

A New Specimen of Corporate Politics

Prem Singh

(This article was written in November 2013 and had been published in the Mainstream Weekly, VOL LI, No 47, November 9, 2013. The article was highly criticized by certain progressive/secular intellectuals/columnists ranging from India to the US. Most of them thought it better to ignore the article as 'trash'. A generation of young Indians has grown up since then. Definitely, there are youths in a large number who still view politics as an ideological activity. The article is re-issued as it is for their reading, and understanding of the present predicament of politics in the country.)

The economy that serves the interests of Indian and foreign corporate houses can hope to exist permanently only if politics too adheres to the same goal. It is with this in view that the new economic policies (NEP) implemented in the early 1990s have been focused to reinvent the mainstream political character as corporate savvy. No ideology or principle, other than corporate capitalism, seems to be working in the current scenario. Surely, the ideology of corporate capitalism has taken communalism, casteism, regionalism, lingualism, dynastic politics and individualism in its embrace infiltrating rapidly into every area and strata of life. A significant role is being played by the media that flourishes on big capital and high technology. The middle class, whose activism is generally in news these days, and which benefited optimally from the mixed economy earlier and then, later, from the neo-liberal economic policies for about 25 years, has now become a supporter of corporate capitalism.

In this situation the ideology underlying the Indian Constitution, based on democratic, socialistic and secular values, is no longer the goal of Indian politics. It follows directives from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization and the American power establishment that stands over and above these bodies. This is the era of corporate politics and a new specimen of this has emerged in the form of the Aam Admi Party (AAP).

The AAP is all over the mainstream media. But a serious analysis of its character, possible only in small magazines, is absent. In the column '*Samay Samvad*' which publishes in the monthly Hindi magazine *Yuva Samvad*, I had briefly investigated the character of this party. Like the other articles written on this subject, it could not have been published in any mainstream newspaper/magazine in Hindi or English. *The Hindu* and *Jansatta* have a different identity from the mainstream media in English and Hindi respectively, but they are at the forefront in their support of the AAP. This intimate friendship between the mainstream media and AAP is based on their common kin, that is, corporate capitalism.

The inceptors and operators of the AAP were the main leaders of the team called 'India Against Corruption' (IAC). IAC was substantially populated with communalists, reactionaries, status-quoists, mail chauvinists, religious and spiritual traders, superstition-mongers and NGO operators. World Bank award winner Anna Hazare, who by virtue of an NGO transformed his

village into a 'heaven', was made the head of this team. Arvind Kejriwal, who crowned Anna as the chief of this team, was one of the prime ringleaders of the NGO network that has wiped out political activism in India. The difference between the two can be alluded to by the fact that Anna is a product of the 1970s while Kejriwal is a child of the neo-liberal era, straightaway.

Born under the aegis of IAC, the anti-corruption movement was primarily administered by the RSS and advertised by the mainstream media. All Indian corporate houses and their institutes were in its complete support. For the campaign-workers, corruption is a sound that requires only one hand to clap; whereas corporate houses, who bribe political leaders to steal away national resources and the safety-valves of corporate capitalism (that is, the NGOs), are considered righteous. The AAP, 'emerging from the ashes of the anti-corruption movement', cannot have a character different from IAC and the anti-corruption movement. Hence it should be viewed as a new specimen of corporate politics.

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The efforts of alternative politics have been heavily damaged by the anti-corruption movement and AAP. In this context, they are more dangerous than the mainstream political parties. Mainstream politics following neo-liberalism is bent upon defeating alternative politics. But this party has undertaken the task of destroying the political option of neo-liberalism. It has dealt the deepest injury to the stream of alternate politics launched by political philosophers and activists like Kishan Patnayak. This time, the socialists of the Kishan Patnayak stream have deceived the legacy. Out of the democratic progressive camp only these few socialists have played a role in establishing this party.

If we look back a little, we find prominent members of this party engaged in work dealing with the Congress and BJP-RSS. Therefore nobody from the neo-liberal and corporate houses will counter such people. In other words, the leaders of the Aam Admi Party are maternal and paternal cousins of the Congress and BJP respectively and the real brothers of the corporate. There is a continuous competition amongst people working for the Congress to land into the National Advisory Committee (NAC) chaired by Sonia Gandhi. It has been said that had Kejriwal been offered a place in the NAC and Prashant Bhushan in the Cabinet, there would have been no mess. For Shanti Bhushan, the Congress' 'unfairness' is clear in not accommodating his lawyer son, while lawyers like Chidambaram, Sibal and Singhvi have been given big posts. From the very inception of the Aam Admi Party, he is known to have been informing all and sundry that beginning with Delhi, the entire country will be won over by in 2014! That is his idea of retribution, retribution for the oversight by the Congress.

