

The Aam Aadmi Party

The Aam Aadmi Party

The Untold Story of a Political
Uprising and Its Undoing

Sayantan Ghosh

 juggernaut

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For Ma, Baba, Aishiki and Anindita

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Introduction

It was the winter of 2016, a season when Delhi's chill seeps into your bones and the city wears a shroud of mist. As an intern with the *Times of India*, I found myself shadowing a seasoned reporter to a crime scene in the Seemapuri slum of East Delhi. A murder had allegedly occurred there, from a dispute over ration supplies, casting a pall of fear and sorrow over the neighbourhood.

Amidst the sombre atmosphere, I encountered Geeta Jatav, a 73-year-old woman sitting outside her humble abode, wrapped in a faded off-white saree that seemed to mirror the foggy sky. She was a neighbour to the house where the tragedy had unfolded. My senior, sensing the gravity of the scene, advised me to avoid the crime site itself, suggesting instead that I speak with the neighbours to gather their stories.

Geeta's eyes, though weary, held a spark of resilience as she began to speak, '*Khun se mujhe darr nahi lagta, babut murder dekhi hai maine. Mere bete ko satra admi milke pita tha, pata hai kyun? Woh ration mafia ka virodh kia tha* (I am not scared of murders as I have seen many. Seventeen people once beat up my son, do you know why? Because he protested against the ration mafia),' she recounted, her voice steady and unwavering.

She paused, her gaze drifting to some distant memory, then continued, '*Nahi dari thi, pata hai kyun? Arvind Kejriwal the hamare sath is ladai mei. Tab woh koi CM ya leader nahi the, lekin ration mafia ke khilaf ladh rahe the. Har hafte aate the, mere bete ka bhi wo log ilaj karwaya. Aaj kal nahi ata hai kyun ki woh toh mukhyamantri ban gaya hai. Lekin humlog abhi bhi uske saath hai, ehsan chukani*

hay (Do you know why I was not scared that day? Because Arvind Kejriwal was with us. He was not a CM [chief minister] or a big leader at that time, but he used to fight against the ration mafia. They used to come every week, they even did my son's treatment. But he no longer comes here now, as he has become the CM. But we still support him, as there are several favours to return.)'

She confided in me that day, revealing the harsh reality of Seemapuri – where murder is a grimly familiar occurrence among the impoverished Dalit and Muslim families. The area is a stronghold for mafias, yet the battle against these criminal forces began with Arvind Kejriwal's intervention. Back when he was spearheading the NGO Swaraj, Kejriwal took a stand against the ration mafia and championed the Right to Information (RTI) Act. It struck me profoundly how individuals like Geeta share a deeply personal connection with the now former CM of Delhi – a bond forged in the crucible of their shared struggles and aspirations.

Geeta's words wove a tapestry of courage and gratitude, revealing the depth of her community's bond with Kejriwal. Despite their daily struggles, the people of Seemapuri felt a profound sense of indebtedness to him. It was in that moment, amidst the echoes of her story, that I understood the true essence of their connection to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Kejriwal. The trust and loyalty Kejriwal had cultivated were not just political capital but a testament to his enduring impact on their lives – a beacon of hope in their relentless fight for justice and dignity.

Reflecting on that pivotal conversation, I realize now that it marked the inception of my journey into the intricate world of the AAP. This dialogue continues to resonate with me, serving as the catalyst for my deep dive into the party's ethos and dynamics.

The lack of material on the AAP's history and evolution was a challenge, but it was also an opportunity. My coverage of the party over the years had granted me an insider's view, and it was during this time that a seasoned member of the party suggested I meet Raghu (name changed for confidentiality). Once an integral part of the AAP's leadership, from the time before the party was formed, Raghu has since distanced himself from it as well as from the AAP's national convenor, Kejriwal.

Raghu was not alone in his estrangement. Several early supporters and comrades of Kejriwal have parted ways with him, both before and after the AAP's inception. While some voiced their discontent publicly, others, like Raghu, chose silence. Their stories were whispers in the political corridors, waiting to be heard.

Raghu and I decided to meet at a coffee shop and wine bar named Perch in Khan Market, Lutyens' Delhi – an area synonymous with the power and prestige of the capital. Raghu arrived, a man whose distinctive features could tell a thousand tales, yet he preferred anonymity. Our conversation unfolded over cups of coffee, revealing the layers of the AAP's journey of transformation from a social movement to a political force. His insights were invaluable, and shed light on the internal dynamics and shifts within the party. My conversations with Raghu (over a period of time) are the source of many incidents mentioned in this book.



