

By Sidharth Mishra



The political circles in the national Capital have been abuzz ever since on Wednesday afternoon Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal expressed his desire to rule as per the principles of Ram Rajya. Participating in a debate in Delhi Assembly Kejriwal said that one of his guiding principles would be sending the elderly on free pilgrimage to the Ram Temple being built in Ayodhya on the site of demolished Babri Masjid.

While Kejriwal's announcements may have come as a surprise, those who have followed origin and politics of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) would know that sooner or later this revelation had to come. Soon after AAP came to power for the first time in 2013, party's then leading ideologue Yogender Yadav was asked about the AAP's ideological orientation.

Yadav in his customary, convoluted argument laced with sweet inanities had said that the party was oriented towards 'people's welfare' and no ideology could be an impediment in pursuing the agenda of welfarism. Yadav, Prashant Bhshan and others for the Left have been ousted from the party, so has been Kapil Mishra from the Right.

So what's the ideology of Arvind Kejriwal led-Aam Aadmi Party, the answer could be sheer opportunism and such positioning which would keep it afloat and politically relevant. The developments of the past year would show that AAP has hopped agendas to suit its needs for survival.

During the riots in North-East Delhi around this time last year, Kejriwal, acting with caution lest it Hindu voters got annoyed ahead of the assembly polls, allowed the matters to get out of hand. Delhi, which has had a culture of peace-committees and peace marches in the riot affected areas from the times of partition, saw no such initiative being taken from the side of the AAP. And why to forget, the BJP leader Kapil Mishra, alleged to be the main perpetrator of the

mayhem, was a Minister in Kejriwal's government not too far back in the history.

While in the years preceding the polls, Kejriwal positioned his party empathetically with the secular intellectuals by not sanctioning prosecution of the student leaders of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). However, closer to the elections with BJP pushing hard politics of polarisation in the backdrop of Shaheen Bagh agitation, Kejriwal distance his party from both anti-CAA agitation and any effort to ameliorate the sufferings of the people in North-East Delhi.

And now, Kejriwal's announcement about the pilgrimage comes a day after his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government presented a Rs 69,000-crore budget themed on "patriotism" under which installation of 500 flag masts and programmes on the lives of freedom fighters are planned across the city. It also announced a "Deshbhakti Curriculum".

Why such 'Desh Bhakti' and 'Ram Bhakti' by Kejriwal's party? It's inspired by two-three political developments in the recent past. First the assembly polls in 2020 clearly showed that it has dented BJP's Vaishya (Bania) votebank, a fact which was reiterated in the outcome of the recently held bypoll for five corporation seats, where BJP lost even its citadel – Shalimar Bagh to AAP.

Second the loss of trust amidst the minority voters, a fact made evident by the huge loss AAP candidate suffered from Chauhan Bangar ward at the hands of the Congress, by a margin of more than 10,000 votes. Chauhan Bangar is in North-East Delhi and completely dominated by the minority community and one of the worst-hit areas during the riots.

It's not just about minorities, the Delhi Government's budget is also almost quiet on what it wishes to do for the farmers. Nor to forget that till a few weeks back Kejriwal government was wooing the agitating farmers from Punjab at Singhu border with all possible freebies. But the rout of the AAP in the Punjab local polls probably has disenchanted the party leadership with the farmers and they are now looking for consolidating on a new found constituency.

There is a caution for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in this as it's agenda of Hinduvta may soon get usurped by the Aam Aadmi Party as they are much better at media positioning than their political rivals. What makes AAP's politics 'precious' is its malleability that's the plasticity of ideology and ability at agenda hopping.

The real test for the BJP would be to counter propaganda which would be embedded in the implementation of Desh Bhakti Curriculum. It's unlikely that AAP would pitch for the contribution of first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, taking whose name BJP also abjures but certainly push for doing better than the bigger party in eugolising the newly adopted members on the right-wing pantheon namely Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

Over past few years AAP has increasingly proved its cheer leaders wrong who thought that it was an alternative to the Congress, whereas the latter has always cribbed it being the B-Team of the BJP. This realisation seems to have also dawned on voters at least in Punjab, where a resurgent Congress under Captain Amrinder Singh has regained its supporters lost to AAP during the 2014 Lok Sabha polls and 2017 Vidhan Sabha polls.

However, it would not be out of place to compliment the AAP leadership of consistently reinventing itself despite the poll reverses and setbacks. It's to their credit that they manage to do so despite nothing much to showcase by way of governance.

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