

Cynicism As The New Political Philosophy

■ Dr. M.N. Buch

The National Capital Territory of Delhi has elected a new Legislative Assembly and, through it, a new government. Incidentally, the National Capital Territory of Canberra in Australia, Ottawa, the capital of Canada, Brasilia, the capital of Brazil, Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan and Washington D.C, the capital of United States do not have a legislative assembly and are governed directly by the Central Government. Of the major federal capitals Delhi is the only one which has a legislative assembly and the equivalent of a State Government. Within the city also operate three Municipal Corporations, a Municipal Committee and a Cantonment Board. All these bodies have superimposed on them the Central Government which directly controls the police, owns much of the lands through the Delhi Development Authority and the Ministry of Urban Development through L&DO and in any case interferes with day-to-day working of both the NCT Government and the local bodies. Singapore, which is a City State, manages all the urban services through the national government and there is no real decentralised local government in operation there. Because of the highly diffused power structure in Delhi it is a city which has the maximum government with minimum governance. A good description of the existing governmental disposition in Delhi would be bedlam.

The election was contested by Congress, BJP and the Aam Aadmi Party. Before I come to the main theme of the paper, cynicism as the new political philosophy, let us look at the two main chief ministerial candidates. Arvind Kejriwal started his career as a member of the Indian Revenue Services, Department of Direct Taxes. His sole aim was to remain posted in Delhi and he used every known bureaucratic tactics to remain in Delhi. He took two years study leave as per rules, which meant that whereas he continued to draw his emoluments as if he were not on leave and to enjoy all the perquisites of office he was also required to sign a bond that on completion of study leave he would give a detailed report to his parent department on what he had studied and would serve government for a minimum of three years on completion of the leave. He did not fulfil this condition, never returned to a posting and kept on finding excuses for not doing so. Ultimately government gave him a notice to refund what had been paid to him during the period of study leave and Kejriwal sat on the matter till an appropriate occasion presented itself to him at a rally by Anna Hazare in which the notice was flourished and Kejriwal claimed that through it he was being victimised by government. The record of his forty-nine days government is well known, as also the frequent changes in stance adopted by him to suit his convenience.

The second candidate for chief ministership, Kiran Bedi, was an IPS officer with unbounded ambition and her determination to use any means, especially publicity, to achieve her goal of high office. She was a member of the AGMUT Cadre of the IPS whose officers are, in the normal course of things, expected to serve in Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram and the Union Territories, of which Delhi is one. Like Kejriwal she was not prepared to live out of Delhi. On posting in Goa she came away after serving for only forty-one days there. In Mizoram she stayed for about only a fortnight and virtually deserted her post. One allegation is that she used this posting to have her daughter admitted to the Lady Hardinge Medical College, Delhi, against the North East quota. In Chandigarh as IG she deliberately picked a fight with the Home Secretary, which led to the Governor virtually throwing her out. Her tantrums on not being made Commissioner of the Delhi Police are well recorded. Between Bedi and Kejriwal there is very little to choose.

Delhi in 1947, with the influx of Punjabi refugees became a city of the Punjabis. Their hard working took to professions and trade and made Delhi a well-to-do, largely middleclass city. The growth of Delhi brought in its wake migrants from the poorer States and regions such as eastern U.P. and Bihar to service the needs of the relatively better off people and these people created slums, many of which were relocated in jhuggi-jhopdi rehabilitation colonies in the outer areas of Delhi during the Emergency. We now had a Delhi which was official, then we had the Delhi of the Punjabi migrants and now there was a Delhi consisting of jhuggi-jhopdi rehabilitation colony dwellers who were from the poorer regions of India. The aspirations of middleclass Delhi were very different from those of the poor. The poor wanted at least the minimum basic services and employment opportunities, whereas middle and higher income Delhiites wanted good roads, flyovers, shopping malls and, eventually the metro railway. Both classes, however, wanted less red tape and much less corruption. The Congress presumed, as a matter of right, that the poor, the backward and the minorities were its vote banks. The BJP presumed that the middleclass was in any way the monopoly of BJP. The Aam Aadmi Party meanwhile worked assiduously amongst the marginalised people while simultaneously assuring the middleclass that it would give them a corruption free government. Perhaps Aam Aadmi Party workers understood the realities of Delhi better than the traditional parties and when BJP suddenly catapulted a complete newcomer, Kiran Bedi, to be the putative Chief Minister of Delhi, the party faced an internal revolt which may not have surfaced, but was like a subterranean magma about to explode. The selection of Kiran Bedi was not by a normal political process, but reflected the cynicism of the top BJP leadership that this might get the party a few extra seats and an edge in the Vidhan Sabha. When the votes were counted on 10th February 2015 BJP got only three seats, the Congress got zero, with 63 out of 70 candidates forfeiting their deposits and the Aam Aadmi Party captured an incredible 67 seats. The citizens of Delhi who in May 2014 had given all seven parliamentary seats to BJP because they voted on national considerations gave 67 Vidhan Sabha seats to Arvind Kejriwal because his party highlighted local issues thus giving a fitting answer to Amit Shah's contemptuous cynicism..

The Aam Aadmi Party has a number of internal contradictions which could probably have been kept under control if its majority was not so brutal. However, with a majority of this magnitude there would always be a tendency to feel that nothing can stop the party and this can lead to some form of extremism in decision making. This is likely to lead to a confrontation with the Central Government. If such confrontation is resolved by discussion and mutual consent things would be fine. If the approach of the NCT Government becomes shrill or agitational, things could become ugly and that would affect the stability of the NCT Government. This would depend largely upon whether or not Arvind Kejriwal has matured.
