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Was Arvind Kejriwal's resignation his biggest political mistake?

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It was as dramatic as everything else associated with Arvind Kejriwal. On Feb 14th, 2014 – the then Delhi Chief Minister, stood on the floor of the house & proclaimed, in a dialogue borrowed from Atal Bihari Vajpayee, that he was going to the governor – to submit his resignation. That brought Aam Aadmi Party's 49 day old government to an abrupt end. While AAP played it as the biggest political sacrifice for the sake of the country, three months later, Arvind Kejriwal is still explaining why he resigned.



The AAP has maintained that they resigned due to the failure to pass the Jan Lokpal Bill and not because of political ambitions. That's a reason most find hard to believe, considering, Arvind Kejriwal showed little to no respect for actually following the rules to introduce a Money Bill in the house. Nor did Kejriwal, hesitate before contesting in the Lok Sabha Polls. On the face of it, Arvind Kejriwal looks every bit the politician that his critics paint him to be.

Immediately after resigning, Kejriwal made all the right noises – "resigned on principle, Cong-BJP conspiracy, corruption etc". But coming in the backdrop of a tumultuous regime, his words didn't find many takers. From bringing the capital to a standstill in the name of Dharnas to midnight raid controversies, the self-proclaimed 'anarchist' only managed to show his contempt for rules & procedures. Ironical, considering he himself comes from the IAS background. Of course, one can't deny that the Chief Minister did announce schemes, albeit ill-planned, for the benefit of those who really need it – free water & electricity to begin with. But in all of this, he greatly narrowed the definition of the "Aam Aadmi".

But the biggest mistake, Arvind Kejriwal made, was not sticking to his own plan. The party which famously conducted referendums for the smallest of things, didn't go to the people for their biggest & boldest move. And that for AAP at least, was political suicide. An admission that came three months later from Arvind Kejriwal himself. "We thought people would appreciate our move", said Kejriwal. But public memory is not just short-lived, it is also incredibly unforgiving. An admission of mistake, coming two weeks before you take on the most formidable opponent in the political realm today, will be read as a sign of desperation. To be fair to Kejriwal, his party members had been mumbling about the "Delhi Mistake", especially reading the public response to their Lok Sabha campaign. Explaining Delhi is now a part of their campaign agenda.

The Lok Sabha elections are not over yet and Delhi Assembly elections will follow next. While AAP would want to avoid a debate on its past mistake, they know as well as the next person that is not possible. So they are going with the next best option – admit and explain. But in the streets of Varanasi, there are posters. Posters that call Arvind Kejriwal a 'Bhagoda' or renegade. Ask anyone with an opinion on the street, and if they are anti-AAP, it is mostly because they don't trust Kejriwal & co. TRUST gains immense significance for a party that portrays itself as the viable third option, a party that waged a David-Goliath war in Delhi, a party whose genesis lies in the anti-graft movement that awakened a nation's conscience. AAP is trying hard to regain the confidence. Across the country they have given tickets to candidates with impeccable records - Meera Sanyal, Rajmohan Gandhi, Medha Patkar, Dr Daljit Singh, Shazia Ilmi to take the heat off Kejriwal. And the result is visible. Opinion Polls suggest that AAP, may make significant inroads in the 2014 elections. And if they do, they know they have fought harder for it than would be required if they hadn't quit in Delhi. The bigger test would be for Kejriwal in Varanasi & AAP in Delhi. Will Delhi offer a second chance to AAP? And the bigger question, if they do – will they get a leader who acts impulsively & throws tantrums, every time things don't go his way? Or was resigning, Arvind Kejriwal's biggest political mistake? Even if it was, as he put it, for the greater common good?

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