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Digital Politics in the Diaspora: Aam Aadmi Party UK supporters on and offline

Martin Webb

Abstract

In 2012 the Aam Aadmi (common man) Party (AAP) made its debut on the Indian political scene on a platform promoting ethical politics, anti-corruption action and active citizenship. Inspired by the AAP's call to "change politics" many Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) in the UK Indian diaspora joined an international network of groups that provided support for the party in subsequent successful election campaigns. This article follows the ways in which digital media played a key role in the formation of intense individual attachments to the party, and how, for some, it became the means through which disillusionment with the party and its project was expressed. By attending to digital politics in the Indian diaspora as it plays out in this relatively recent political formation, we can gain a new perspective on the circulations, connections and class values through which post-liberalization projects to reform the nation are worked on from beyond its borders.

Keywords: Indian diaspora, Aam Aadmi Party, digital politics, anti-corruption activism, social media networks

In this article, I draw upon research carried out with supporters of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the UK Indian diaspora between 2013 and 2016. Formed in 2012, AAP is a relatively recent entrant on the Indian political scene and support for the party from Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), particularly in America and Europe, has played a significant role in the party's sometimes spectacularly successful election campaigns.

Here I will focus on two aspects of the NRI activist experience of digital participation in party activities. The first involves the work of activists, particularly during election campaigns, who participate both alone and in networked teams in the everyday tasks of monitoring mainstream and social media coverage of the party, producing and sharing content about their activities and participating in the party's global calling campaigns. These cyber volunteers see their role as counters to the well-funded and organized social media campaigns of the opposition parties, in particular the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Rebutting attacks in the comments sections of online news reports and sharing videos of speeches by party leaders via Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp become part of everyday mobile phone and home computer usage. Accounts of the time and effort devoted to this work reveal how AAP supporters in the diaspora bring ethnic, and particularly class, identities into play as part of their online and offline projects to mobilize support for the party and 'change politics' in India.

The second explores the role of digital media when some supporters become disappointed with what they see as the party's inability to deliver a new kind of politics and begin to criticize the party or seek to disengage from it. I look at two examples in which committed activists' faith in the party fails. In one, the activist turns to YouTube to criticize the party. In the other, digital engagement with the party via twitter at first provides an avenue through which to express disillusionment. However, a social media backlash from party supporters follows and the activist's personal commitment to transparency, openness and

building networks that they have sustained over their years of activism is transformed into a wish for anonymity and disconnection.

My attention to the support for the AAP in the Indian diaspora is informed by an existing literature on diasporic politics and long-distance ethno-nationalism by scholars of transnationalism and globalization (Mathew and Prashad 2000; Rajagopal 2000; Mukta 2000; Moorti 2005; Kinnvall and Svensson 2010; Conversi 2012; Zavos 2015). This literature has helped us to think about the circuits and events through which NRIs play a part in political projects to reimagine India, particularly those of Hindu nationalism, and about the emergence of a globalized Indian middle class which is concerned with the preservation of Indian ‘culture’ and national integrity.

Here, in contrast to the focus on the reproduction of an ethno-nationalist politics of Hindutva, I look at the ways in which AAP-UK supporters in the diaspora imagine a *pan-Indian* concept of the nation which is framed on the one hand by a moral politics of self-sacrifice and activist commitment that deploys the iconography of the freedom struggle against colonial domination, and on the other by the inclusive idea of the nation framed in the Indian constitution. This imagination of the nation contains a narrative which blames establishment politics for rampant corruption and the disintegration of the post-independence national development project (see Udupa 2019). The figure of the *aam aadmi*, the common person who has suffered enough and can act as an individual moral agent in concert with others, is offered as an alternative to participation in politics as usual and allows for people with diverse social, religious and political identities to associate themselves with the project for change. Thus, the AAP-UK emerges as a broad church which can appeal to a diversity of Indian identities within the UK diaspora, albeit one which is shaped by the worldview and concerns of middle class NRI professionals. It is arguable that the emergence of the AAP in the UK diaspora has been partly facilitated by the similarity between its anti-corruption and governance reform message

and that of the BJP. Both appeal to middle class Indian discourses about the ‘dirty river’ of politics (Harriss 2005) and the possibility of good governance. In this sense the imagined India of many AAP-UK supporters, if not necessarily the intellectual leaders of the party in Delhi, was perhaps not so very distant in policy terms from the BJP’s 2014 electoral pitch of incorruptible leadership, development and “minimum government, maximum governance”.

