

Redefining the Indian Left: The AAP Way

Dr. Abhishek Nath

Assistant Professor

Department of Political science

Delhi University

India

i_abhi@hotmail.com

The spectacular success of BJP in the recent General Elections invited a mixed assessment from different positions. But mostly it was oversimplification and undermining of its success. On the other hand, the victory of AAP in assembly elections was taken as an alternative in making. For example along with other commenter's in an article (published in The Indian Express, 26 May 2014, op-ed page) renowned lawyer and AAP leader Shri Shanti Bhushan analysed the electoral success of BJP and the future course for AAP that lacks in substance. It tried to under-assessed the BJP's success and oversimplified the road ahead for AAP. As it like wait till BJP does the same blunders as Congress did. In this paper some light will be thrown on BJP's success and legacy but will mainly discuss the AAP phenomena in Indian politics with a view to access the recent developments in party and as an emerging alternative that can also be an opportunity to capture the space vacated by the Left movement in India.

First of all I would like to argue that considering the BJP after the failed Janta Party Experiment as a 'faction of Janta Party' (Shri Bhushan's views) is not a correct judgment. Actually the Bhartiya Jan Sangha was the last party that remained as Janta Party coalition after the other four parties that came together without merging their distinctive

identities to form Janta Party left the coalition at their will to pursue their own ambitions. Hence it was not just a matter of chance that the new party that emerged on the Indian political scene after the failed Janta experiment named Bhartiya Janta Party (**Bhartiya** Jana Sangha + **Janta Party = Bhartiya Janta Party**). The then leaders not only launched a new party with inheriting the name but also the legacy. As it was more moderate and reformed on many policy agendas by incorporating Gandhian- JP Legacy to fight against the ruling dispensation. That seed has now grown as a Banyan tree and shadowing the Indian political scene defying all ifs and buts. Although it is still to be tested that how will a full majority BJP will work in coming years as many scholars of Indian politics doubt the BJP's course of action as a single full majority party (see Christophe Jaffrelot, 2003). It is also because the earlier BJP led government was a crippled and soft BJP as NDA coalition and also Atal Bihari Bajpai as its leader and was not able to pursue its core Hindutwa demands of building Ram temple, Uniform Civil Code and the abolition of Article 370 of the Constitution for the full merger of J&K into Indian Union.

As far the Congress is concerned it can be said that it lost its roots at the very time when Indira Gandhi first broke Indian National Congress to form Congress(R) in 1969 and later known as Congress (I). The organization and its working style buried with the Congress (O) or the Congress (Organization) and loyalty took the defining role. Therefore it was just a matter of wait and watch that when this Banyan will fall. Because the Congress rise in 1984 general election was just sympathy wave and Rajeev failed to harness this wave for deepening the roots of party organization once again.

Is Bjp's Loss Is AAP'S Gain

The future course for AAP is oversimplified as the leaders talk about restoring clean politics in country and bringing people from all castes and creed together. But that is not all that a party born out of a single agenda of corruption can attract people from all caste and creed.

A party needs solid ideas that can be inculcated in the people to fight for and an agenda to chart the future course of action after coming to power. It's not about assuring something to everyone as it's' manifesto for General Election reflects (see AAP website). And as the AAP senior leaders like Shri Bhushan suggests waiting for the BJP to do the same things as Congress did. But then is AAP assured that the BJP's loss is his gain not of Congress or any other party even the regional ones in the states.

I also think that AAP can still be a good alternative of the old big ones but it needs to chart out concrete programs not only the corruption buzz.

Can AAP Fill The Vacuum

The total decimation of Congress took away the sight of political analyst from the complete uprootedness of the Left parties in India from its last fort also. CPI won 1 seat out of 67 contested and CPM 9 out of 93. Together their vote share is $(0.78 + 3.25) 4.03$ per cent. CPI won the only seat from Kerala and CPM 5 from Kerala, 2 from West Bengal and 2 from Tripura (see EC website). The scenario is that they are on the verge of losing their national party status. So, is it not the time to redefine the Indian left and the possible contender of this space vacated?

I have strong reasons to suggest that AAP has potential and chance to appropriate the vacated left space and redefine the Indian left. Potential because it has shown its national presence and even in the remote areas they are recognized by people regardless of the fact that their more than 400 candidates lost their deposits for contesting the election. I suggest 'redefine or reinvent' the Indian left because in its current form it has lost its ground and faith in people and leadership (the Karat Brand of leadership). And current leadership under Shri Sitaram Yechuri is yet to be tasted. Actually during the struggle for Independence and even after Independence the Indian Left always failed to capture the Indian reality. Moreover there were always some disconnect between Left intelligentsia and the common people. And apart from

individual successes in few states the Indian Left never catch up the mind of Indian masses to emerge as a major national force. Hence it is important not only to fill the space but to redefine it also.

The spectacular success of AAP in Delhi Assembly elections and the growing presence and influence of left scholars and sympathizers provides them opportunities to reinvent the Indian left with Indian realities. Although I feel that a party emerged out of Gandhian legacy has been slowly and steadily moved towards the left orientation by its left oriented leaderscholars. It will be welcomed if it provides a viable alternative to the people. Remember the

Yogendera Yadav's reply while turning down the CPM's invitation to join the non-BJP, nonCongress alliance before the 16th General elections. He replied that Left forces have been the opportunist in India. This is the similar argument put forward during the earlier furcations of the Left parties that the parent party is opportunist and betrayed the revolutionary path. However, it is different matter that none of them proved themselves and failed to establish themselves in the Indian masses (not considering Naxlites). Compare the another statement given by Arvind Kejriwal during a meeting with the industrialists before the General Elections that he is not against all industrialist but like Ambanies and Adanies. So, Kejriwal is not against capitalism but the crony capitalism. Gandhi was also not against the industrialists but he wanted to remove the ills by making them trustees of their wealth. Hence it is quite noticeable that there is a close interface in party regarding the Gandhian strategy and Left sympathy. It also showed an internal rift and dilemma for appropriate ideological inclination and concerned course of action among the senior party ideologues'. The current rift among senior leaders and tussle to hold the key positions and finally expulsion of some scholar-leaders can be defined through this ideological positioning and capturing of party also. Therefore AAP has to balance this interface logically to chart out an Indian brand of Left Political- Economy.

Furthermore the AAP leaders have to come out from the Proletariat-Bourgeois dichotomy and have to redefine the Indian left. And the Gandhian legacy of AAP provides this opportunity. The today's aam adami is not only the working-labour class but all those who are feeling dejected and disempowered by the system. This aam adami is Gandhi's 'last man standing in the queue'. It will help AAP broadening the shrunk Left base among people.

Indian masses can't be adjusted within the framework of class only but caste, creed and religion is also important. You can't reject the religion altogether but have to address the issue of religion and politics and chart a path for a plural society. Mahatma Gandhi always asserted that those who want to separate religion from politics understand neither politics nor religion. Kejriwal's method of connecting with people through mohalla sabhas, going back to the people and civil disobedience is all Gandhian in nature. It provides an alternative to the other Left tactics.

Therefore it is the time and space worth capturing for AAP to reinvent the Indian Left and make it a solid alternative for the people against the BJP and Congress.