I began covering the AAP as a rookie journalist from 2017 at the *Millennium Post* newspaper. The AAP, although not as structurally complex as national political entities like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or the Indian National Congress (INC), presented unique hurdles, particularly during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Despite its grassroots origins and relatively straightforward organizational framework, the AAP's media interactions were notably restricted, posing significant challenges for journalists like me.

The AAP's approach to the media was a study in contrasts. On the one hand, a faction within the party believed that their status as Delhi's ruling party guaranteed perpetual media attention. This confidence was rooted in their significant presence in the capital, which houses major national media outlets. On the other hand, another faction argued that the party's historical association with media professionals and intellectuals inherently equipped them with the wisdom needed to manage media relations effectively.

At the Delhi Secretariat and within the party's inner circles, interactions with journalists were often superficial. While we were

offered tea, coffee and engaging conversations peppered with gossip and sarcasm, substantial news was rarely shared. The real stories were reserved for elite media houses, notably the *Times of India* and *Hindustan Times*, whose extensive readership perhaps justified the preferential treatment they got.

However, these observations did not deter me from pursuing stories that mattered. Covering the AAP in Delhi provided an opportunity to explore the city's streets, lanes and neighbourhoods, bringing to light the perspectives of ordinary citizens and their interactions with the ruling party.

The 2019 general election campaign was a significant event, particularly in East Delhi, where the contest garnered considerable attention. The BJP fielded the famous cricketer Gautam Gambhir, while the AAP's candidate was Atishi Marlena (a close associate of Kejriwal). Atishi's decision to drop her surname 'Marlena' and adopt 'Singh' during the 2019 campaign was a strategic move to counter the BJP's attacks on her. She quietly shed the moniker 'Marlena' from her digital footprint and public persona as well. This strategic decision distanced her from her middle name's overt nod to communist luminaries Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin, and also potentially quelled rumours that she was a Christian. Born into a Punjabi Rajput family, Atishi's cultural heritage stood distinct from the implications of her former middle name. This calculated rebranding underscores the complexities of identity politics and the scrutiny that public figures face. Atishi's choice reflects the delicate balance between personal heritage and perceived affiliations, highlighting the tension between authenticity and strategic self-presentation in the public eye.

One memorable assignment for me was covering an AAP rally for Atishi in Kondli (a Dalit slum in East Delhi). Here, I met Sukhdev, a 58-year-old manual scavenger, who expressed his support for the AAP, stating, '*AAP party ke log zyada imandar hote hain* (AAP members are more honest).' This sentiment was echoed by many others who believed in the AAP's integrity and clear intent, despite the party's poor performance in both the 2019 and 2024 Lok Sabha elections, where they failed to secure a single seat in Delhi.

The AAP's appeal lay in its grassroots origins and its image as a party of the people. Founded in 2012 out of the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement, the AAP positioned itself as a party dedicated to anti-corruption and good governance. This resonated with many Delhi residents, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds who felt neglected by traditional political parties.

Throughout my coverage, it became clear that the AAP's strength was its ability to connect with the common man. Whether through public rallies, *mohalla sabhas* (community meetings) or their flagship policies like free water and subsidized electricity, the AAP maintained a strong rapport with the electorate. This grassroots engagement was a key factor in their continued relevance in Delhi politics, despite setbacks at the national level.

Through interactions with the AAP leaders and supporters, I gained a deeper understanding of the party's philosophy and its approach to governance. This firsthand experience of witnessing the AAP's growth and the dynamics within the party enriched my journalistic journey.

From Journalism to Political Insights Commentary

My initial encounters with the AAP were strictly as a journalist. However, I was presented with an unexpected opportunity to cross over to the other side, so to speak. The former speaker of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, Ram Niwas Goel, established the Delhi Assembly Research Centre (DARC), and I was fortunate enough to be awarded a fellowship there in 2019. This role elevated me to the position of associate fellow at DARC, where, due to my prior experience, I was stationed at the office of the then deputy CM, Manish Sisodia.

