

It is, indeed, instructive to analyse why the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was decimated at the polls in Delhi.

But the more important point is how the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has emerged with such a bang: 67 seats in a house of 70! The BJP is down to just three from the 32 it had won in the December 2013 Assembly election.

What's the AAP? It is a secular, left-of-centre party which may become an alternative in the country, replacing the Congress which is languishing. Some

many idealists in society at that time. And Arvind Kejriwal was one of them. He was among the many who aspired for a clean and transparent polity. Although the movement was suppressed, it never allowed its idealism to go out of the public gaze. That was when the AAP was born and it refocused its attention on the issue at hand. The party contested the election in Delhi and was briefly in power.

But the answer to the question of how and the voters handed such an incredible mandate to the AAP this time is that the people were sick and tired of the



## REBIRTH OF AAM AADMI

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time ago a set of motivated people came from different fields and joined Gandhian Anna Hazare in his campaign for the appointment of Lokpal (ombudsman) in order to fight corruption at high places.

The movement engulfed the entire country in no time because the campaign had permeated all segments of the society. How the government beguiled Hazare and his associates to circumvent its undertaking to appoint an ombudsman is another story.

Yet, there is no doubt that his movement attracted

two main political parties, the Congress and the BJP.

The AAP, despite facing public apathy, stuck to its path and managed to catch the imagination of the people once again to be voted to power with an unprecedented majority.

Much will now depend on Kejriwal and his associates and how they pursue the ideals they have adumbrated. The Delhi electorate has pinned its hope on AAP because the people believed that the party can deliver.

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Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) president Arvind Kejriwal greets supporters during Kejriwal's swearing-in ceremony as Delhi chief minister in New Delhi on February 14, 2015.

PHOTO: AFP

Sabha elections in 2019. But it will be a different journey and, to traverse it, the AAP will have to remain focussed on values which constitute the basic structure of our Constitution.

True, the Delhi election was not a referendum on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But it was the BJP that had made it so by putting his photos on every bit of publicity material it released.

The hundreds of thousands of rupees worth of advertisements which the party released in newspapers and on hoardings displayed in Delhi had the

photograph of Modi along with Kiran Bedi who was seeking election.

It would be too simplistic to believe that the induction of Kiran Bedi as the chief ministerial candidate was the cause of the BJP's defeat.

Perhaps, it made some difference. But the vote was primarily against the BJP and its ideology of Hindutva. The party still does not want to face the fact that Modi's spell has waned.

The BJP itself looks jaded and stuck in the old mould of religious superiority. The voters swung towards them in the last election not because of their ideology but because they were promised development, the economic betterment of the people.

But almost 10 months of the Modi government at the centre have made little difference to the life of an ordinary man on the street.

Both the BJP and the Congress, which did not win a single seat in the Delhi election, must introspect hard and change their policies.

If the BJP analyses the causes of its defeat, it will find the ideology of Hindutva does not sell in a society which is pluralistic. The vandalisation of churches is suspected to be the handiwork of extremists in the party. The campaigns like ghar wapsi or the projection of Nathu Ram Godse, who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi, do not go down well in a country that takes pride in being secular.

The Congress, stuck in dynastic politics, has little hope of a revival. The party was a movement and had all its qualities. Today, it is distant from the people. The belated efforts of Rahul Gandhi to address rallies or give speeches are too little, too late.

He should cultivate the media. But he hates to hold a press conference or give an interview. The rout of both the Congress and the BJP should make them go back to the drawing boards. If they do that honestly they would realise that they are distant from the ground realities.

Even if they do not move left, they have to find a solution to poverty and unemployment. Modi's free enterprise has not given any dividends so far. There is no running away from the reality that one third of the people are living below the poverty line.

The RSS, the BJP's ideologue, takes pride in saying that the rule of Hindus has returned after many decades. This is not a solution but the problem. All segments of society should be associated with development. One, however, feels that the minorities are being left out purposely.

India, as Mahatma Gandhi said, is a bouquet of flowers. He was emphasising the plurality of society. The Constitution assures equality to all before the law, whether Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or Christians. But it is a pity that we are going away from that principle.

The sooner we return to that basic requirement, the less arduous would our journey be towards a democratic, secular and socialist polity.

ANN/ *The Statesman*