



Team Anna`s Electoral Prospects in Delhi State

Based on a purposive survey in seven constituencies of Delhi, among five social groups that included the poor residing in the slums, affluent in the residential colonies, youth/first time voters in the colleges, Muslims, and women, this study through an open-ended questionnaire attempted a qualitative opinion survey of Anna Hazare and his teams` electoral prospects. The purpose was not merely to arrive at whether or not these social groups are willing to vote if Anna is to launch or support a new political party but also to get close to the reasons as to why they are willing or unwilling, and how people have come to see the interface between corruption and electoral politics. The survey has thrown up very intriguing differences between the opinions of these five social groups and it has also shown a trend in how people perceive electoral politics and new experiments that promise to change the rules of the game. The survey has clearly reflected that on the one hand the rhetoric of honesty looms large, and there is a will among the electorate to vote for that agenda, while on the other hand there is wide-scale skepticism of how that agenda would translate into reality and more importantly connect with the everyday problems specific to these different social groups. It seems that the gap between the social and the political is too large to be easily breached or bridged. Movements that are attractive as a social phenomenon are not necessarily considered effective in political or electoral terms. In fact, much of the legitimacy of a movement such as Anna`s has drawn it from its avowed distance from electoral politics and pursuit of political power. What can bring people together on a social plain can be divisive when it comes to the political domain, since the later is not merely about normativity, or right and wrong sort of distinctions but it is also about getting concrete benefits that are indispensable for the everyday life. It is the hard pursuit of interests that are tangible that makes politics enormously complex, and distinct from all other activities. What can draw a relatively easy consensus in the social domain does not necessarily or neatly translate when it comes to the domain of politics. Each of the social group had distinct reasoning(s) as to how they relate to this new anti-graft movement, what would be its prospects

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in electoral politics, and what would be their own position in supporting them in terms of casting their vote. It is important to observe that the reasoning to each of these queries itself need not match or complement the other, and can in fact present us with a picture as to what goes on in the minds of people from different social backgrounds before they decide whom to cast their vote.

The poor when asked to identify the most pressing problems they are facing, pointed towards price rise, unemployment, lack of sewage, health and educational facilities, along with lack of savings, public transport, ration cards and finally the irony of lack of drinking water supply and water logging. Undoubtedly these local factors and issues will come to dominate and who they perceive will be most effective in solving, or at least, providing relief. Regarding Anna they seem to have the dilemma that while he himself is poor and honest, and would stand by them but this in itself raises the doubt whether he will be effective enough in a system that is marred by power, money and manipulation. His goodness can also be his weakness in a system that is corrupt. They therefore, for instance, have a doubt if his campaign will be able to bring relief from the routine harassment for bribes that they face from the police. Similarly, many of them doubt if he can win elections without money, therefore the capacity to win elections becomes important in their final decision whom to vote for. They also agreed that during elections they are offered money and liquor and this looks like an attraction as much as a welcome relief in lives that gain very little otherwise from whichever party comes to power. Majority of respondents however drew a direct link between inflation, price rise and corruption, and they felt that if corruption could be rooted out, prices will come down, and that would be a very big relief. This seems to be the strongest point of the campaign against graft. If the poor increasingly get convinced that in arresting corruption price rise could be controlled, there is a possibility of the poor voting for the initiative by Anna Hazare, as the table given below reflects. The response from women among the poor seems to tilt more towards Anna since many of them saw a link between corruption, liquor and domestic violence. Many of the women among the poor felt that if Anna was at the helm of the affairs then they would get



relief from domestic violence, and they strongly support his campaign for prohibition of liquor. Women were of the opinion that last minute distribution of money and liquor play a way too important a role in how men decide to vote. Here corruption is not merely about bribes but about how it translates into other cultural practices within their homes. If Anna could widen the scope of corruption to include such issues there is a strong possibility of it appealing to the women among the poor. Finally, many among the poor, both men and women do not perceive Baba Ramdev to be pro-poor. Instead they seem to see him more as a businessman, as against Anna being a common man. Some even raised the issue as to why Baba cannot sell his medicines at a cheaper price for the poor.