Till date, none of the political parties of this country have entertained the sole motive of immediately winning in elections, by hook or by crook. A party, which considers politics to be only about the business of winning or losing elections, whether successful or unsuccessful, can slip down immensely. Recently, I got an opportunity to visit a Rashtra Sewa Dal (RSD) camp for the youth in Kandikhali village of Uttarakhand. There I asked Dr. G.G. Parikh, editor of the English weekly *Janata*, about the enthusiasm level of fellow socialists from Maharashtra who had joined the AAP. Dr. Parikh replied that all eyes are on the Delhi Vidhan Sabha elections. If

the AAP succeeds in forming the government in Delhi, they will stay in the party, if not, then they will think of something else. Even a child can say that no party other than the Congress or BJP can form the government in Delhi. If both parties fall short of a majority by a few seats, then without doubt, following the footsteps of the Congress-BJP and winning a few seats, the AAP's leaders can go with either of them.

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The character of this party can be understood very well if we pay attention to some of the latest activities of this new specimen of corporate politics. Most of the Indian political parties consider Muslims to be their vote-bank. In the eyes of the AAP too Muslims are merely a vote-bank, not citizens of India. Recently there was a news in the media that some 'special Muslims' have been inducted into the AAP. In present times, one can say that the media is the kingmaker. Like Modi's candidature for the post of the Prime Minister is more due to the media's contribution (than that of the RSS), so is Kejriwal a media creation. Not only is the media an AAP news supplier, the media also presents the news in the form desired by the AAP's media cell. The leaders of the AAP have wished to project the news that the AAP has won the support of the Muslim community, the country's largest minority group.

Here it is imperative to pay attention to the issue of the 'special' Muslims. Political parties turn the entire Muslim community into "vote-bank" by virtue of these 'special' Muslims. 'Special' Muslims are available not just for secular parties; the BJP has bagged some as well. For the last two decades, Indian politics is tied to the pivot of the USA and Israel wherein these 'special' Muslims play a substantial role. The 'special' Muslims in the AAP must have assumed that if the AAP comes to power, the party will lift them to crucial posts. These days this is the new avatar of secularism.

That leaders from parties like the BJP, Congress, SP, BSP etc. are joining the AAP, makes it newsworthy for the media. At this moment, the 'leftovers' of these parties are joining the AAP. By the time the elections begin, established leaders, disgruntled at being denied a ticket, can also join the AAP. The logical end to the inclusion of such politicians obviously and predictably implies set patterns, that is, distribution of alcohol and cash in slums, resettlement colonies and villages. If the money-power of the AAP sustains to challenge the Congress-BJP, then the distributors of alcohol and cash will, on their own, fulfill this job. Politics sans ideology and values cannot aspire for anything other than making a beeline for the blind alley to power.

These days one hears a lot about the expenses of the AAP and its cash inflow. Even the amount to be given to each candidate for election expense is being advertised. A figure of about thirty to thirty five lakh rupees is the estimate, which in reality will touch a crore. It's a huge temptation for the candidates. The massive dimensions that this money-game of the AAP will take, as the general elections close in, can be guessed. The recent political activities of the AAP clearly show that its leaders, like other mainstream political parties, believe politics to be, first and foremost, a game of money-power. That is, they are agreed to have expensive elections in a poor country, which will get even more expensive while emulating corporate politics.

Some information detailing news about some leaders of the AAP getting foreign currency from certain countries was published in *Samyantar* (a monthly Hindi journal published from Delhi) during the anti-corruption movement. Now, with the work expansion, a cash flood is needed. Actually, the only eligibility the AAP leaders have displayed till today is that of minting and hoarding money. In the coming days, the ability to extract as much money as possible from organisations like the Ford Foundation, supposed to be propagator of neo-imperialism, and corporate houses will be apparent. That people from India and abroad are voluntarily giving money is no excuse. Everyone knows that money attracts money.

Like the other mainstream political parties, the AAP is disconnected from the farmers, tribals, Dalits, labourers, artisans, small shopkeepers/business-men, students, and the unemployed. It's a party of the middle class, made by the middle class, for the middle class. A middle class, that snatches its share from the neo-imperialist loot and then props itself as ethical/moral. It jumped (on a huge scale) into the anti-corruption movement to show that despite its collusion in the displacements and suicides in the last 25 years, the middle class conscience is alive. The facade enacted by the middle class was so potent that several genuine thinkers and people's movements' activists came under its sway.