For NRI professionals however, not comfortable on the one hand with the ethno-nationalist politics of the BJP, and on the other with a Congress party discredited by corruption scandals, the AAP offered an anti-establishment alternative with a positive agenda for change. This interest was then activated through the other clear difference between the AAP and the established national parties in India. That was the ‘extraordinary agency’ (Roy 2014, 46) which the party offered to activists to build a movement through the performance of individual and collective forms of active citizenship, to be the underdog struggling against a well-organized and funded opposition. For AAP supporters in the diaspora digital connections offered a means through which to participate in and reproduce party action spaces in the UK. Working through digital connections AAP UK supporters could imagine themselves as active citizens with a global reach, able, perhaps, to participate in remaking India from beyond its borders and empowered by new media platforms, professional knowledge and their status as NRIs.

The Origins of the Aam Aadmi Party

To understand the politics and aesthetics of the Aam Aadmi Party, it is necessary to introduce the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement from which the AAP broke away in 2012. Operating through idioms and aesthetics of ‘saintly politics’ (see Morris-Jones 1963) the IAC reflected both the history of non-party political action in India (Kothari 1984) and the waves of anti-corruption action connecting grassroots political movements to middle class concerns

about good governance that had emerged in India since the 1990s (Jenkins 2007). IAC activist discourse understood electoral politics as part of a corrupt nexus between politicians, public officials and business interests that betrayed the aims of the original movement for independence from colonial rule. Styling itself as a second freedom movement and deploying nationalist imagery, activists gathered behind the figurehead of the veteran social activist Anna Hazare (see Chowdhury, Banerjee, and Nagarkoti 2017). The series of spectacular protests demanding anti-corruption legislation staged by the IAC across 2011-12 (see Pinney 2014; Webb 2014; Bornstein and Sharma 2016), were made all the more forceful by being contemporary with the “Arab Spring” (Werbner, Webb, and Spellman-Poots 2014).

Less public were the organizational efforts behind the protests, in particular the use of ICTs and social media strategies to publicize events, build networks and share material such as memes and videos (Udupa 2015, 210; Webb 2014; Lal 2017). The IAC organizers’ strategy recognized both the increasing penetration of smartphone and computer-based participation in social media platforms such as Facebook, and the much wider use by the lower middle and working classes of more basic mobile phones which only allowed users to call and send SMS messages. Gaining followers and likes on social media was important, but equally so were campaigns encouraging people to make a “missed call” to an IAC number to show support without incurring connection charges. This allowed the IAC organizers to build a database of phone numbers of potential supporters reported to be as many as 14 million (Sharma 2014).

The progress of the IAC movement was followed keenly within the global Indian diaspora. NRI networks became involved in social media campaigns and there were protest gatherings at Indian embassies in a number of countries, including the UK. When the IAC organizing committee split in 2012 with a faction led by Arvind Kejriwal forming the Aam Aadmi Party and contesting elections on an anti-corruption platform, a significant number of

IAC supporters in the diaspora followed. Many agreed that the lack of success of the non-party political action of the IAC movement could only be overcome by entering electoral politics.

The AAP also drew in new supporters who had been skeptical of the IAC movement's approach. As Padmini, an NRI software engineer and AAP activist in her thirties working in London told me, during an interview in 2014, her husband had been a keen follower of the IAC in 2011 but she had seen it as a waste of time as it did not offer an alternative for voters. When Kejriwal announced the formation of the AAP she volunteered enthusiastically. Padmini's account of attraction to the political possibility of the new party after the IAC movement was repeated by other AAP UK supporters that I interviewed in the UK, such as Fahima and Farooq, a young Muslim couple from Andhra Pradesh working in the UK in IT roles. Speaking to them during the 2014 national election campaign, Farooq told me that he had not been tempted to join the IAC because it had made no progress. But he had followed Kejriwal very closely online and through videos posted on social media. When the AAP was formed, he and Farooq quickly became involved.

Engagement with the new party then was bolstered by a narrative about the failure of the earlier movement and the transfer of focus onto a new leader and moral authority figure, Arvind Kejriwal, and a new leadership team. Within the diaspora it also involved interaction with interested others through a variety of online and offline encounters, and through the consumption and production of the party's digital offering. It is to accounts of these digital engagements that I will now turn.