Much in contrast to the poor, the affluent classes identified theft, law and order, taxes, growth, lack of implementation of developmental projects, illegal encroachments, petrol prices, condition of the roads and traffic, power cuts, growing population, and above all problems of parking as the most pressing problems they face. The majority of respondents seems to sympathise with the BJP, and suggested the need for leaders such as Narendra Modi, and even T.N.Seshan to bring order and fast paced growth. Regarding Anna, they seem to have a rather caviar attitude of being too simplistic to handle a complex political system and issues of governance. By and large they felt he would be ineffective, and will make no difference to the electoral results in 2014, and they were explicit in their decision not to vote for candidates supported by him. In fact, many felt that he is better-off as a social activist rather than a politician. He should campaign against corruption but not by entering electoral politics. They pointed out that in fact corruption perpetuates in the system because not merely those who receive bribes but even those who offer them benefit, and therefore in spite of the rhetorical support of many for a campaign against corruption the picture will be very different when it comes to everyday reality. The only merit, if any, in Anna launching or supporting a political party will be, according to many, in damaging the vote share of the Congress, which augments well for the BJP; though majority of them felt that we will have a coalition government at the Centre. Finally, this

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was the only social group that was, in comparison with others, less critical of Baba Ramdev and they drew the analogy that he is serving the nation to produce healthy people and healthy individuals are a pre-condition for a healthy society.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims interviewed in the seven constituencies of Delhi were the most skeptical of all the five social groups regarding the campaign by Anna Hazare. They seem to suspect a close link between him and the BJP. In fact, many are convinced that this a BJP and RSS backed campaign. The poor among the Muslims seem to be politically astute in their responses and in identifying where their interest lies. They were very conscious of the fact that if Anna was to launch or support any political party that will cut into the vote share of the Congress and that is all the more reason for them to vote for the Congress. Their suspicion, they pointed out, got further strengthened both by the recent refusal by Kiran Bedi to join the protests and the proximity of Anna with Ram Dev Baba, and also the fact that there is no Muslim leader who is part of their campaign. Many of them pointed out that the lack of unity in the team was due the fact that the intentions of many of those involved are not very clear. For the poor among the Muslims what seemed to matter the most is the approachability of the local MLA and the assurance for their physical protection including the assurance to not to demolish the slums they reside in. With regard to the question as to whether Muslims will benefit from the campaign against corruption, many struggled to identify any specific benefits, while others took objection to such a question, and retorted why it should be asked singling out the Muslims. While all other social groups found specific advantages that they might get with the anti-graft campaign, Muslims took serious objection. Their response about the Congress was also therefore very contextual. While they felt that Congress did very little to improve the law and order situation, especially in relation to the vilification of the Muslims, they felt that specific leaders such as Sheila Dixit in Delhi are strong and work in the interest of the minorities. Many of the more affluent Muslims shared the suspicion about the campaign by Anna and pointed to the fact that it has a single agenda, and wondered where would other burning issues figure in? They argued



that Team Anna has no public position regarding the recent spate of attacks on Muslims in Assam, they have never pressed for the implementation of the recommendations of Sachar Committee, never pointed to the dire needs to better educational facilities for the minorities and about the witch-hunt by the Police in the name of arresting Terrorism. It is intriguing to see that on the one hand Muslims scourge at the possibility of separately benefitting from a campaign against corruption, while on the other hand they have a list of demands that they feel are not part of the anti-graft movement. They could draw no immediate link between their interests as a religious minority in a polity and a more generic campaign against corruption and the perception of having no `secular credentials` definitely make Team Anna least popular among the Muslims.

Women have pointed out, across class and religion, that safety and law and order are their top priority, along with admissions to schools for their children. They pointed out that as they draw strength from having Sheila Dixit at the helm of the affairs they also draw strength from someone like Kiran Bedi being associated with a campaign against corruption. In addition her being a former police officer, women felt was reassuring. Many pointed out that a campaign against corruption will eventually also translates into a campaign against eve-teasing and sexual violence against women in the city. It is, according to them essentially a movement for ethics, and it will benefit women, in terms of getting better employment facilities, being treated as equals, and above all in gaining access to public spaces. As pointed out earlier, this seems to corroborate with women among the poor who expressed a similar link between corruption, consumption of liquor and relief from domestic violence. Though many women expressed the desire to vote along with and in consultation with other members of their family, individually they seem to both admire Anna and his ideas against corruption. Finally, it was women who most strongly supported the idea of Anna entering the electoral politics but they also expressed the doubt whether Anna will be allowed by other mainstream political parties to either launch a political outfit and even if he manages whether it will be allowed to survive.

