Reconfiguring of Power Politics in Arvind Kejriwal's *Swaraj*

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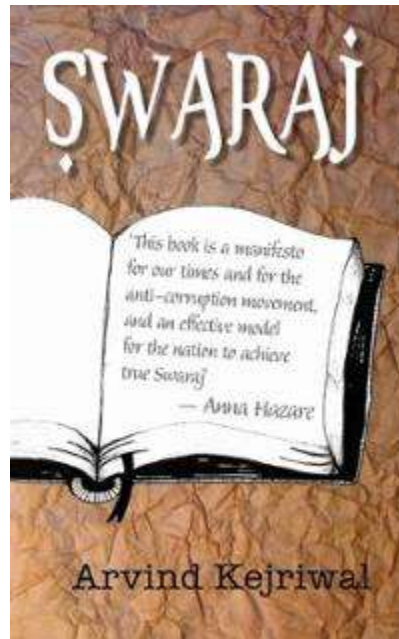
Courtesy: http://www.tower.com/swaraj-arvind-kejriwal-paperback/wapi/123410015

Despicable Situation Calls for Resolution

The preamble of our Constitution starts with the words "WE THE PEOPLE OF INDIA"; the basis for the inclusion of these words in our Constitution was the fact that the struggle of the people of India led to the independence of our nation from the deadly grasp of the British Rule. Now, since independence is solely acquired by the people of India after a long struggle and great sacrifices, it is their legitimate right to participate in governance directly along with their representatives.

It is inherent in all human beings to struggle for acquiring all human rights for peaceful and amicable co-existence being members of a civilized society. Mere inclusion of provisions of human rights in any political or legal system is not enough for sustenance. In a situation where people are dying of hunger or without money for treatment to save their lives, can we say that

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they are availing the right to life in real sense? So, enforcement of all such rights including the right to good governance at the apex with transparency in governance is a sine qua non for the benefit of humanity. But the situation as on date is far from reality.

Continuing Poverty

Even after more than six decades of independence, poverty is still deeply rooted in the Indian society and it is considered as the greatest obstacle to the economic and social progress. Therefore, as long as poverty exists in India, streamlining the form of governance is the need of the hour if human rights have any place in our democracy. Then only democracy will be able to bring in people's rule, as in the word (demo-cracy) itself, it is people i.e. 'demo' that comes before the rule, i.e. 'cracy'.

The Necessity to Restructure Society

Soon after the independence, the drafters of the Constitution felt the immediate necessity of restructuring the traditional society as it was engulfed with social, economic and political disparity. The Constituent Assembly conceived the constitution of free India not only as a mechanism for governing the country through parliamentary democracy but also as an instrument to bring out social change. The effort was for building an egalitarian society on the concept of socio-economic justice. The fruits of economic development should result in actual enjoyment of the development by the weaker sections of the society and all the resources must essentially be distributed in an equitable and justifiable manner. This was possibly dreamt about by the framers of our Constitution.

Shattered Vision of India

Today this vision of India is completely shattered into smaller pieces which can be joined to make the whole by hard work but still lapses will be there. The vision is not that of 'INDIA SHINING' but that of 'INDIA STRUGGLING' for the inclusion of individuals in governance. Now, India no longer seems to be governed by the principles of "democracy", i.e. government by the people, of the people and for the people but by the principles of "politico-cracy", i.e. democracy usurped by the politicians where 'demo' is replaced by 'politico'. There is no doubt that people are aware enough that they are at the abyss of humiliation and exploitation. They are entrapped by this 'new' form of governance, in the clutches of powerful politicians. The people continuously complain about the corrupt officials to the police and higher officials through a

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proper channel. It's a pity that even then the concerned officials remain deaf, dumb and blind to the plight of 'Aam Admi' (the common man) for the sake of monetary gains and selfish motives.