Cyber Volunteers

The majority of the AAP UK supporters I encountered belonged to a globally mobile workforce of middle class 'techno-professionals' (Mathew and Prashad 2000, 520; also see Fuller and

Narasimhan 2007; Xiang 2008; Fernandes 2000) with a range of citizenship statuses. Some were settled in the UK as family units and had held UK citizenship for many years. Some were male workers spending long periods working on contracts in the UK but with wives and children living with their extended families in India. Other volunteers were connected to higher education as postgraduate students or academics, or worked as medical professionals in the UK's National Health Service. In any case, access to and familiarity with digital devices and processes was a common factor and volunteers' mobility and the digitally mediated political space that AAP-UK supporters were co-producing became entangled with their family, social and working lives. For these people sojourning (Bonacich 1973, 585) in the UK the AAP supporters network acted not just as a political activity but also provided friendship and, in some cases, accommodation while working away from home. The network also facilitated business and other work opportunities between party supporters, some of which have endured after connection to the party lapsed.

As information sheets for potential volunteers circulated by the AAP-UK conveners around the time of the 2014 national election campaign show IT skills were seen as a key part of the contribution that volunteers might make. These included participating in teams which would adopt state level campaigns and provide support to 'on the ground' volunteers in specific constituencies. Volunteers were called upon to join teams offering web and database management, app building, video editing, technology logistic support and 'HR/volunteer' coordination which mirror the team based but flexible, self-directed and mobile working practices of the global IT services industry (Upadhyia and Vasavi 2008). 'Local NRI' teams from different parts of the globe adopted different states with the UK team taking on Kerala, Punjab and Maharashtra, sometimes in concert with NRI teams from other locations, such as the 'Middle East' or Canada. The choice of locations also partly reflected the predominance of specific diasporic populations and language communities, such as Punjabi Sikhs, within the

UK and other countries. This focus also fed into the ‘calling campaigns’ in which NRI supporters would cold call potential AAP supporters in India. These took on particular significance as a form of volunteer labor with UK teams taking part in international competitions with teams around the globe to see who could log the most calls via an ‘online portal’ designed by AAP volunteers in the US.

The database of phone numbers used for the calling campaigns was initially comprised of contact details of IAC supporters collected during the movement’s campaigns to persuade potential supporters to make a no cost ‘missed call’ to an IAC number to show support and via SMS and social media campaigns across 2011-12. Controversially these numbers had been retained by the AAP media team when it had split from the IAC (see Sharma 2014) and the team continued with the strategies developed during the IAC movement to further build a support base (see Lal 2017).

Total Called Overall: 66653

Total Called Today: 30660

BY COUNTRY			BY STATE			BY CITY		
#	Caller	Calls	#	Caller	Calls	#	Caller	Calls
1	INDIA	29236	1	CALIFORNIA	7378	1	NEW DELHI	3672
2	UNITED STATES	20733	2	DELHI	6707	2	BANGALORE	3026
3	CANADA	5822	3	MAHARASHTRA	4932	3	DELHI	3014
4	UNITED KINGDOM	2565	4	TEXAS	4315	4	MUMBAI	2432
5	AUSTRALIA	2026	5	ONTARIO	3642	5	MISSISSAUGA	2233
6	SINGAPORE	1131	6	KARNATAKA	3179	6	GURGAON	2209
7	KUWAIT	863	7	ENGLAND	2479	7	HOUSTON	1971
8	JAPAN	773	8	TAMIL NADU	2464	8	FREMONT	1915
9	MALAYSIA	720	9	WASHINGTON	2322	9	LONDON	1603
10	NEW ZEALAND	508	10	WEST BENGAL	2117	10	HYDERABAD	1597

BY TEAM		
#	Caller	Calls
1	us4AAP	3576

(Fig 1. A call campaign leader board used to encourage AAP volunteers during the 2015 Delhi Assembly election campaign showing numbers of calls and call locations logged through the online portal. Original source <http://emc3.aamaadmiparty.org/index.php>)

As well as working together, teams from different areas and countries would also meet online via video conferencing platforms such as Google Hangouts. As part of the 2014 election campaign I gathered with AAP UK supporters and teams based in Canada and America for an online meeting with Yogendra Yadav, then a leading figure in the AAP, in which he congratulated them on their hard work for the party. While we stood in a room in East London interacting with Yadav via a webcam link, the teams in the US and Canada appeared in smaller screens in the corners of the picture indicating to party supporters both the international level of the effort and their collective ability to work across time zones and provide round the clock support.