My responsibilities primarily involved media coordination. I facilitated interactions between the media and key leaders, assisted ministers with their media engagements and crafted press statements and releases for the CM, the Deputy CM and the party. This role granted me access to the party's inner workings, allowing me to observe it from an insider's perspective. However,

despite this access, I remained an outsider in many ways, as the AAP's ideology was rapidly evolving during that period. I never formally joined the party but worked closely with its leaders, including top figures like former CM Kejriwal, former Deputy CM Sisodia and other prominent AAP members.

In the 2020 Delhi Assembly elections, I worked tirelessly behind the scenes for the party. The experiences I had, the stories I heard and the people I met provided me with a fresh perspective on the party, which is captured in this book.

After completing two years of my fellowship, I chose not to extend my tenure. By then, I felt a strong pull to return to my family in Kolkata. However, before I could do so, another opportunity took me to Jaipur, where I embarked on a completely different professional journey. Deliberately, I distanced myself from the AAP leadership, adhering to my belief that once you leave a space, especially a workplace, it is best not to remain entangled in its affairs. Nonetheless, my interest in the AAP persisted from afar, as I continued to study and write about their politics, offering my insights as a columnist and political commentator.

My journey from journalist to researcher has been instrumental in shaping my understanding of the AAP, and I am grateful for the opportunity to share my insights with readers.

Party with a Difference?

The rise and struggles of the AAP present a fascinating case study. Founded on the principles of anti-corruption and transparency, the party's predicament in 2024 seems paradoxical, with its senior leadership embroiled in the Delhi liquor policy case. The AAP's journey from its inception to its current state is a testament to the volatile nature of Indian politics. The party emerged from the IAC movement led by Anna Hazare in 2011, with Kejriwal and his colleagues promising a new kind of politics – clean, transparent and accountable. This promise resonated with a significant section of the populace, leading to the AAP's remarkable electoral success in Delhi. Their victory in the 2015 Delhi Assembly elections was unprecedented, with the party

winning 67 out of 70 seats. This mandate was seen as a rejection of traditional politics and an endorsement of the AAP's vision.

However, the subsequent years have been challenging for the AAP. The party's governance model – which emphasized healthcare, education and public utilities – won accolades but also attracted scrutiny. The very ideals that brought the AAP to power became points of contention. Accusations of corruption and administrative overreach began to surface, tarnishing the party's image. The liquor policy case became a significant blow, leading to the arrest of key leaders and raising questions about the party's commitment to its founding principles of clean governance.

The AAP's strength has always been its grassroots appeal. Its policies on free water, subsidized electricity and improved public education and healthcare have had a tangible impact on the lives of Delhi's residents. Critics argue that the AAP's populist measures strain the state's finances and are unsustainable in the long run. Proponents, however, view these policies as necessary interventions to uplift marginalized communities and provide basic amenities to all citizens.

In the broader context of Indian politics, the AAP's journey underscores the complexities of sustaining a political movement rooted in idealism. Its challenges highlight the difficulties of maintaining transparency and accountability, while navigating the murky waters of political power. The allegations of corruption and the subsequent arrests of its leaders have cast a shadow over the AAP's claims of being a clean and ethical alternative to traditional political parties. During an interview for this book, former AAP member and journalist Ashutosh reflected poignantly, 'AAP was born out of a desire to make a difference, to be a beacon of change. Yet, today, it stands indistinguishable from any other political party in India.'

There is an undeniable aura surrounding Kejriwal within the AAP, a magnetic presence that has grown to define the party itself. As I pen these words, Kejriwal has stepped down as Delhi's CM, following an interim bail granted by the Supreme Court. True to his vow, he seeks a moral *agni pariksha* – a trial by fire – choosing only to reclaim his post if the people of Delhi

re-elect him in the 2025 Assembly polls. In his stead, Atishi has assumed the CM's office, yet the shadow of Kejriwal looms large. So profound is this symbolic power that she governs with an empty chair beside her, dedicated to Kejriwal – a gesture that speaks volumes about his omnipresence.

Aurangzeb Naqshbandi, a seasoned journalist who has chronicled the AAP's journey since its inception, once remarked to me, 'You might call Atishi's act optics, but in reality, it reflects something far deeper. Today, Kejriwal's persona has eclipsed the party itself. His cult within the AAP is as powerful as Prime Minister Modi's within the BJP. The AAP is no longer just a party – it is Kejriwal-centric politics, with everything revolving around him, and nothing existing beyond.'

