



Volume: 2, Issue: 7, 613-615
July 2015
www.allsubjectjournal.com
e-ISSN: 2349-4182
p-ISSN: 2349-5979
Impact Factor: 3.762

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Can Aam Aadmi Party's Success and Its Politics of Common Man Be Described as a Third Democratic Upsurge?

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Abstract

Democracy is not about a single dominant community enjoying all the privileges but about the uprising of the people who occupy lowest position in social ladder. And to bring about change in democracy "Democratic Upsurge" is very much needed. Democratic Upsurge is related to voter turnout during elections. There is no democratic country in this world which has not witnessed democratic upsurge in the past. India is no exception in this regard, as it has witnessed two major democratic upsurges in the past with massive voter turnout which played a greater role in changing the face of government at the national level. When we talk about voter turnout, we cannot ignore the newly formed party, Aam Aadmi Party who claim to be a "Common Man's Party". In Indian History, it happened for the first time that a newly formed party with no political experience swamped the two strong opponent parties, BJP and Congress in Delhi, who are known for their legacy in Indian democracy. The success of Aam Aadmi Party in Lok Sabha election has started a debate, whether it can be called a Third Democratic Upsurge or not. It is within this context, an attempt is made in this article to reach to a conclusion over the debate of putting Aam Aadmi Party's success as the third democratic upsurge.

Keywords: Democratic Upsurge; Voter Apathy; Voter Turnout; Politicization; Assembly Elections.

1. Introduction

The last few months of 2012 saw remarkable developments in India. The first was the fast of Anna Hazare for bringing Jan Lokpal bill, the second was the emergence of AAM AADMI PARTY and the third was the nationwide protest against the rape of Delhi based girl.

Though all the three incidents do provide a glimpse of the deepening of democratic process of India, but here we are going to focus on whether AAM AADAMI PARTY and its politics of common man qualify to be called a third democratic upsurge or not.

AAM AADAMI PARTY came into existence on 26 Nov 2012 on the issue of fighting corruption^[1]. It also brought what we call the 'POLITICS OF COMMON MAN' which has its own effect on Indian politics to some extent. One could hear leaders of various parties talking about common man issues and problems that he has to deal with. Thus the issues of common man blurred the caste and class line for some time.

Then came the assembly elections of Delhi in which AAM AADAMI PARTY emerged as the second largest party in Delhi in terms of seats, the first being the BJP^[2]. It was able to form government for a short while with the support of congress from outside. Improving its scores by winning 67 out of 70 seats in Delhi Legislative Assembly Elections held in 2015, AAM AADMI PARTY again came to power but this time with absolute majority^[3]. The success of AAM AADMI PARTY started a debate whether this was the major 'THIRD DEMOCRATIC UPSURGE' India has been waiting for since 1990s. Of course there were supporters and opponents of the issue.

The comparison of AAM AADAMI PARTY with the previous two democratic upsurges will help us to determine whether AAM AADAMI PARTY and its politics of COMMON MAN can be called a THIRD DEMOCRATIC UPSURGE or not?

First & Second Democratic Upsurges

The first democratic upsurge in independent India took place in 1960s when expansion in participatory base took place in order to proceed towards an alternative to hegemony of the congress party^[4]. Take for example the 1967 Lok Sabha Elections. The voter turnout increased in 1967 Lok Sabha Elections and at 61.1% it was highest voter turnout witnessed so far^[5]. The FIRST DEMOCRATIC Upsurge played a vital role in ending the congress dominance in several Indian states and in bringing congress seats in the Parliament to its Minimum since Independence.

The SECOND DEMOCRATIC UPSURGE was the result of realization by the backward caste and class of the potential in their numbers. They saw the way the democratic system can be worked to their favour. This has led to a situation where they now play a much more significant role in the political system across the country. This phenomenon has been elaborated by Jaffrelot and Kumar. This has also been termed as the

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'second democratic upsurge' by Yogendra Yadav, wherein India witnessed a major participatory upsurge among the socially underprivileged, across caste, economic class, gender or localities [6]. The phenomenon of second democratic upsurge started gaining momentum from early 1990s onwards. The Second Democratic Upsurge involves in it nearly all the groups that suffer from one form of social deprivation and backwardness or another. The percentage reduction in the voter turnout gap between the General and Scheduled Caste voters on one hand and the General and the Scheduled tribe voters on the other hand proves the above mentioned point about the second democratic upsurge [7]. The following data about the turnout percentage by different types of constituencies in Lok Sabha Elections will make the point more clear:

Table 1

YEAR	GENERAL	SC	ST	GAP:GEN-SC	GAP:GEN-ST
1984	65.2	62.6	54.1	2.6	11.1
1989	62.7	61.8	53.2	0.9	9.5
1991	56.6	55.4	48.8	1.2	7.8
1996	58.3	57.1	55.6	1.2	2.7

Source: CSDS DATA UNIT

(The above mentioned data was also published in Understanding the Second Democratic Upsurge: Trends of Bahujan Participation in Electoral Politics in the 1990s By Yadav. Yogendra, in Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy. Frankel. Francine R, Hasan. Zoya, Bhargava. Rajeev, and Arora. Balveer, eds)

The Second Democratic Upsurge was a widespread phenomenon affecting the SCs, STs and minorities voter turnout in many of the Indian states.