Recently, an episode of an AAP leader being shunted out of a UGC committee created uproar in the media. Private universities have mushroomed in India. The country's President himself is advertising for private universities. There is an eager preparation to bring in foreign universities. The governments have initiated the process of sabotaging/dismantling State and Central universities. The latest example is the forcing of the Four Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP) in the Delhi University. In this crucial time it is essential to boycott government committees and to courageously fight against the neo-liberal attack on education. Many organizations and individuals are working to this end throughout the country. The AAP leader should have resigned from the UGC committee without replying to the show-cause notice and engaged in protesting against the privatization and commercialization of education at his party level.

But it was turned into a media event and the question asked if the government would have raised objection to the UGC committee membership had he joined the Congress. Although, if he had to question the government then he should have asked as to why he cannot continue being in the committee as a member of the AAP when he could be in the committee as a member of the Samajwadi Jan Parishad (SJP)? It's a known fact that membership of government organizations these days is an outcome of closeness to the government; scholarship is rarely a criterion for it. If a scholar loses the membership of a committee, there is little to worry about. The worrisome issue is that despite the presence of scholars in different committees, governments are waving green flag to privatization. In these circumstances, which concerned scholar can stay in a committee?

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It is said that narcissists make garlands which they themselves wear in their own necks. The leaders of the AAP, who conducted surveys earlier on diverse channels for different governments, now conduct surveys and predict their victory. Crossing all boundaries of political civility, they label leaders from other political parties as corrupt and portray themselves as honest. They have also defaced election symbols of the opposite parties, for which a complaint has been lodged with the Election Commission of India. Not just this, they have made the Indian Flag a means to fulfill their political ambitions. Hired workers wave the flag, then discard it and walk away. Actually, they are self-enamoured people who consider their existence as miraculous, and believe that any sin committed by them is also holy. They are their own connoisseurs and, even after descending to bottomless pits, display a noble demeanour. Having relished the best things the world has to offer, they portray themselves as its victims. One can find a long list of narcissist heroes in Indian and world literature. In reality, they are mental patients due to innumerable complex reasons, but nurse and propagate a delusion of being the doctor for all ailments. IAC, the anti-corruption movement and AAP boast of such a list of narcissist 'heroes'. At this juncture, we can only say that the road to dictatorship and fascism begins from here. The trend of rumour-mongering started by these leaders by virtue of the media is also the point from where Narendra Modi is coming.

Gandhi's name was often invoked during the anti-corruption movement. Anna Hazare, who at Jantar Mantar had at first praised Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi (responsible for slaughtering thousands of innocent citizens in a state-sponsored genocide in Gujarat), is frequently referred to as a Gandhian. So, till date, nothing has ever been spoken or written by him about 'Gujarat's lion' transformed into 'Mother India's Lion' Narendra Modi. There was an attack on Prashant Bushan made by the followers of Anna Hazare and Ram Dev against his statement on Kashmir. The AAP workers were also amongst the hoodlums who did not let a press conference proceed in the Press Club of Delhi. The press conference was organized on the demand to give the dead body of Afzal Guru to the women who had come from Srinagar. There is an abundance of reactionaries in the AAP. If the leaders of the AAP want to win the elections, they must keep on appeasing them.

Gandhi did not look at the means and the goal separately. The leaders of this party are propelled by the intention of doing anything to win the elections. In reality, both the creation and aim of this party are infested with deceitfulness. During the anti-corruption movement there was a widespread propagation of deep hatred against politics and politicians, although the intention was always to create a political party, and despite Anna Hazare's wishes against it, it was formed. It was also said that Kejriwal was not in favour of Anna breaking his fast at Ramlila Maidan, because in the event of Anna's death due to his fast, Kejriwal could have usurped Anna's position and taken his political flight. He was already fearful of Baba Ramdev leaving him behind in the race towards politics. The entire point of these manipulations was propelling the poor Indian populace, reeling under the oppression of neo-liberalism, in favour of the richer faction of India that has benefited from it.