This statement captures the essence of a leadership so compelling that even in physical absence, Kejriwal remains the gravitational centre, a political figure whose cult has become synonymous with the AAP's very identity. The AAP's fall from grace is a cautionary tale of the dangers of unchecked ambition and the importance of adhering to one's core values. The party's journey serves as a reminder that the pursuit of power can often lead to compromise and corruption. As the AAP navigates this treacherous political landscape, it must confront its own demons and rediscover its lost ideals. Only then can it hope to reclaim its position as a champion of anti-corruption and a beacon of hope for the common man.

About this Book

This book embarks on a captivating journey to unravel the transformation of the AAP, chronicling a less-documented chapter of contemporary political history. It refrains from passing judgement on whether the AAP is right or wrong, good or bad, instead presenting facts to the readers. The narrative is divided into six distinct sections, each meticulously exploring different facets of the AAP's evolution.

The initial chapters delve into the inception of the AAP, tracing its roots back to Anna Hazare's IAC movement. This

section captures the fervour and momentum that propelled the AAP into Delhi's political arena, highlighting its early achievements and setbacks. The third chapter offers a thorough evaluation of the AAP's tenure in Delhi, followed by profiles of key individuals whose contributions are integral to the party's history. Here I took the opportunity to tell the story of how the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological parent of the BJP and its affiliated organizations like the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) played a crucial role behind the IAC movement.

A significant portion of the book is dedicated to the 'Delhi Model of Governance', dissecting its various aspects. The narrative intertwines the persona and popularity of Kejriwal with a governance model characterized by schemes the party touts as welfare initiatives, while critics label them as populist measures. The book also delves into the contentious liquor policy issue, which led to the arrest of the AAP's top brass, including Kejriwal, presenting the facts without passing judgement.

I have also focused on the AAP's political strategy and leadership beyond Delhi, particularly its rise in Punjab, where it secured its first state election victory outside the capital. This part also addresses the controversies surrounding the party, providing a balanced view of the issues and facts. The narrative pays homage to the thousands of grassroots cadres whose stories are woven into the fabric of the AAP's journey. Additionally, it explores the party's innovative use of media, drawing from my personal experiences with the AAP.

The book concludes with an analysis of the party's prospects, and delves into the 2025 Assembly elections, which Kejriwal has termed his *agni pariksha*. This final reflection encapsulates the blend of idealism and pragmatism that defines the AAP's journey, acknowledging both its significant strides and the complexities of governance it faces. Through this comprehensive exploration, the book aims to provide readers with a nuanced understanding of the AAP's impact on Indian politics.

Today, as the AAP stands tall as a national political force within just a decade, governing two states and establishing a

presence in four crucial others, there is an undeniable curiosity about its remarkable journey. While there are no comprehensive books documenting this odyssey from its inception, a few pivotal works have chronicled the AAP's meteoric rise in the political arena. In India, there exists a notable void in literature on contemporary political history, and the AAP is an integral part of this narrative. This book aims to fill that gap, offering a nuanced perspective on the party's evolution.

It is essential to acknowledge that although this book focuses on the AAP and its journey, it inevitably delves into significant political stories from various states and other political parties, all through the lens of the AAP's trajectory. By doing so, it not only charts the course of the AAP but also provides a broader understanding of the political landscape in which it operates.

I would like to add that as an associate fellow, I was appointed by the Delhi Legislative Assembly and not by any political party. I state unequivocally that this book does not disclose or refer to any official documents, reports, or outcomes of work prepared for the Legislative Assembly or the Government of Delhi.

Any references to my experience with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) are based solely on interactions and observations related to the party in its political capacity, and not in connection with any official or governmental function. Conversations or anecdotes involving AAP office bearers mentioned herein pertain exclusively to their role within the party and not as public representatives or government officials.

In my official capacity, I was accountable only to the Delhi Legislative Assembly and the office of the MLA or Minister to whom I was assigned. At no point did party functionaries who were not elected public representatives fall under my reporting hierarchy or official responsibilities.

It is important to clarify that any overlap between the government and the party referred to in this book is purely incidental and reflects the complex political realities of the time. None of the content herein draws upon or reveals confidential, classified, or internal work of the Delhi Government or Legislative Assembly.