On a visit to Fahima and Farooq's apartment in East London during the 2014 Lok Sabha election campaign the role of the digital in connecting them to events in India was made evident by the number of devices, cables and chargers spread across the table in the living room. Two laptops, back to back on the table, were connected to AAP Facebook and YouTube accounts and their smartphones were always in hand, buzzing with updates and memes shared across Twitter and WhatsApp groups. Fahima explained how caught up their daily lives had become with the party's media streams

Every day after coming home while we are cooking, we start some videos of the Aam Aadmi Party which say what is happening. So, we keep up to date that way. [...] Any channel which gives the interview of Arvind [Kejriwal], immediately we get updated on Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter. We are just thriving to come home to look at those videos (laughs).

I asked about the labor involved in supporting the party. Farooq spoke passionately about the need to counter the mainstream media accounts of the AAP in the run-up to the election by connecting directly to people in India via phone calls and social media. He echoed an assertion

that I had heard before from AAP-UK supporters that the need for commitment to this work was made all the more pressing because of the belief that they were up against a well-funded BJP digital media campaign. Farooq assured me that

‘Narendra Modi [...] he has got one office in Hyderabad and that is a 500-crore project with the big CCTVs, with big televisions and big monitors. There are some 13 hundred people in that team and the job of those 13 hundred people is to counter people on social media.’

In this battle the AAP’s teams were clearly the underdogs, but still, here was a sphere in which the diaspora could take an active role in campaigning alongside their busy professional lives.

He went on to tell me about his daily routine from getting up early in the morning to cold call people in particular constituencies using numbers provided by logging into the online portal. After that he would leave for work but would continue to monitor and share posts across twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp. Connecting to AAP activists on the ground in Andhra Pradesh, his home state, and organizers in the global network he would attempt to assist with logistical problems activists might be having in sourcing campaign materials such as caps or stickers.

Like other AAP UK activists I encountered Fahima and Farooq were particularly busy at election times logging into the AAP database containing the contact numbers of potential supporters in India and calling to encourage people to vote and volunteer. In order to make these cold calls effective they felt that they had to keep as up to date as possible with media events concerning the party. The calling work was not easy. Fahima said that at one point she had spent so many hours calling India that one of her ears had started bleeding. Many volunteers I spoke to believed that the calling work they did was particularly effective because of their NRI status. As Fahima put it:

‘It’s like a ripple effect. When we call one they [the party] say it is like calling to ten because a call from an NRI is always a privileged one, even today in India. They feel it’s a privilege if somebody is calling from London or America and feel really excited and happy.’

What Fahima and Farooq and other AAP-UK supporters are doing is familiar from accounts of the involvement of diasporic populations in long distance nationalism as migrants, in this case mobile IT professionals, seek ways in which they can help what they perceive as the struggling home nation (Mathew and Prashad 2000; Jones 2014). In the political action space that they have created in their home they participate in the ‘online nation-talk’ that Udupa (2019) has identified as a site of contest between post-Nehruvian liberals and Hindu nationalists in which varying aspirations for a ‘new India’ defined by ideas of clean government and technological modernity are debated. The service they perform for the party is to try to persuade others that the human and natural capital immanent in the nation has been held back by the misrule of the established national political parties and could at last be released from the drag of corruption and communal politics by a new political movement. For Fahima and the other AAP-UK volunteers, educated and successful NRI professionals working for the party are embodiments of the human potential of the nation and thus imagined to be influential.

