

Arvind Kejriwal's Ambition

■ Dr. M.N. Buch

This is not a psycho analyst's report on a rising political figure in India. It is a layman's comments on a person who is epitomising himself as the Aam Admi, or ordinary person. It should be read in that context.

Gandhi was the most extraordinary person in whom every Indian saw a reflection of himself. This is as true of an industrialist such as G.D. Birla and a peasant in Champaran whose cause Gandhi took up against the indigo planters. This man, whose role in South Africa Ram Chandra Guha so beautifully depicted in his book, "Gandhi before India", who led the anti apartheid movement in South Africa and rallied the Indian community behind him; this man, who returned to India and initiated and led the freedom movement, certainly had ambition because without ambition the feral energy and drive which achieves great things would be missing. The position which he achieved in the hearts and minds of every Indian and even of the enemy whom he fought, the British, is unparalleled and in his own lifetime earned him the title of Mahatma. And yet this was the man who refused to accept any office when India became independent, though the people would have even accepted him as Emperor if he had so declared. Instead when India became free he advocated that the Congress should dissolve itself, not become a successor in power of the British, break into its different ideological components and then reinvent itself as a party with its own distinct ideology. To quote Louis Fischer, Gandhiji said, "But I do not want to take power into my own hands. By abjuring power and devoting ourselves to pure, selfless service of the voters we can guide and influence them". Gandhi tried to build a new vehicle, which would be in politics without seeking political power. It would teach the masses "to use their votes intelligently", to quote Gandhi. Unlike Jaiprakash Narain Gandhi made no claim that he would decide as to who are the good people who should be elected. That task he left to the voters. Gandhi died a sad man because partition had taken the sheen off independence, but his legacy is immortal.

Gandhi wanted independence and fought for it. In the twenty-first century independent India wants good government. There is distinct public unease at the total abandonment of principled politics based on ideology and the opportunism and corruption which is an inevitable consequence of such a development. This unease is so widespread as to be almost universal. The Mahatma's party, the Congress, has reached that state which Gandhi had predicted at the time of independence. Here I quote from Louis Fischer's book, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, "Without political criticism and opposition a nation's intellect, culture and public morality stagnate; big men are purged and small men become kowtowing pygmies. The leaders surround themselves with cowards, sycophants and grovelling yes-men whose automatic approval is misread as a tribute to greatness". Is this not an apt description of today's Congress in which Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Vadra are the leaders and every other Congressman is a sycophant?

Anna Hazare sensed the unease of the Indian people and took up the single issue of corruption as a centre point around which he built a popular movement which struck a chord with the people of India. Amongst his acolytes was a young former Indian Revenue Service officer called Arvind Kejriwal. I do not know him but from what one reads about his progression from an anti corruption activist to the creator of a new political party, one can safely assume that

he has political ambition. We all scoffed at the thought of an anti corruption activist attempting to build a serious political party, especial in view of what appeared to be non-serious supporters who in other circumstances would have been socialites. Perhaps we misread the anger of a substantial section of the Indian people against sixty years of misrule and this gave spontaneous cohesion to the new political movement. A new language came into existence in which a feeling was created that ordinary citizens were being consulted and made partners in governance. The jury is still out on whether this perception was created because of the genuineness of the movement or because the new party promised the citizens of an over pampered city populist items such as free water and free electricity, and minor matters such as the size of the house to be occupied by Chief Minister of Delhi.

It seemed that the voice of the people was being heard, but the shifting stance of Kejriwal and his group in the matter of formation of the government in Delhi gave rise to a great deal of scepticism. Starting with a statement that Aam Admi Party will not form a minority government and will never side with the Congress, Kejriwal & Co., had a change of heart on the grounds that the people of Delhi wanted the party to come to power. The people as such are amorphous and do not have a common voice. Can one state that the people want something to happen and, therefore, those in power are only acting accordingly? That is what Kejriwal said. The fact remains that Kejriwal and his party did form the government, a minority government which the Congress supports, with the full confidence that if the Congress withdraws its support it is the Congress which will suffer. Is this not a form of blackmail? In some ways Kejriwal reminds me of Macbeth, with the role of Lady Macbeth being played by an amorphous group called the Aam Admi. Is it then a case of Lady Macbeth commenting on Macbeth, then Thane (Earl) of Glamis and Cawdor? To quote:-

“Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o’th’ the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest ways. Thou wouldst be great;
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily, wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win”.

It is permitted to be ambitious. It is not permitted to “wrongly win”. It is not permitted to hand out largesse without the larger picture also being presented. So, in the long run, will ambition translate into promoting the welfare of the people or will one act of populism lead to one other, then one other ad infinitum? One can but wait and watch.
