

AAP - Broom That Has Swept Off Bhartiya Janta Party (“BJP”) in Delhi

Arvind Kejriwal is an Indian politician, social activist and former Indian Revenue Service officer who served as the seventh Chief Minister of Delhi. He's the firebrand activist who has successfully upset the uneasy balance of power in Delhi's political scene and is all set to become the national capital's chief minister. He is the National Convener of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

Arvind Kejriwal is a Mechanical Engineering graduate of the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, and worked for the Indian Revenue Service (IRS) as a Joint Commissioner in the Income Tax Department.

Formation of AAP

During the nation-wide protests against corruption, Arvind Kejriwal had a difference of opinion with social activist Anna Hazare. Hazare wanted the Jan Lokpal movement to be politically neutral. On the other hand, Kejriwal's opinion was that as no progress had been attained through talks with different political parties, it was necessary to get directly involved in politics. An organisation named India Against Corruption conducted a survey in this regard. The result indicated support for politicisation. Others involved in the anti-corruption movement too had split opinions. While Kejriwal's move was supported by Shanti Bhushan and Prashant Bhushan, others like Santosh Hegde and Kiran Bedi opposed it.

On 19 September 2012, Anna Hazare and Arvind Kejriwal found that their differences over formation of a political party to replace India against Corruption movement were irreconcilable. On 2 October 2012, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Kejriwal announced the formation of a political party. He mentioned that the party would be formally launched on 26 November 2012. The Constitution of India was adopted on this day in 1949. The party was not having any political background too. The symbol of the party is broom. Party aims at cleaning away corruption from the country. Party is fighting to have a transparent government which will prove and establish a better democratic power in the country.

The party was launched in Delhi on the scheduled date and was called the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) or the Common Man's Party. The party contested elections for the first time on 4 December 2013 for the Delhi legislative assembly. Arvind Kejriwal defeated Sheila Dikshit in the New Delhi assembly constituency, who had been the chief minister of Delhi for three successive terms. He was first sworn in as the Chief Minister on 28 Dec 2013. He governed Delhi for only 49 days as he resigned from the post in Feb 2014. He did so because of his minority government's inability to pass his proposed anti-corruption legislation due to a lack of support from other political parties.

Arvind Kejriwal Strategy Used for 2014 Elections

After Arvind Kejriwal's resignation from the CM's post in February, the AAP set its sights on the Lok Sabha polls. A month earlier than stepping down, Kejriwal had said that he would not contest the Parliamentary Elections. He later contested from the Varanasi parliamentary constituency in Uttar Pradesh against BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi, alleging that the party members insisted him to do so. Kejriwal lost the elections with a margin of around four lakh votes.

Arvind Kejriwal led AAP's run up to the 2015 Delhi Assembly Elections

After 9 months of Governor's Rule in Delhi, the Elections Commission of India dissolved the Delhi Legislative Assembly. This meant that Delhi had a date with fresh elections. Arvind Kejriwal led Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) started making a strategy for the elections. Initially, the party released a list of 62 candidates for the elections. It later added eight other names. Thus the party fielded its candidates in all 70 constituencies of Delhi as compared to 69 in the 2013 elections. AAP has resorted to innovative ways of raising funds for campaigning such as offering lunch and dinner with Kejriwal via subscriptions. The party also received funds online from the public. Social media sites too helped Kejriwal gain popularity among the masses.

Historic Win in Delhi for AAP and Arvind Kejriwal's Re-election as the Chief Minister

The National Capital Territory of Delhi went to polls on 7 February 2015 and saw a record electorate turnout of 67.14 percent. But the history was still to be made. Three days later, on

10 February 2015, the “Broom” of AAP swept the Delhi polls. The AAP registered a slam-bang victory by grabbing 67 seats of the available 70. The favourite BJP was compressed to be restricted to as minimal as three seats, while Congress and the rest were crushed to ashes, accounting for none. The chief and the CM candidate of AAP, Arvind Kejriwal himself won from the New Delhi assembly constituency with a margin of more than twenty six thousand votes. He defeated the debutant Nupur Sharma of BJP and veteran Congress leader Kiran Walia. Kejriwal decided to take oath as the Chief Minister of Delhi on 14 February 2015 (a year after he had resigned from the same post), at the famous Ramlila Ground in Delhi.