Part 1

Origin Story

1

Anna vs Arvind

On 18 November 2024, my phone buzzed with a news notification informing me that the Delhi Transport and Environment Minister and senior AAP leader, Kailash Gahlot, had resigned from the party.¹ It was a news that felt like a jolt that reverberated through my thoughts. I had known Kailash Gahlot since 2015, the year he actively entered politics after contesting and winning from Najafgarh. A soft-spoken, dedicated individual, Gahlot had never veered from the directives of the AAP's high command. His work, particularly in revitalizing Delhi's transport infrastructure, had earned him widespread respect as a policymaker who prioritized action over rhetoric.

Eager to uncover more, I turned to X (formerly Twitter), where Gahlot's resignation letter had already ignited conversations. In the letter, he voiced his discontent, lamenting the erosion of the AAP's foundational values. Within a day of his resignation, Gahlot joined the BJP, sparking a storm of political speculation. Yet, for me, one line from his letter lingered: 'Challenges from within, to the very values that brought us together to AAP.'² He suggested that the AAP had lost the moral compass it once prided itself on.

This sentiment of shifting values is not new. Over a decade ago, Anna Hazare, the face of the IAC movement, had publicly declared his disillusionment with Kejriwal. Hazare accused him

of abandoning the original ideals of transparency and anti-corruption that had fuelled their movement. The movement that once stood as a symbol of ethical reform in politics seemed mired in ideological compromises and internal discord. Hazare said, 'It is obvious. Despite the rift, we have one single aim. This (rift) is not like (what happens with) political parties. He (Kejriwal) will go his way and I will go mine. I have always stated that I don't want to form a political party and contest elections. My path is different. I had made it clear at Jantar Mantar.'³

In Gahlot's resignation letter, another poignant detail stands out – the mention of 'personal ambition' within the AAP. This phrase resonates deeply, as it reflects a broader and more intricate narrative within the party's history. The friction caused by individual aspirations has not only shaped Gahlot's departure but also mirrors the ideological rift that once defined the relationship between Kejriwal and his mentor, Hazare.



There has been extensive writing on the IAC movement, detailing the roles of Hazare and Kejriwal and the formation of the AAP. However, what has always fascinated me is the relationship between Hazare and Kejriwal. The dynamic between the two is a subtle yet layered story of transformation. They were once a celebrated duo – *guru* and *shishya* – united in their crusade against corruption during the IAC movement. However, this camaraderie gradually eroded, giving way to a contentious relationship marked by disillusionment and discord. Hazare later became one of Kejriwal's most vocal critics, accusing him of abandoning the movement's ethos in favour of personal and political gain.

As I reflect on this complex history, the image of Hazare's pointed critiques lingers. His disappointment with Kejriwal's governance style is not just about policy differences but about a perceived betrayal of the moral foundation upon which their movement was built. To delve deeper into this evolving relationship, I turn to my notes from an enlightening conversation with Dhruv (name changed), who had witnessed these dynamics

unfold firsthand. I had the chance to meet Dhruv during the 2019 Lok Sabha election campaign. Through his insights, the tangled threads of ambition, ideology and betrayal begin to transform into a story of a partnership that once inspired millions but now stands as a cautionary tale of fractured ideals.

Dhruv, who resides in Canada, had come to Delhi for a family function and decided to attend some AAP rallies due to his old association with Hazare's movement.

Over a cup of tea at the Cha Bar in Connaught Place, Dhruv shared his insights with me. 'Arvind met Anna during the early 2000s, when the Right to Information protest was gaining momentum. At that time, several organizations across India were working on eradicating corruption and making the government accountable,' he recounted.

Dhruv explained that, during this period, Kejriwal was an Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer running an NGO named Parivartan. His efforts to expose corrupt IRS officers and his relentless work for the betterment of the slum dwellers in Sundar Nagri were well-known among activists. 'When Anna and Arvind met, they not only collaborated on RTI but also worked closely on drafting the Jan Lokpal Bill in later years. Anna had an aura but also an ego, and it was clear to us that Arvind was never very fond of Anna,' Dhruv said.

Dhruv mentioned that during the late 2000s, RTI activism peaked, and news of the murders of RTI activists and whistleblowers was rampant. Arvind Kejriwal, lawyer Prashant Bhushan, Supreme Court judge Santosh Hegde and former Law Minister Shanti Bhushan came together to draft a bill to protect whistleblowers and fight corruption. Shanti Bhushan had first proposed the draft Lokpal Bill in 1968, but it was not fully passed.