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The campaign strategy of the AAP is akin to that of the Congress. Emulating the way in which the entire Congress is acting as an agent to establish Rahul Gandhi's leadership, the AAP leaders-workers are functioning as Kejriwal's agents. In a party where individualism dominates so much, coming to power will further cement it. The AAP party has suffered a division due to this individualism. If the party progresses further, there can be more divisions. Individualism is a capitalist value. In Indian politics, the former colludes with feudalism to manifest in regionalism, family rule and dynastic politics. Following the footsteps of big parties who blindfold the voters with the name of their leader through indiscriminate propaganda, a similar road is being envisaged by the strategists of the AAP. Only one man's name is being publicized on posters, banners, hoardings, mobiles and internet. That too as a Chief Minister! You are sitting at home or in the office, participating in some function or driving your car, your mobile will receive a written or voice-recorded message of Anna's pupil Arvind Kejriwal. Indiscriminate publicity cannot be attained without indiscriminate cash flow. That is, these 'good' and 'honest' people are saying that if you wish to practice politics, learn from the Congress and BJP. This kind of propaganda in a democracy bears a fascist tendency, wherein the image of a leader is imposed on the voters day and night.

A Hindi proverb says that a man who goes blind during spring sees everything in a green hue. The AAP leaders, blind in their pursuit of power, are in a similar situation. They look at all people and events through the lenses of power politics. When IAS officer Durga Shakti Nagpal was suspended, without even meeting her, she was offered the opportunity of fighting elections from the AAP. An announcement for fighting the Delhi Assembly elections was made even prior to the registration of the party. Since then, a Muslim candidate is being searched for somewhere, a Dalit somewhere, a Jat somewhere, a Punjabi somewhere, and a Sikh somewhere. Promoters are being searched for as well. If the whole story, of how and which people are being approached to fight election from the AAP, is exposed, it will produce a great political farce.

A friend told us that in Prakash Jha's *Satyagrah*, there were many people shown wearing the AAP's common man's cap with '*main aam admi hun*' written on it. We also came to know that many AAP workers wearing the cap were seen outside the theatres. It's quite possible that to show this, some money was exchanged. Or may be Prakash Jha was impressed, like many other good people, that persons wearing '*main aam admi hun*' caps would direct their energies towards the betterment of the ordinary public. The way the leaders of the AAP demonstrate their caps, it is worth a thought. Wearing the cap on special political occasions of the party can be understood. Even then if the cap is not worn it shouldn't matter. Dr. Lohia was against party workers wearing red caps. He believed that the thought of revolution should be in the mind of the workers. Politics that begins in showmanship will end in complete fraudulence.

When people earning in lakhs and crores put on the '*main aam admi hun*' cap, its first and last meaning is to ridicule the poor of this country. There is a need to reflect seriously on the thought process behind the AAP strategy. During the struggle for independence and after that, the common man has been at the centre of many debates in political, intellectual circles and also literary discussions. The Hindi 'individualistic' litterateur Agyeya, irritated at the excessive

insistence on 'aam admi' in literature by the progressives, had said, 'Aam Admi, Aam Admi... Aam Admi kya hota hai?' (Common man, common man...what is a common man?). His point was that for a litterateur all people are special. When the discussion about the common man extended from politics to literature, the meaning of the common man was also stereotyped. In this definition, the last man of Gandhi was nowhere to be seen. The reference to the importance and special status of the common man were not meant for the impoverished people engaged in 'mehnat-mazduri'.

The middle class fitted itself into this image of the common man, made all efforts to defend and fortify it, and is continuing to do so even now. The common man is a middle-class concept which has no link with either the poor or poverty because the modern industrial civilization which has the middle class at its core waves the assurance that it will not let anybody stay poor. In other words, the poor will be brushed under the carpet in more than one way. This neo-imperialist 'great' Indian middle class, fattened in the last 25 years of neo-liberalism, wants to strengthen its position in the name of the common man. It wants everything for itself, but doesn't want to give up its role of being the leader of the poor. This classic pretence has heaped immense disrespect and pain on the poor and the hard-working masses of India.

The middle class of India contains mainly the upper-caste members. This is the reason why the anti-corruption movement, and the party that emerged from it, is largely based on upper castes, which are supported by the 'dominant' backward castes. This is the basis and claim on which the leaders of the AAP have called upon the youth to come forward and join this 'new caste', namely, the middle class, discarding the casteist politicians. The youth are further suggested that here their caste too will be strengthened and their class-interest realized.

It is astonishing that some friends have expectations from the AAP. After the Congress and BJP, they see only a few-month-old AAP in the image of a political saviour. It's not as if, like the 'common man', they are unaware of the existence of Left and democratic movements and political parties having a long standing legacy of struggle. Amongst them are people's movement activists, teachers and journalists. About the people who expect the AAP to win and do something, even after the collapse of the anti-corruption movement, the only thing to be said is that the political mind has disappeared from most members of the civil society. This is the reason behind the rapid growth of the politics that favours corporate capitalism with no foothold left for the political endeavours that oppose it.

(Associated with the socialist movement the author is a former teacher of Delhi University and a Fellow of IAS, Shimla.)