Kejriwal brand of political activism might be replicated in other states

There are enough chances that now the Kejriwal brand of political activism might be replicated elsewhere considering how the Janata Dal (United)'s Rajya Sabha member from Bihar, KC Tyagi, recalled in a television discussion his days of political activism during the Emergency in the '70s.

Bihar is the next state that goes to poll later this year. Already much political mudslinging is going on there following a fierce infighting between rebellious chief minister Jiten Ram Manjhi and party patriarchs Nitish Kumar and Sharad Yadav. The Kumar-Yadav duo now raises accusing fingers at the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for “blessing” Manjhi and his supporters. As a fierce show of strength is on, can such “opportunistic” politics of Manjhi, Kumar and Yadav as well as (if the accusations hold water) Modi, withstand the scrutiny of people in a politically conscious Bihar particularly when the AAP too has expressed its intention of contesting elections there?

What is significant is that the JD (U), along with its front partners Laloo Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal and Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party, had supported the AAP by not fielding any candidate against it in Delhi. Similarly, the Trinamool Congress chief and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee too had surprised everybody when she tweeted, requesting the voters to vote for AAP in Delhi. She, at least on this count, was on the same page as her rivals, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) which had urged its party members to vote for the AAP – a rather strange grouping to prevent the BJP making inroads in West Bengal which faces elections next year.

However, the AAP, after winning Delhi, has wasted no time sending a cryptic message to these regional outfits that it was “neither anti-BJP nor anti-Congress but anti-establishment”.

What this means could be anybody's guess but the people do now expect a highly exalted brand of politics from Kejriwal and his ilk. Already he has raised the bar by publicly apologising for his mistake of not taking the common man into confidence before deciding to quit as the CM last year. As if to correct this mistake, his whole campaign revolved around his poll slogan – “Paanch Saal Kejriwal” (Kejriwal will stay for five years if voted to power), and his resounding victory now amply proves that the people forgave him and gave him another chance to rule for “five years”. Ostensibly his humility did pay at the end but can this usher a new era of humble politics? The challenge before Kejriwal is to deliver on this count.

Political implications of the AAP win

Yet, the political implications of the AAP win in Delhi are much wider. Consider how the AAP even cornered sizeable Dalit vote from the Bahujan Samaj Party (the BSP's vote share came down to 1.3 per cent this year from 5.35 per cent in 2013).

Speculations are rife even on the likely impact of the Delhi verdict on Punjab politics where everything is not hunky dory between the Shiromani Akali Dal and its alliance partner, the BJP. Though the assembly election in the state is in 2017, all eyes are set on the Dhuri by-election where a victory would ensure absolute majority to the SAD – a prospect that its alliance partner, the BJP, is wary of. A resurgent AAP further compounds the issue particularly for the SAD, which desperately needs to safeguard its separate identity and vote bank. The AAP ate up considerable votes of the SAD when, while winning four Lok Sabha seats in Punjab last year, it led in 34 of the 117 assembly segments. Of these 34 segments, 18 were represented by the SAD while the Congress represented the remaining 16! Now with the AAP deciding to be in the fray in the assembly by-election for Dhuri, it could well play a crucial role in determining the future

of SAD-BJP alliance. Many commentators have now already started conjecturing that the landslide victory of AAP in Delhi has set in motion a change of Government in Punjab.

Yet another twist in the tale is the statement by Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray, who hailed Kejriwal's performance as a "tsunami" in comparison to Modi's "wave". Such a potshot at Modi does remind one of the bitterness of the nasty break up between the Sena and the BJP ahead of the assembly elections in Maharashtra last year, before they patched up after much consternation.

An impact of the AAP victory will ostensibly be felt in Jharkhand too, where the BJP had got a working majority for the first time ever in November last year. Sources suggest that the BJP much depended on a favourable verdict in Delhi before announcing a cabinet expansion in Jharkhand – where the present government has only four cabinet ministers as chief minister Raghubar Das had pinned hopes on splits in Opposition before further expansion. The AAP's win has apparently upset Das's calculations now. When he opts for full cabinet expansion is now to be seen.