For some volunteers, bearing witness to their involvement with the AAP online the challenge was not so much dealing with attacks from political opponents but rather criticism from friends and family. Soman, an IT consultant from Andhra Pradesh in his mid-thirties who had been in the UK since 2004, told me that he had never been involved in politics before he started supporting the AAP. He was from a Hindu family but had non-Hindu friends and had attended a Muslim college. He also had a strong memory of feeling threatened by BJP workers visiting his house when he was a boy to collect donations for the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya and of his father’s refusal to give money, to any party. Though while he mistrusted political parties,

he had always been very patriotic, he said, and had warned his future wife about this when they were introduced. As he became involved in the AAP and started posting about it on Facebook, he lost many online friends. People also questioned his wife online about why he had become involved in politics, ‘this dirty thing’. His continuing, and very public, commitment to the AAP became a something of an embarrassment to his family, but due to the potential for national renewal that he saw in both the AAP and the leadership of Arvind Kejriwal, he had sustained his engagement both online and in time consuming offline organizational work and recruiting drives such as the AAP-UK Flame of Hope tour of UK cities (see Flame Of Hope AAP-UK 2015).

As we can see from these accounts of volunteer labor and attachment to the party, what drives these activists is the sense that established politics is broken but the non-party political formations of Indian civil society, here represented by the IAC movement, while laudable and necessary, are not sufficient to effect change. As one of the leading figures in the AAP UK supporters’ group, often argued the AAP would “change politics” through leading by example and linking a strong ethical and moral stance in election campaigns to individual volunteer action on and offline. Inevitably this process has not been straightforward and its working through has had significant impacts on both the party and its supporters. It is this emphasis on the party’s ability to change politics, and the fall outs caused by it that take us to the next section.

Sojourning, Returning and Falling Out

Srirupa Roy has written compellingly about the ways in which the AAP’s electoral campaigns have provided ‘action spaces’ through which volunteers can enact their citizenship, exercise agency and become ‘agents of transformational politics’ (2014, 51). She describes how

important participating in outreach activities became for AAP activists in India in the run up to the 2013 Delhi assembly elections and the pedagogical mission that many educated AAP activists felt they had to educate voters, particularly the urban poor, about the problem of corruption. As we have seen from the examples above for AAP-UK supporters, and others in the global diaspora, digital spaces were very significant in terms of action and outreach. Action and engagement with the public in India was effected through the maintenance and use of a digital infrastructure inherited from the IAC and developed further by AAP activists, and the pedagogical mission partly fulfilled through person to person connections during the calling campaigns.

For many AAP-UK supporters it was also important to participate ‘on the ground’. A number of them visited India during election campaigns to volunteer and I encountered some of them in Delhi in 2013 before the Delhi assembly elections in which the AAP achieved its first success in the polls. A member of the group called Jainath, a man in his late 70s who had been settled in the UK since the 1950s but regularly returned to India to do voluntary work, was particularly celebrated for his street campaigning work in Delhi and featured in AAP-UK YouTube posts of the time (Aam Aadmi Party UK 2014). Some volunteers returned to Delhi to take up temporary office roles in specific teams that they had been working in remotely from the UK. For example, in the vigilance ‘cell’, led by one of the party’s leading figures, Prashant Bhushan, which vetted prospective AAP candidates by investigating allegations of impropriety and corruption. Some activists saw the possibility of an AAP government after the 2014 national election as a signal to end their sojourns in the UK as skilled professional migrants and return to serve the nation. However, the AAP won only 4 seats in Punjab in the face of an unprecedented BJP landslide in that election and so, unfortunately, some returns were put on hold. When volunteers did return to India to help though, as with Jainath, the evidence of their

commitment would be recorded, shared and folded back into the party's social media feeds to be promoted by AAP supporters in the UK.

Another example is the case of Kundan, an IT worker who I had met at the first AAP-UK event that I attended in west London in the summer of 2013. Kundan returned 'permanently' to India later in 2013 with the best wishes of his AAP-UK friends. A Facebook post from the time shows him smiling, standing at an airport in the UK draped in the Indian flag and wearing an AAP cap. The accompanying text congratulates him on his 'transformation' from IAC activist to AAP supporter and now on his return to India to be a 'true soldier on the ground'. The post celebrates the 'lakhs of rupees' that Kundan had donated and raised for the party, even at times when he faced hardship himself, and in particular notes the donation of a blue Maruti WagonR car to the party, which had belonged to his wife in Delhi. The WagonR is a modest automobile and this one had gone on to become famous in its own right when Arvind Kejriwal started using it as his Chief Ministerial car, a symbol of his common touch and lack of ostentation, rather than accept a government vehicle.

