

DID ARVIND KEJRIWAL GIFT POWER TO THE WRONG PEOPLE?

Written by

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When India Against Corruption activist Arvind Kejriwal tore up electricity bills and reconnected the power connection of Banna Ram, he said he was fighting for the poor, for the aam aadmi. He chose Banna Ram carefully - a daily wage labourer who got a seemingly outrageous bill of Rs. 15,000 which seemed high by any standards. But is it really so?

When NDTV visited Banna Ram's house in Ambedkar Colony, his family told them that Kejriwal learnt of their plight after they made a call to his helpline number. IAC flyers were all over Ambedkar colony and when Banna Ram's inability to pay the bill resulted in disconnection, they called the number on his flyer. Next thing they knew, Kejriwal brought the entire media jamboree to their house. They are thankful they have their lights back but are also defensive about whether they are poor enough to stand media scrutiny.

"Now the media also landed up at where Banna Ramji worked, to see whether he is really a daily wage labourer," said his niece Manisha. Her aunt had switched off the three coolers in their home when NDTV walked in. And they objected when we took pictures of the three split air conditioners that were in the adjoining house. "Then you'll say we have ACs in our house too," they said.

Banna Ram and his 20 family members don't have an AC but they do have at least 3 coolers and 2 washing machines along with four television sets. The four TV sets are for each of the four brothers in the family. The washing machines don't work because of the shortage of power and one was part of the dowry that came into the family. When asked about their income, they said- "Their are five incomes but four aren't regular because they are daily wagers," said Manisha, whose brother added the fifth income as a salesperson. Daily wage income was Rs. 300 per day but they didn't have steady work.

While the Rs. 15,000 bill was extraordinarily high, the family had been paying an average bill of Rs. 3000 before that. When the tariffs were raised by 25 per cent recently, it went to seven thousand rupees which they had difficulty in paying and got loans to pay and then finally the amount which they couldn't pay. "Before we found a way to pay the bill but now we couldn't," they said. Their relative who lives two houses away hasn't been lucky enough to get Kejriwal's help so they've had no power for three months and rely on Banna Ram for their water needs. They say even they'll vote for Kejriwal and not Sheila if he comes around and connects their wires too.

(Report by NDTV)