Kejriwal's Movement

Arvind Kejriwal

Courtesy: http://www.deccanchronicle.com/130322

In the present scenario, where ruling class is not honest enough, it becomes essential for the citizens of the nation to unite under a banner to achieve "freedom of human spirit" (Mukherjee 2006). This is where the role taken up by Arvind Kejriwal becomes relevant because until or unless the public is led into the struggle by someone who seems to be honest, aggressive, determined, young and energetic by his conduct, the goal cannot be easily achieved.

Arvind Kejriwal:

has rekindled the desire among many, including the old, to participate in the political process. His focus on engaging the youth as well as urging women could be a game changer – at least for the larger political scene in the country, if not for a Kejriwal – led party. . . . 'We would consider it our success if some of your agenda items gradually find their way, into the manifestos of the larger political parties', said Kejriwal during his speech while announcing his party. 'Perhaps when they [larger political parties] see our candidates they will at least replace the most corrupt candidate with a less corrupt one!' he joked. (Misra 2012)

Kejriwal's Book *Swaraj*

Kejriwal's *Swaraj* has the potential to mould the present set-up into the environment which is human friendly, if majority stands united with him on the stage itself. And it is wisely

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said that providence too favours big battalions. Srilakshmi and Mahadevamma (2012) in their article have also emphasized the efficacy of collective participation by the people through team work and devised four stages of team development which are:-

1. The Forming (awareness) stage.
2. The Storming (conflict) stage.
3. The Norming (co-operation) stage.
4. The Performing (productivity) stage.

An Eye-opener Book

Swaraj, a book by Arvind Kejriwal is not only inspirational but an eye-opener too, defining in detail the deficiencies of modern day power-game of politicians and suggesting major changes required for good governance. It is a narrative of existing establishment wherein political parties rule the nation. He stresses the need for participation of not only the influential rural people (elites) but also the involvement of rural poor. Undoubtedly, this ideology gains ground on the reason that 70% of Indian population resides in villages. And unless rural India is properly represented in the process of self-empowerment, the dream of Kejriwal's *Swaraj* will remain unfulfilled. "Through this book the author questions the present establishment of the democratic framework in India and tries to show the way forward, what we, the people, and what the opinion makers and political establishment in India can do to 'provide a political alternative, or to' (Rev.) achieve true Swaraj (self-rule)" [Swaraj (book)].

Means to Acquire Power

It also explicates numerous methods to acquire the reigns of self-governance, i.e. the power of 'Aam Admi'. Anna Hazare, a veteran social activist supported the book and said, "This book is a manifesto for our times and for the anti-corruption movement, and an effective model for the nation to achieve true Swaraj" (Rev.). Vinod Mehta, a senior journalist, also praised Kejriwal's commitment to the cause and said "Most decisions should be taken at the district and village level and Kejriwal's book outlines how it can be achieved" [Swaraj (book)]. The book underlines the important and debatable issues as well as the failure of good administration. Ultimately, the present state of affairs will result into the spread of already existing naxalite movements, extremism, insurgency and parallel administration of justice by the aggrieved people themselves through kangaroo courts in a similar fashion that naxalites have entered into. Hence, *Swaraj* aims at bringing out a drastic change in the existing defects of the system of governance.

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Questioning the Idea of Power – the Power Politics

Swaraj questions the very idea of power. We live in a society where "political leaders exert pressure on the district collector and get works done . . ." (Kejriwal). When any type of power like military, economic, social or political, etc., is used to threaten somebody for personal interests, it is called "Power Politics". Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as – "politics based primarily on the use of power (as military and economic strength) as a coercive force rather than on ethical precepts." It is "political action characterized by the exercise or pursuit of power as a means of coercion" (Dictionary.com, Def. 1). Today's "Power Politics" is in the hands of political leaders which as the present set-up demands, needs to be restructured in the lap of Gram Sabhas or people. As Kejriwal rightly points it out:

> For effective development of the country, the people/gram Sabha/ sarpanch must be given powers to question the BDO/collector/political masters for their acts of omission and commission. Their free run on the country's resources and wealth has to be checked.
>
> That can only happen if the people have the power to take decision at the grass root level. That grass root level begins from the villagers and the city dwellers.

