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Analyzing the Corollary of Delhi Assembly Elections-2020

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Abstract: The overwhelming victory for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) with 62 seats out of 70 in Delhi Assembly polls did not surprise the nation as all exit polls had already pointed to the absolute majority mark. People proved their maturity by casting votes for continuing the AAP Government sidelining the national and emotional assurances promised by the BJP, as good governance of the Delhi Government remained intact among the people. Though, the BJP did not omit any opportunity to portray the AAP as insensitive and insensible towards national security and sovereignty by setting it up as a supporter of the Tukde-Tukde gang. The verdict of the Delhi Assembly elections 2020 could be viewed as a foundation-stone for projecting secular and issue-based politics as the thumping victory of the AAP. AAP won on its governance record, but its tactics do not undermine the BJP's politics. Hence, this study attempts to analyze the character and sense of the election campaign and how the AAP romped home victorious. The study further deciphering the BJP loss and the message from the Delhi assembly conveys to the political parties.

Keywords: Aam Aadmi Party, Campaign, Governance, Ideology, Polarizing.

Introduction:

Delhi, the Union Territory (UT) which is India's capital city, may be behind several States in total population and in area, but it enjoys enormous significance in terms of media and political attention. It has 1.47 crore electors spread across the largely metropolitan national capital region and some suburbs. The assembly elections were supposed to be a three-cornered electoral fight consisting of Aam Aadmi Party, BJP and Congress. The Aam Aadmi Party which graduated from a social movement to a political party less than a decade ago was seeking to position on its governance record, five years after nearly sweeping the Assembly results in 2015. The BJP was hoping that unlike in Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Haryana, the legions of voters who supported it in the Lok Sabha election will not transfer their votes to its competitors, while the Congress was seeking to regain the support of the UT's poor and marginalized sections, most of whom had shifted allegiance to the AAP in 2015.

I. The Character and Sense of the Election Campaigning in Delhi

The character and sense of election campaigning in Delhi had two campaign models; One advocating the politics of neighborhood and promising the supply of everyday needs at a reasonable price (development) and the other pitching the issue of religious nationalism.

The election campaign no doubt started with a definite advantage in favor of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), as in the last five years of rule, ground reports suggest that the party proved its credentials by fulfilling some of its solemn promises. The party has done noteworthy work in the field education and health sectors. The government schooling system, which had seen some degree of down sliding, was given a new lease of life during their regime. Similarly, the mohalla clinic experiment of this party became a new model for healthcare reform, which is now being copied by the governments of other states. The admirers of this healthcare initiatives included even Delhi's middle class, which started using these services. AAP had consolidated its base among the marginalized sections of voters, and it was almost impossible for other parties to make inroads. The voters did not seem to be influenced by the slogans of Hindu nationalism. The BJP tried to attract the voters by regularizing some unauthorized colonies, but it did not produce much impact.

The key to the Delhi elections was the Poorvanchali population, the migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. They grew in sizeable numbers over the last 25 years. Initially, the BJP's support base constituted the Hindus having the experience of partition and the small business class. Poorvanchalis was ignored by both the Congress and the BJP. AAP tapped this opportunity and gave them sizeable representation.

The BJP, losing out on the development agenda, left no stone unturned in transforming the terms of the debate. To the best of its capacity, it tried to take political mileage by projecting the movements against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and National Register of Citizens as anti-Hindu and anti-national. The party created a "tukde-tukde gang" brand to highlight the nationalism of the brand "Modi." Some of the leaders of the BJP were competing among themselves to acquire the radical image among Hindu nationalists.

Shaheen Bagh had become a site of political imagination for both the parties. No one knew who would be benefited. Arvind Kejriwal initially decided not to speak much or go there to show solidarity for the fear that he would immediately be blamed for being part of the so-called tukde-tukde gang. The Congress had been openly supporting the movement, and the leaders were sharing stage on behalf of the party.

Delhi generally had four kinds of voters, Firstly, the party cadre, which is fully committed to the party and votes for it in any case. Secondly, the network voter, who is not fully committed to the party, but mostly votes for the party under the influence of the cadre or decides based on the issues. Thirdly, the influence voter, who is under the influence of the party workers, but decides based on the issues. And fourthly, the floating voter, who decides on the last two days, and takes the decision depending on their assessment of the competing, discourses.

Most political observers indicated that the AAP had an edge in terms of discourse, since it defined the development agenda, and the opposition in turn was busy proving that it was travesty. However, Delhi elections were considered to be a test of political consciousness and prudence of the voters.