From late 2010 to early 2011, Kejriwal and others travelled state by state, discussing their plan to launch a mass movement against corruption and to pressurize the government to pass the Jan Lokpal Bill. Activists from Maharashtra suggested that Hazare could become the face of the movement, as he was already an anti-corruption crusader and a popular name in Maharashtra.

According to activists close to Kejriwal, he was initially hesitant to involve Hazare due to the latter's ego and straightforwardness. Kejriwal reached out to figures like Baba Ramdev, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and others to involve them in the anti-corruption movement because they had a huge following. But he was sure that they could not be the face of the IAC movement.⁴

It's essential to recognize that the IAC movement, which electrified the nation, was not originally conceived by Hazare but was largely the vision of Kejriwal. Before Kejriwal and his team approached Anna, there was no blueprint for such a large-scale anti-corruption campaign under Hazare's name. Kejriwal, with his organizational acumen and clarity of purpose, imagined a movement that could channel public frustration against systemic corruption into a force of change.

Kejriwal's ambitions were boundless, and he saw the IAC movement as the beginning of something transformative. In contrast, Hazare, rooted in Gandhian principles, approached the movement with a different mindset. For him, protests, fasting and grassroots agitation were the ultimate tools of moral persuasion – the measured and patient pathways to reform. This divergence in temperament and vision became evident as the movement progressed.



In order to grasp the breakdown between Hazare and Kejriwal, it's vital to revisit the chain of events that unravelled their once-solid camaraderie. Hazare's hunger strikes under the IAC banner comprised three notable fasts in 2011 (discussed in detail in the next chapter). The inaugural fast occurred in April, followed by another in July and culminated in a less successful one in December. The unyielding support and enthusiasm around the first two Delhi fasts gradually waned by the time they reached Mumbai (previously Bombay).

By early 2012, the discord within the IAC movement was publicly evident. Hazare, abandoning the IAC banner, embarked on a state-wide tour in Maharashtra.⁵ Despite the apparent

discord, neither Hazare nor Kejriwal openly opposed one another, maintaining a veneer of unity. However, the cracks became glaringly visible during a critical internal meeting of the IAC's core committee in Delhi.

During this period, predating the official announcement, whispers about Pranab Mukherjee being a potential presidential candidate under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) were rampant. In a bold move, Kejriwal – supported by his close-knit team including Manish Sisodia, Gopal Rai and Sanjay Singh – in an internal meeting of the core committee proposed that the IAC should stand against Mukherjee's candidacy, citing corruption allegations.⁶ Hazare, however, was blindsided by this proposal, which wasn't on the agenda and felt like an abrupt hijacking of the meeting's purpose. Reliable sources recount Hazare's public chastisement of Kejriwal, declaring that if the IAC took a stance against Mukherjee, he would dissociate from the movement. The meeting concluded in disarray.

Come April 2012, post this heated confrontation, Kejriwal, alongside Sanjay Singh, made an unanticipated sojourn to Himachal Pradesh, where the state was gearing up for its Assembly elections. 'We were startled when we heard about their presence in Himachal. Only a select few of Arvind's team were in the loop, leaving the core committee in the dark. When confronted, Arvind claimed Anna sent him to explore potential candidate support,' an insider remarked. However, according to the sources, when questioned, Hazare denied issuing any such instructions.

Upon their return, Kejriwal and his loyal associates – Prithvi Reddy, Mayank Gandhi, Manish Sisodia, Gopal Rai and Sanjay Singh, among others – clandestinely broached the idea of forming a political party. Kejriwal was acutely aware that Hazare would never endorse such a move, but he was resolute in his conviction that the time was ripe to venture into politics.

An insider revealed, 'Arvind indicated it was time to engage disenchanted IAC supporters and rally them. Surprisingly, his team also suggested refocusing leadership on Arvind and centralizing efforts on Delhi, as the Mumbai fasts and protests fizzled out.'

By mid-2012, it was clear that Kejriwal had outgrown his pretence of deference to Hazare. With grand designs in mind, those close to the movement sensed that a significant shift was imminent. In a dramatic turn, Kejriwal announced that he would be on an indefinite hunger strike from the end of July 2012.⁷ During the preparations, it became evident that Hazare had not been kept in the loop. Nevertheless, Kejriwal's team extended an olive branch, seeking Hazare's support. With little choice, Hazare accepted, aware that outright refusal could mean ceding leadership of the IAC movement to Kejriwal.