Generally, it is meant that the State exercises its power to control the civilians. However, "Althusser makes a useful distinction between what we might call state power and state control" (Barry 158). Althusser asserts that state power is maintained through Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) which include "the police, the army, law courts and prisons that operate through actual or threats of coercive force/violence" (Nayar, Lit. Theory Tod. 121) or the "external force" (Barry 158). And a state in order to maintain its power secures the consent of its citizens through the use of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) or in other words "the internal force" of state control involving "political parties, schools, the media, churches, the family, and art (including literature)" (Barry 158).

Incompetence of State Apparatuses

Swaraj therefore, brings out the incompetence of both the State Apparatuses in maintaining the state power and state control in Indian context. It also comes out with numerous

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ideas to recreate a nation where these apparatuses must play the assigned role logically and efficiently.

Defining *Swaraj*

The word 'Swaraj' is derived from Hindi and other Indian languages, 'Swa' + 'Raj', meaning self + rule or self + government. Therefore, there are twin objectives of Swaraj simultaneously, i.e., to empower the people as well as to empower the nation or state. Arvind Kejriwal defines Swaraj thus: "Swa means 'my' and 'rajya' means 'kingdom'. Swaraj mean 'My kingdom'. If it is my kingdom then it is I who will govern the way I want. 'Swaraj', therefore, stands for 'Self governance'".

The present day politicians or in the other sense the people's representatives have distorted the definition of *Swaraj* in their favour by considering themselves to be the rulers, where they emphatically declare that it is 'MY RAJ' and 'I WILL RULE THE NATION'; thereby dividing the society in two classes, i.e. the governors and the governed. As Kejriwal comments on 'democracy' in the chapter "CITIZENS ARE THE MASTERS" in *Swaraj* that:

> The power that "We the people" give to the representatives for life and liberty of "We the people" is totally misused. Decisions taken by the representatives are not for "We the people" but for "I the people".
>
> The basic principle of democracy is violated. Of the people, by the people is alright but FOR THE PEOPLE is missing in this matrix.

Shaping Knowledge

For Foucault "power shapes discourses and knowledge" (Goodman 64). The politicians before coming into power can be classified as common men. But when they acquire power, the meaning of discourse and knowledge takes altogether a different shape i.e. from that of a common man it shifts to the discourse of people in power. It is at this stage that 'MY' and 'I' tend to symbolize the person in power. If power is snatched from the hands of these powerful politicians, then their discourse and knowledge again shifts back to that of a common man. Hence, the significance of these terms is inextricably linked to 'power'.

The Oppressor and the Oppressed

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On the other hand, the actual meaning of the term clearly explains that it is the rule of the people, where this 'MY' and 'I' stand for the people. And this misinterpretation of Swaraj has therefore created a chaos in the nation which has generated the consciousness among the people that they have been pushed into the attic regarding their own welfare. The "self-proclaimed rulers" are imposing their dictatorial rules without taking into consideration or without obtaining the general public opinion of the common man which eventually is a must for the success of a democratic form of government. By doing this they are entering into the binary set of terms i.e. the oppressor and the oppressed. With Jacques Lacan's "the symbolic order", the figure of the father enters in the realm of a child for whom the father is the 'Law'. Lacan considers the father to be the 'Law' because a child being a member of the family is obliged to follow all the rules and regulations as per the guidelines of the head of the family which is the father. Similarly, here in this context, it is fixed and pre-ordained for the public to follow these "self-proclaimed rulers". But this fixity itself needs to be dissolved so that people can freely breathe and enjoy their precious life. Gayatri Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" implies that "the subaltern cannot speak" and is always "spoken for" (Nayar, Contemp. Lit. and Cult. Theory 171). But Kejriwal strongly negates this notion because it is the subaltern section that is speaking through his pen.