II. AAP's Great Comeback

As we know, the Aam Aadmi Party secured a landslide victory in the Delhi Assembly elections that was held on February 8, 2020, by winning 62 of 70 seats. The BJP had improved its seat-tally marginally from three in 2015 to eight and its vote-share went up from 32.2 per cent in 2015 to 38.49 per cent. The AAP's vote-share came down marginally from 54.3 per cent to 53.6 per cent. The Congress drew a blank with its vote-share reduced from 9.7 per cent in 2015 to 4.4 per cent. The AAP comfortably won seats in many Muslim-settled constituencies including Okhla, Ballimaran, Babarpur, Chandni Chowk, Seemapuri and Matia Mahal. In the Okhla seat, within which lies Shaheen Bagh, Amanatullah Khan of the AAP won, bagging more than 66 per cent of the votes.

The hate campaign of the BJP, however, was not entirely futile. The handful of seats the BJP gained in the last Assembly elections were in East Delhi and Northeast Delhi, home to several anti-CAA demonstrations, mostly by Muslim women.

The landslide victory of the AAP in the Delhi Assembly elections provided a breathing space to the citizens of Delhi after hearing all the hate and intimidating speeches. However, the language of politics of the AAP carried multiple meanings. In the wake of the massive victory of the party, the AAP leader, Arvind Kejriwal, said: "The people of Delhi have given birth to a new kind of politics in the country, what is called *kaam ki rajneeti* (the politics of work)...Only this politics can take the country into the 21st century. This is not just a victory for Delhi, my friends, this is the victory of our Mother India, this is a victory for the whole country. Today is Tuesday, Hanumanji's day. Hanumanji has been kind to Delhi today. Thanks to Hanumanji too."

It may be mentioned in this connection that Arvind Kejriwal visited the popular Hanuman Temple near Connaught Place on the day before the Delhi elections and offered his prayers. He also recited *Hanuman Chalisa* on a TV channel. Kejriwal visited the Temple again with his family members and party leaders on the day of counting votes, as his party headed for a landslide victory in the Delhi elections.

It was transparent that Arvind Kejriwal was trying to combine his politics of good governance with the politics of soft Hinduism. He was speaking simultaneously in the language of secular governance and popular Hindu religious cults. Moreover, he was also distancing himself from the contentious political issues of contemporary India.

Congress Missing

In Lok Sabha 2019, the AAP came third and was beaten not only by the BJP but also the Congress. Therefore, it is rather shocking to see that the INC vote-share being reduced to only 4.26 per cent and 63 of their contestants did not even recover their deposit. It seems the INC has taken a calculated chance to not appear as a serious third alternative purposefully to prevent the BJP's rise in the State. It will be naïve to think that suddenly so many senior leaders of

the INC couldn't have put up a fight even if they wanted to. The bi-polar contest between the BJP-AAP benefited the AAP. Now, whether this was a good decision for the future of the Congress in Delhi will have to be seen.

III. Deciphering the BJP Loss in Delhi

The voters in Delhi prioritized the AAP's performances of the last five years, discarding the charge of communal agenda prevalent in election campaigns as regular exercises of the BJP. The top leadership of BJP failed to reject the good governance of the AAP as people have been availing a lot of basic facilities provided by it in accordance with the promises made in the 2015 elections. The following are the reasons for the BJP's defeat:-

1. National versus Local

Despite the BJP's victory in the last general elections with a thumping majority, voters did not turn up in the Assembly elections as people began to understand the relevance of the local issues over the national issues. The electoral battle for the Delhi Government 2020 was confined to the AAP and BJP with local agendas and national issues respectively keeping the Congress on the sidelines only as a spectator. On one hand, the BJP tried to sell its achievements made in the last five years under PM Narendra Modi; on the other hand, the AAP remained engaged with the task of reaching out to the voters by publicizing its own good governance focused on health, education, transportation, social welfare etc. The way the BJP propagated its election campaign with idea of nationalism and national security with the purpose of marginalizing the local level issues addressed by the AAP Government during the last five years acted as hit-wicket for the BJP's defeat. Muhalla clinics, modernizations of government schools, installation of wifi, freebies for electricity, water and transportation acted as catalysts for accommodating the AAP voters while highlighting the 'achievements' of the BJP headed by abrogation of Article 370, CAA 2019, Ram Mandir etc.

2. Missing Anti-incumbency Factor

The performance grade of the AAP always stood on top on the basis of a number of surveys and reports conducted independently, leaving the minimum level of scope for criticisms as seventy percent of the promises made in the 2015 elections proved to be satisfactory. The AAP model of development shocked the Opposition parties and the voters of Delhi learned how to advantageously cast their votes in accordance with the assessment of performances.

3. Arvind Kejriwal versus Manoj Tiwari

The absence of the BJP's CM candidate against the dynamic and popular leadership of Arvind Kejriwal also became another factor for underperformance of the BJP as the sitting C.M. of Delhi was always a front runner for the Chief Minister's post among the voters due to his simplicity and citizen-friendly behavior. Although the top leadership in the BJP tried to convince the voters by portraying Narendra Modi as a dynamic leader showing his previous five-year tenure as a stalwart and architect of New India, ambiguities for the BJP's chief ministerial post raised a number of the questions.