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The last of the social group that was interviewed was the youth/first time voters in various colleges of Delhi. By and large the young seem to sympathise with the cause that Anna has taken up. However, they were also the most cynical about politics itself. They expressed the least confidence in bringing change through politics and more so electoral politics. They expressed a series of doubts about this recent move by team Anna. They questioned if it is feasible for team Anna to win elections without an organization and by the efforts of a few individuals; can there be a political party with a single issue of fighting corruption; haven't they made a hurried entry into politics more as a face saving device rather than as a well thought out decision; some even asked where is the funding for the campaign by team Anna itself is coming from, and that they have never been transparent about this; age matters in carrying a political programme and Anna is already very old to carry-on for too long; they were skeptical about the reach of the campaign to rural hinterlands and whether it is only restricted to urban areas and metropolitan cities; even if Anna's party wins a few seats they cannot enter into post-poll alliance with any other party since they consider all others to be corrupt, in this age of coalition politics what chance do they stand to form a government; they have overstretched the anti-Congress rhetoric; and finally, some believed that strategies such as holding fasts have a limited impact, and since they could not devise any effective alternative strategy of mobilisation, under compulsion, they had to declare that they would enter electoral politics. Along with the Muslims, the young were the next most skeptical social group to question the proximity of Anna with Baba Ramdev. Some of them made the interesting observation that, while Anna is with the masses it is important to see if he can carry the elites with him, and while Ramdev Baba is with the elites it is pertinent to see if he can gain credibility among the masses. It is in symbolic terms for some a battle between *Khadi versus Saffron*. While the young undoubtedly seem to be disillusioned with both the Congress and the BJP, but it is important to note that they are disillusioned with politics itself as a way of bringing about change. This seems to be the single most palpable effect of media, especially the television and news channels that have held a high moral ground against politicians without ever seriously questioning the

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corporate houses or corruption in all other walks of life. The routine humiliation of politicians, who are made answerable but rarely have we witnessed this attitude of media towards the private big corporate houses that have been hand-in-glove in all the major scams that we have been witness to during the current dispensation.

Table No. 1

| Performance of the Sitting MLA (in %) | | | |
|--|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>constituency</i> | <i>Satisfactory</i> | <i>Not Satisfactory</i> | <i>Don't Know</i> |
| New Delhi | 22 | 43 | 35 |
| South Delhi | 50 | 39 | 11 |
| Chandni Chowk | 42 | 47 | 11 |
| East Delhi | 34 | 60 | 6 |
| West Delhi | 31 | 60 | 9 |
| North East Delhi | 37 | 50 | 13 |
| North West Delhi | 40 | 51 | 9 |

Table No. 2

| Social Group-wise Support for Team Anna (in %) | | | |
|---|------------|-----------|-------------------|
| SOCIAL GROUPS | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| Youth | 67 | 31 | 2 |
| Affluent | 49 | 43 | 8 |
| Women | 64 | 30 | 6 |
| Muslim | 33 | 63 | 4 |
| Poor | 74 | 17 | 9 |

Table No. 3

Impact of Team Anna (in %)

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| <i>Damages Congress</i> | 36 |
| <i>Damages BJP</i> | 4 |
| <i>Damages Both</i> | 23 |
| <i>No Impact</i> | 21 |
| <i>Anna Will Win</i> | 11 |
| <i>Don't Know</i> | 5 |

Table No. 4

| Weakness of Team Anna | in % |
|------------------------------|-----------|
| Financial | 6 |
| Internal Disturbances | 15 |
| Political | 34 |
| No Weakness | 17 |
| Don't Know | 15 |
| Others | 13 |

Note: Political weakness includes lack of experience in electoral politics, dominance of existing political parties, lack of clear cut political agenda, manipulation of votes, etc.



To conclude, it is clear that the campaign against corruption has had a social impact in foregrounding the issue in a big way in the recent past. However, in terms of converting it into electoral prospects, it needs to work out the links between corruption and local factors, and issues specific to different social constituencies. The campaign, it looks would have stood much better electoral prospects had it come as a social upheaval or a wave questioning power, money and muscle in politics, but to sustain it as a political party will raise the questions that many of the respondents have alluded to in course of this study. It now depends whether or not those leading the electoral campaign can not only imagine effective answers for these issues but also preempt what other questions that various social groups might have if and when they go amidst them seeking a mandate.

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