Thus in the first upsurge the thrust was the expansion of the participatory base of Indian democracy [8]. It showed the world that in Democracy the common masses i.e. the voter's participation in the electoral process decides the fate of the political parties. It was a massive phenomenon and had its impact on the whole country as the voter turnout went up at all levels as Political competition became serious and alternatives to the one-party dominance of the congress began emerging [9]. The second democratic upsurge brought the question of dalit support into limelight and the wooing of dalit voters by other political parties started increasing. The SECOND DEMOCRATIC UPSURGE also involved large chunk of the population involving the SCs, STs and the minorities which has a tremendous effect on Indian politics and increased the politicization of dalit which is still continuing with the BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY as its fore bearer.

Comparison of AAM AADMI PARTY's Success with the Previous Democratic Upsurges

When compared with the success of both the upsurges the success of AAM AADMI PARTY seems like a toddler which still has a lot to learn. But before making a comparison let us focus on the success of AAM AADMI PARTY.

First of all 'The Politics of Common Man' that it introduced to the Indian politics is a revolutionizing one and it has the potential to change the face of Indian politics. To some extent the successive increase in the voter turnout in Delhi Legislative Assembly Elections can be contributed to the innovative ideas introduced to the Indian Politics by AAM AADMI PARTY. Before this the Delhi Legislative election

was marred by Voter apathy [10]. The coming of the AAM AADMI PARTY along with its innovative ideas increased the interest of the people of Delhi in the electoral process and freed them from the shackles of voter apathy. This played a vital role in ending the reign of Sheila Dikshit who had been the Chief Minister of Delhi since 1998. This reign came to an end in 2013 Delhi legislative Assembly Elections in which AAM AADMI PARTY emerged as the second largest Party with 28 seats [11]. Again in 2015 Delhi Legislative Assembly Elections AAM AADMI PARTY secured 67 out of 70 seats [12].

Table 2

	VOTERTURN OUT %
2008	57.58 [13]
2013	65.86 [14]
2015	67.08 [15]

The above given data shows the voter turnout Percentage in Delhi Legislative Election held in Different Years

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the AAM AADMI PARTY along with its new innovative ideas was one of the factors behind the massive voter turnout in 2013 & 2015 Delhi Legislative Assembly Elections. But still it was a limited regional phenomenon. The first two democratic upsurges covered a larger geographical area as well as a large chunk of Indian population across various states of India. This is evident from the fact that the vote participation percentage of the first and the second democratic upsurge mentioned above in this article is based on the Lok Sabha elections which naturally covers larger number of voters as compared to a state assembly election. Apart from this AAM AADMI PARTY has little or no effect on rural India which is still dominated by caste and class politics. The rural India still votes on the basis of caste and class lines and the AAP's tremendous success in Delhi has not been able to affect the voter turnout in rural parts of the various states of India. Moreover its poor performance in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections puts a question mark on its ability to transform it into state of influence where the Political Scientists can call it a third democratic Upsurge. It is still a Party with the major support base of urban dwellers. Last but not the least the news of the rift between the AAM AADMI PARTY stalwarts and the subsequent sacking up of Mr. Prashant Bhushan and Mr. Yogendra Yadav as AAP spokespersons and their removal from the Party's National Executive Council and from the party as well along with several allegations of misappropriation of funds by AAM AADMI PARTY members has given a clear signal to the Urban Public who is AAP's support base that it is like any other party marred by internal factional fights and charges of corruption. This can further decrease its support base and ruin its chances of forming governments in other states in the years to come The news of its internal factional fights and charges of misappropriation of funds have overshadowed its tremendous success in 2015 Delhi Legislative Assembly Elections. To become an exception in a positive way the party needs to stand against all odds as it is an infant party with less than four years of political experience. Hence AAM AADMI PARTY has a long way to go and it will be too early to call it a Third Democratic Upsurge just on the basis of its current success as it is limited regional success where as previous two democratic upsurges were not limited to a single region and

covered both rural and urban voter participation across several states of India.

In an article published in the Journal of Asian Studies entitled "Is India Becoming More Democratic" Ashutosh Varshney enlightened us with the help of examples about the deepening of democratic process of India. The same can be said about AAM AADMI PARTY, which no doubt helped in revolutionizing the political process by introducing some innovative ideas to Indian politics which in turn helped in making India's democracy a bit more democratic. But it cannot be called a 'THIRD DEMOCRATIC UPSURGE' that India has been waiting for.

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