Apart from one chance encounter during election campaigning in Delhi in late 2013, I didn't see Kundan again until the summer of 2015. But in the meantime, he had fallen out with the party very publicly. The initial euphoria at AAPs debut success in the 2013 Delhi assembly election had been tempered by the feeling that the party had overreached itself in the Lok Sabha election of 2014. As the party geared up to recontest the Delhi Assembly elections in 2015 divisions had started to emerge about the ways in which candidates were chosen, in particular over the focus on "winnability". That is, a candidate being chosen for their ability to command votes, perhaps through muscle power and influence, in a particular constituency (see Price and Ruud 2012), rather than for their ethical leadership and probity. In the news media these disputes were partly played out in the drama of the expulsion from the party in April 2015 of Yogendra Yadav and Prashant Bhushan, both leading intellectual figures within the AAP who

broke away to form a new movement, Swaraj Abhiyan, and later a new political party, Swaraj India¹. For many volunteers in India and in the UK the AAP project seemed to have lost its moral compass. Rather than seeking to “change politics” it appeared to have taken up political business as usual in the search for power.

In early April of 2015 Kundan had become so dissatisfied with the direction of the party that he posted a series of tweets in which, among other things, he had asked for the WagonR to be returned to him. Kundan later said that he had not actually expected the car to be returned, only that he wished to express his frustration. But the car had gained symbolic significance far beyond its material value as an emblem of Arvind Kejriwal’s commitment to ascetic simplicity. Thus, Kundan’s request was eagerly reported across the news media. He submitted to the attention of the cameras and was briefly famous. The backlash on social media from party supporters was immediate and intense. So, overwhelming that within a month or two Kundan had returned to the UK with his family.

I met up with him to discuss these events in July 2015. Sitting together underneath the Brutalist towers of the Barbican in London he told me how the exposure had affected him. He had withdrawn from any digital connection to the party and closed his social media accounts as the abuse had become too much. He had even feared for his and his family’s safety. Referring to the deaths of Right to Information campaigners and whistleblowers who had exposed corruption and wrongdoing in political parties, he said that he and his family feared the power that politicians had to do harm. That he even suggested this possibility in relation to Kejriwal and the AAP was a sign of the depth of his disappointment with the party. He seemed quite shattered by the experience. Perhaps the hardest aspect of the affair for him to bear he said was the embarrassment at having been such an avid supporter of the party and having spent so much effort persuading others to support and donate funds. I asked if he was interested in following Yadav and Bhushan, and some of his fellow AAP-UK supporters into the Swaraj Abhiyan. He

said no, no more politics, he had had his ‘hands burnt’, although he remained committed to the core principle that corruption was holding India back. Kundan was not alone. Other AAP-UK activists also disengaged from the party at this time suspicious of its selection of candidates and concerned about the party’s attitude to transparency. While some chose to withdraw quietly, others felt compelled to actively express their dissatisfaction by posting critical videos and comments on social media. Jainath, the retired party supporter who had been celebrated on the AAP-UK YouTube feed for his commitment to campaigning began to publish videos online in which he expressed his extreme disillusionment with the party’s leadership, Arvind Kejriwal in particular, repeating demands that supporters should not donate to the party until a full list of donations is posted on the party’s website. AAP HQ in Delhi, which administered the AAP-UK Facebook account, responded to the growing online criticism in digital form by resetting the page and deleting the timeline of AAP-UK posts in the process. It was as if the party, represented on the ballot paper by an image of a broom, had swept clean part of its digital archive to prepare the space for the emergence of what an ongoing AAP-UK supporter, appropriately using the language of digital technology, described to me as ‘AAP 2.0’ (personal communication 2018).

Conclusion

What can we learn then from these accounts of digital engagement with anti-corruption politics in the diaspora? The AAP UK supporters appear enmeshed in digital circulations in two senses. First, as actors involved in the global circulation of text, images and narratives that comprise the ‘techno-moral’ rhetoric of the party (Bornstein and Sharma 2016) and offer a site through which action and personal ethical commitment can be demonstrated, and second, in many cases, as sojourning techno-professionals whose own global labor circulations are linked to the emergence of digital capitalism and the identities and hierarchies created by it. In these stories of intense attachment to a cause facilitated by digital media, AAP UK supporters do not just