AAP's win is a rude jolt to the BJP

Obviously the AAP victory has rudely jolted the BJP's confidence because Narendra Modi's arrival on the scene failed to see any increase in the party's vote share which on the contrary, actually declined by one per cent than what it was in 2013. At the same time, the AAP, in face of all odds, significantly improved its own vote share by an impressive 25 per cent – from 29.49 per cent in 2013 to 54.3 per cent this year.

Whether perceived arrogance cost the BJP dearly in Delhi is a matter of introspection for the saffron brigade. The way Modi and his party had targeted the AAP chief by calling him names ("anarchist", "naxal", "thief", "bhagora"), the BJP cartoons lampooning Kejriwal, and the manner in which the BJP posed five daily questions to Kejriwal, was unbecoming the ruling party and the Prime Minister. It was only after the defeat that a few BJP leaders publicly conceded that these were negative campaigning tactics by the BJP that should not be repeated. (Consider BJP leader Kirti Azad telling a news channel after the results – "Bihar me apne paanv me kulhari nahin mareng (Loosely translated it means that the BJP won't repeat these mistakes in Bihar as that would mean hara-kiri).

No doubt, that the BJP had gone full throttle into poll campaigning in Delhi with all MPs, ministers! But then, it was all personality centric campaigning with no manifesto either. In the ensuing melee, local Delhi leaders lost their voice. While last time's CM candidate, Dr. Harsh Vardhan was sidelined, a rank outsider, Kiran Bedi, was made Modi's charge d'affaires and the party's CM face! That Bedi lost miserably from Vardhan's impregnable constituency – the doctor had never ever lost from Krishna Nagar – could well suggest some conspiracy theory. But shouldn't the party's collective leadership be equally held responsible for this gaffe (if at all they consider it to be a blunder)?

AAP's win has spelt doom for the Congress

Yet another aspect of the AAP's win was that it also spelt doom for the Congress party which now needs serious introspection for its very political survival. The party could not even open its account in Delhi this time and what is even more ignominious is that 60 of its 70 candidates lost their deposits and its total vote share was a dismal 9.8 per cent (as against 40.3 per cent in 2008 when it had won the Delhi election for the third and last time).

Without any doubt, the AAP has eaten away its vote share since 2013 (when the Congress could still get 24.55 vote share and win eight seats) and a direct bearing of this is on the Congress leadership.

It goes without saying that the Congress's fortunes nosedived after its disastrous performance in the general elections, where it could win just 44 seats. Ever since, the Congress has inarguably lost space to regional outfits in all subsequent state elections. So can the defeat in Delhi be the final nail in its coffin?

Murmurs are there over whether the Congress should start looking beyond the Nehru-Gandhi clan – an unthinkable prospect just over nine months ago when Sonia Gandhi was firmly in command of the United Progressive Alliance government as its all powerful Chairperson, and the Nehru-Gandhi scion, Rahul, as her heir- apparent.

Undoubtedly AAP's win is a tribute to its leader Arvind Kejriwal's resilience and political prowess. He has risen like a phoenix after being written off by even his most ardent admirers. He not just fought to get rid of the 'bhagora' stigma that had stuck to him after he quit as the Delhi chief minister in just 49-days last year, he reorganised his party – that had since seen a spate of desertions – to erase the ignominy of its disastrous debut in last summer's general elections when it could win only four seats in Punjab. Kejriwal himself had then lost against BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi in Varanasi.

Finally, the most important question following the AAP's victory in Delhi is whether the hardliners within the saffron brigade will now try to reassert their supremacy in the government. It cannot be a coincidence that soon after the results of the Delhi elections were out, the BJP's firebrand MP from Gorakhpur Yogi Adityanath triggered a fresh controversy by saying that he will install idols of Gauri-Ganesh in every mosque, if given a chance. Now more interestingly, the spin masters of BJP are trying to build an image of intentional defeat by BJP so that they can win Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. This attempt is nothing but eyewash to salvage the image of top bosses of BJP who failed to take for ride the Voters of Delhi in 2015.

Obviously, the happenings in Delhi have made the entire country sit and watch the political fallout. After all, it is the triumph of the common man, and the BJP and PM Modi and team (if there is any, as it is more of a one man show) do need introspection!