An incident during this period offers insight into the brewing betrayal felt by Hazare. He agreed to support the strike on the condition that placards denouncing Pranab Mukherjee be removed. He added that he would join the fast later to allow the government time to act on their demands, which included probes against then Prime Minister (PM) Manmohan Singh and other cabinet ministers. Hazare joined the fast on the fourth day, but insiders noted Kejriwal's irritation. In the protest rally, the placards and banners against Mukherjee were removed by team Kejriwal. But suddenly, in a fiery speech upon Hazare's arrival, Kejriwal condemned Mukherjee, further deepening the rift.⁸

Kejriwal then distributed copies of his book, *Swaraj*, calling for a total revolution – a thinly veiled reference to forming a political party. The message was unmistakable: Kejriwal was now steering the IAC and Hazare's influence was waning. Many viewed this move as typical of Kejriwal: use someone until they were no longer needed.

This fast seemed orchestrated to pit Kejriwal directly against the government. Insiders believed the script was predetermined. When Kejriwal's health began to fail, he remained obstinate about ending the fast. It was then that his confidant, Yogendra Yadav, reached out to civil society figures, drafting a letter urging Kejriwal to consider forming a political alternative rather than succumbing to hunger. The seeds of a political party were sown on 3 August 2012. While Hazare opposed the idea, he begrudgingly supported the notion of a political alternative.

An insider commented, 'Arvind was poised to launch a political party, but Anna ji was attempting to manipulate the situation. Arvind conducted an opinion poll following Anna ji's directives, which showed public support for a new party. Anna ji rejected the poll and suggested forming a panel of prominent civil society figures for their opinion. Again, the majority endorsed Arvind.'

According to the insiders, the decisive fracture came when Kejriwal convened a panel of 42 prominent figures – including Kiran Bedi, Santosh Hegde, Yogendra Yadav and V.K. Singh. On 19 September, only six (this includes Bedi, Singh and Hegde, among others) of the 42 members opposed the formation of a party. Hazare stormed out, declaring he would disassociate from the movement if a political party was formed, and insisting that his name and image not be used. The schism between Kejriwal and Hazare became public and has persisted ever since.⁹

A key question about the genesis of the AAP is: Why did Anna Hazare refuse to support Arvind Kejriwal's idea of turning the movement into a political force? Was it ego that divided them, or were they simply disillusioned in different ways, driven by their own restless ambitions?

The IAC movement had shaken the Congress-led government to its core, forcing it to engage in discussions with the movement's leaders. Hazare seemed to believe that the movement's impact would fade into irrelevance if they abandoned their non-political stance, while Kejriwal, ever the pragmatist, recognized that real change would require political power – power that could only be wielded from within the system.

A senior member of the AAP, who spoke to me on condition of anonymity, offered a candid reflection on those turbulent times:

It's been a decade since we first met Anna Hazare. When we were forming AAP and Anna refused to support us, we thought he was being stubborn, impractical. But now, standing where we are today, I see the difference between Arvind and Anna was flexibility. Anna was a man of

unyielding ideals, unwilling to compromise even an inch. But look at him now – he’s being used by political leaders in Maharashtra for their own ends.

He paused thoughtfully before continuing, his voice steady yet reflective.

Arvind was relentless, but not for the sake of accolades or authority. His drive wasn’t about earning a title or sitting in a plush office. It was something deeper – a burning hunger to transform the ideals of the IAC movement into tangible change. He saw what others didn’t: that without a political framework, the movement’s fire would burn out. The energy, the passion, the unity of people from all walks of life – brought together by the hope of a corruption-free India – would dissipate. They’d return to their routines, their struggles, their personal ambitions. And all that would remain of the IAC would be the memory of an extraordinary uprising, a ‘what-if’ etched in history.

He paused again, as if measuring the weight of his words, and then continued: ‘Arvind understood the cost of inaction. He realized that movements, no matter how powerful, are fleeting without an anchor in governance. His leap into politics wasn’t a betrayal of the movement – it was, in his eyes, its natural evolution. Without it, the ideals of the IAC would be nothing more than whispers lost to time.’

He said that the people who were part of the movement understood Hazare’s ideology and respected it, but also knew that if they didn’t act, the opportunity would be lost forever. He said:

Kejriwal wasn’t willing to lose that momentum. That’s why AAP was born. Today, when Anna criticizes Arvind and the party, it hurts each one of us who were part of the IAC. But we also understand, we never held it against him. He chose his path, and we chose ours. In the end,