passively follow events but become actively involved in producing and recirculating content for their movement. In the process they refashion themselves as the *aam aadmi*, an ordinary, but active and engaged, citizen of India working to remake the nation from beyond its borders. At the same time, however, it is their identity as a *khas* (special) category of person/citizen, the educated, techno-professional, globally mobile NRI, that is presented as the factor that makes them particularly valuable to the party. This value is expressed instrumentally, as in the skillsets, system knowledge and team working practices that techno-professionals are imagined to bring to activist work, and discursively as NRI activists appear as aspirational avatars of India's techno-modernity and global influence. Activities such as the international calling campaigns reflect both the class hierarchies found in contemporary global India and those implicit in the moral-pedagogical outreach missions to slum neighborhoods organized by middle class AAP activists during election campaigns in India (see Roy 2014, 51). In this sense, as Roy finds in AAP campaigning in India, the AAP-UK supporters group does not easily prefigure (Maeckelbergh 2011, 4) a future India free from hierarchy in the way that the use of the term *aam aadmi* suggests.

The emergence of digital communication, and more recently social media, over the last two decades makes political participation possible in a way that it was not with earlier forms of long-distance nationalism. As Conversi notes for the phenomenon of “Yankee Hindutva”², the virtual connectedness of diasporic techno-professionals to radical political formations in their home country is partly facilitated by self-introspection related to loneliness and a search for community (Conversi 2012, 1362). This is a sentiment familiar to me from my conversations with AAP-UK supporters and indicates the ways in which the connections and affects that underpin other forms of diasporic nationalism are present in global AAP supporter networks. In this sense the AAP-UK is not unusual as a form of digitally mediated long-distance nationalism but remains a very useful site through which to explore alternative

understandings of pan-Indian nationalism, in counterpoint to the focus in the literature on diasporic Hindutva. In many ways the AAP-UK supporters are similar to their diasporic Hindutva supporting counterparts in the UK (see Zavos 2015) in terms of the reproduction of values and hierarchies based in discourses of pan-Indian class morality, moral and ethical reform of the state and society, and the imposition of streamlined and disciplined forms of governance (see Udupa 2014). In that respect it is worth noting that some ex AAP-UK supporters from Hindu backgrounds are now happy to support the BJP prime minister Narendra Modi as a strong leader with a positive agenda for governance reform while remaining suspicious of the party machine that he leads and of Indian politics in general. And yet as a whole, AAP-UK supporters did, and still do, express opposition to the politics of communalism and in this sense, they do promote a politics which recognizes regional and religious differences subsumed under a greater pan Indian identity. Even as AAP-UK supporters negotiate regional and religious diasporic identities and spaces in the UK, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Punjabi, Bengali or Gujarati perhaps, the strength of the AAP-UK is that it offers a space, on and offline, in which these different identities are performed as equal. Perhaps more to the point is that located in the diaspora and very often working as techno-professionals what the AAP-UK supporters have in common is their class position as NRIs and the values that this places in education, professional qualifications, relative wealth, citizenship and mobility.

Finally, there is the way in which digital mediation allows supporters a connection with the party both as consumers of party produced content and as participants in on and offline interactions. Utilizing digital platforms activists can inhabit a political space, an interactive ‘media-scape’ (Appadurai 1996, 33) perhaps, in which they are active co-producers, whether this be attending an event at which a digital meeting with a party leader will be the highlight, or in the everyday work of sharing, and commenting ‘below the line’ on, mainstream media reports of events. As Bennet and Segerberg argue for movements such as Occupy, and the 15M

in Spain, the ideal of the aam aadmi provides an ‘action frame’ that can circulate globally when shared as personal stories across social media platforms (2012, 742). This work can bind supporters to the movement but also, as we see in the case of Kundan, can very quickly be used by those who, disillusioned, wish to speak out against the party, and in turn used to punish them for their transgression. Digital politics then is a means through which AAP supporters can practice political engagement and reimagine themselves as active citizens but also acts as a terrain on which morality and ethics are actively contested.

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¹ The detail of the arguments that led to the expulsion of Yadav and Bhushan and of the many accusations and counteraccusations of treachery, dictatorial leadership by Kejriwal, and moral failings by AAP candidates are too complicated to go into here.

² Ethno-nationalism amongst 'Hindu-Americans' in the US in support of political parties and non-governmental organisations pursuing a Hindu nationalist agenda