4. Violence in Delhi and Dubious Role of Police

The BJP's defeat in the Delhi elections may also be linked to inefficiency and partiality of the Delhi Police in controlling the unrest and violence that occurred on account of dissident voices against the newly enacted CAA 2019. The credibility of the Delhi Police has been observed as dubious, without qualms and distressing in coping up with the violence occurring at Jamia, JNU and other parts of the State; its role was criticized due to its biased and politically guided functioning as the police were considered perpetrators of several incident and were selectively punished. A large number of masked culprits responsible for JNU's violence did not come under the police radar despite several evidences brought against them.

5. Backfire of Shaheen Bagh Issue

The BJP's campaign for the Delhi elections was accelerated and completed in just twenty days making the Shaheen Bagh protest as the epicenter of polarization so as to divide on the voters on communal lines. This was disastrous for the BJP as people in Delhi discarded the emotional campaign on this score. In order to counter the AAP model of development, the BJP launched its campaign by defaming the Shaheen Bagh protesters from the party's top leadership that included the PM and Home minister. Later on, many more parliamentarians were deployed in Delhi to defame the Shaheen Bagh protesters as anti-national making Delhi elections a battle ground between nationalism and anti-nationalism.

The political parties dissenting against the CAA, including, the AAP and Congress, were directly hit by the BJP as traitors and conspirators of the nation, inciting the voters to throw Kejriwal out of power from Delhi. Keeping this strategy as a master-stroke, the BJP floated an idea of tarnishing the image of the AAP as anti-national so as to polarize the voters on nationalist propaganda. The Shaheen Bagh protest remained only as a legal and peaceful protest against the CAA and had nothing to do with any political party

6. Consequences of VVIP Hate-speech

The way the AAP has shown its political maturity in countering the BJP top leadership's hate and unparliamentarily speeches delivered during the election campaign played a decisive role for the voters as the Delhi voters are politically aware and sensible enough coming as they do from every part of the country.

IV. Message from Delhi

- 1) Regional parties continue to be key players in Indian n politics.
- 2) BJP has to rework on their issues and strategies for the upcoming elections instead of harping on national issues and on polarizing campaigns.
- 3) The congress will have to decide if it will play an independent role or get into alliance with others, if it has to play a meaningful role in Indian politics.

4) If we stress on infrastructure there is no need of ideology.

5) To activate people's consciousness and enable them to see the link between the everydayness of the world and the larger structural issues.

V. Reflective Ideology

The ideology of the might of majoritarianism, militant nationalism, stigmatization of the minorities and the growing economic disempowerment of the poor and the subaltern; as well as our quest for the spirit of pluralism and spirituality enriched secularism should be engaged with Gandhi's religiosity of love, compassion, cross religious sensibilities and satyagrah as the profound art of resistance against what is immoral and unethical. In Gandhi we can see a vision what can take us beyond Hindutva or the emulative use of religion as an identity that causes hatred and division. Likewise, Rabindranath Tagore's deep reflections on the violence of totalitarian nationalism ought to give us an important lesson; the act of worshipping the abstracted nation- a cumulative expression of our egos- often brutalizes consciousness and causes great harm to the ethos of empathic and compassionate universalism. In other words, as the history of war or holocaust suggests, non-reflexive nationalism is not necessarily a good idea to cherish.

Conclusion

The spectacular victory of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the Delhi Assembly election is matched in its intensity by the resounding defeat of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Having been in power for the last five years, AAP's second consecutive victory is not an electoral enchantment of a start-up, but an endorsement of its track record. Along the way, its founder and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has perfected a political cocktail that turned out to be the most potent counter to the toxic religious polarization that the BJP has come to champion. His governance brought succor to Delhi's poorest and the most vulnerable in the form of better and accessible education, health care and water in particular.

If at all the AAP sees itself making a national move in the near future, it will have to take stand on the issue of identity that has the nation out on the streets in protest. because there is a very thin line between principled silence and convenient submission. There is a clear risk of being on a slippery slope of ideological convenience. Hence, if the AAP needs to sustain as a force to reckon with, it must differentiate between strategies of prioritizing governance and showing apathetic attitude towards core political issues that have a pronounced impact on India's future as a secular democratic Republic.

Finally the Delhi results conveys that regional parties will continue to play an important role in Indian politics, the BJP will have to rework on its issues and strategies for the upcoming elections and the congress will have to decide

whether it wants to be an independent player or get into an alliance with other parties to reinvent itself in regions it has lost ground.

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