graft-officers, already got some from police department
- Arvind Kejriwal to open CWG scam files
- Anti corruption helpline launched.
- AAP MLA Somnath Bharati launched website to manage public utility complaints -www.aapconnect.com
- Kejriwal government tables Jan Lokpal Bill and both Congress/BJP oppose the move.
- Two constables arrested in extortion case. This was done through the AAP introduced anti-corruption helpline.
- New anti-corruption helpline number is 1031, in 36 hours 23,000 calls received, one official has been trapped.
- Kejriwal orders CAG audit of Delhi's Bus Rapid Transit operator
- Case against Mukesh Ambani (Chairman, Managing Director and largest shareholder of Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), a Fortune Global 500 company and India's second most valuable company by market value), Moily (Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister of Corporate Affairs and Minister of Power in the Indian government) over gas scarcity, pricing.

Health:

- Delhi to get 100 new ambulances
- All the government and private hospitals in the national capital have been directed to provide "immediate and free" medical treatment to the victims of acid attack or rape.

- Health Minister Satyendra Jain does a major re-vamp of the entire healthcare sector of the city. 16 out of the total of 34 superintendents of Delhi hospitals were given their marching orders. Many of the medical superintendents were holding the same post over the past many years, which had led to corruption and laxity of work.
- AAP Government issues advisory & directs hospitals, private and government, to provide “immediate medical care, without any delay to persons requiring emergency medical care, especially victims of crimes, road accidents, acid attack, sexual assault or critical patients”; to not hold bodies of deceased persons “under any circumstances” and to not delay processing of death certificates.
- Health minister visits 10 major hospitals in Delhi and talks to doctors and patients to elicit their problems and suggestions for improvement.
- Email address set up for suggestions from public about their views on problems with health setup and their suggestions for improvement.

Law & Order:

- The Arvind Kejriwal- led Delhi government demands action against the cops involved in the case of death of Karan Pandey, the pillion rider who was killed in police firing on the night of July 27-28, 2013.
- The government wants accountability fixed on cops in a case reported on Monday of a girl allegedly raped in a car.
- AAP Government Recommends SIT Probe of 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots. Lieutenant Governor gives nod to SIT probe on 1984-anti Sikh riots.

Judiciary:

- Kejriwal's government seeks 100 new judges in district courts

Unauthorized Colonies:

- Govt prepares road map to use new method to map illegal colonies

Unemployment:

- One million Delhi contract workers to be regularized

Inflation:

- AAP government files contempt petition against Centre challenging Centre's CNG gas distribution policy
- CNG price slashed by 30%, piped gas by 20%

Taxation Sector:

- AAP government simplifies VAT filing system.

Transport Sector:

- 5500 auto rickshaw for Delhi-NCR
- Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP govt to issue 15,000 autorickshaw permits under SC/ST category

Austerity Measures:

- AAP ministers refuse security, red beacon and other perks such as bungalows
- Kejriwal government has also done away with the practice of keeping reserved elevators for the ministers and MLA's. People taking the lift standing alongside a cabinet minister are a common sight now.

RESULT

The Aam Aadmi Party solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Democratic Republic and to secure to its entire citizen's Justice for social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation.

CONCLUSION

Arvind Kejriwal and his Aam Aadmi Party have been in the news even before their stint with governance in Delhi. While its continuous attacks on governments and politicians kept the party in news before it marked a debut in the Delhi Assembly elections, the party did not miss even a day after forming the Delhi government and continued to make headlines.

The supreme court of India stated that the corruption is just like a cancer for Indian democracy. The corruption is a main barrier for the accountability and effectiveness in Indian democratic, political, bureaucratic and social system. The Aam Aadmi Party is committed to ensuring that political power is returned to the hands of the people of India, that policies are made in consultation with and in the interests of the common man so that ordinary Indian citizens can fight these threats. The party is committed to form Jan Lokpal Bill which is the effective tool against corruption.

In my opinion Aam Aadmi Party has displayed an outstanding courageous and democratic attitude and deserves to be in authority again to sustain democracy. The MLA funds are serving throughout the people of the assembly for their services, by taking their opinions which is

the real sign of democracy.

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