"India's neo-colonial political masters who have usurped power from the British are playing the same game with us as the colonials did" (Acharya). Their motto remains the same i.e. "DIVIDE AND RULE" where the natives must be divided and the Britishers are to rule in order to strengthen their roots, purely for the illegitimate reason to be entrenched in power. *Swaraj* exhorts the oppressed and the colonized of this neo-colonial nation to reframe the colonizer's motto into "UNITE AND RULE" where both the terms are meant for the natives. On the other hand, the predicament of citizens at present is very pathetic where "The country is for sale and we citizens stand by like mute spectators, helpless but angry" (Kejriwal). Therefore, it's high time to reconfigure the notion of SWARAJ, where 'Swa' must shift directly to refer the civilians/citizens instead of political representatives.

As long as the power remains in the hands of the politicians, *Swaraj* is unable to achieve its sole aim. So, a ray of enlightenment is required to energize the citizens towards the relocation

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of the paradigms of power. As Adorno and Horkheimer believed that "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters." (qtd. in Goodman 106).

Administration at the Local Level

In *Swaraj,* Kejriwal says that administration at the local level in rural and urban affairs must necessarily be within the control of the residents of the concerned area. Voters must have powers to recall their legislative representative any time during his tenure as and when they feel that he has not proven himself true to the legitimate expectations of the electorate. As Kejriwal writes: "All the government officers, bureaucrats, the political leaders are actually your servants". And "It is tax paid by you that disburses their salary . . . These are the same people who look down upon you with disdain and indifference once their purpose is served . . ." So, this will ensure common man's direct participation not only in the administration of social justice meted out according to the requirements and wishes of the common man but also his active participation in all the matters regarding the use of national wealth. Even while framing policies regarding globalization of trade, industrialization and other related issues, the perspective of beneficiaries must be taken into account instead of formulating them in closed rooms.

Now, since it is obvious that a nation has no existence without people and if people are empowered to have their hearsay in the administration process then ultimately the nation as a whole will be empowered. The strength of nation is dependent upon the strength of its people considered as the foundation stone of a strong nation. Kejriwal's concept of swaraj nicely explains that welfare and democracy must go side by side.

> Swaraj is a comprehensive concept. Its relevance exists in the wider context of human freedom and welfare. According to Aurobindo, Swaraj is more than mere political freedom-it is freedom of individual and the community. It is spiritual freedom and social freedom. To him Swaraj is possible by self help, intellectual conviction and the unity of hearts that spring from love; Swaraj is the direct revelation of God to the people and the idea of self must be replaced by the idea of nation if Swaraj is to be attained. (Mukherjee 2006)

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The concept of Swaraj must be pragmatic along with internal development of the self, thereby, including within it the external aspects also. It's aim is to attain emancipation. For Makarand Paranjape, the word 'Swaraj' means something more than merely freedom of self:

> By Svaraj, . . . I mean not just political and cultural independence, but personal emancipation, autonomy, and selfhood. . . . Svaraj, which is an ancient Upanishadic word, was revived and redeployed during the freedom movement to signify India's longing for self-rule. . . . To me Svaraj is the bridge between the personal and political because it implies both individual and collective emancipation. Svaraj means not just self-rule but rule by the self, or the Atman, that which is the highest principle. (97 - 98)

Swaraj: Paradigm Shifts

According to Mukherjee (2006), the concept of Swaraj has changed its connotations from the times it was introduced.

1	2	3
FROM	TO	PRESENT
Planning	People's Participation	Political Interference
Authority	Empowerment	Suppression/Subjugation
Power Structure	Decentralized Structures	Centralized + Power Structures
Welfare	Self Reliance	Exploitation
Upliftment	Social Justice	Degeneration of Social Values
Ethnicity	Pluralism	Self-centered Pluralism
Economic Growth	Sustainable Development	Unsustainable Development
Freedom	Democracy	Capitalism

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(Columns 1 and 2 are conceptualized by Mukherjee. Column 3 reflects the existing system on the basis of the study of Kejriwal's *Swaraj*. Column 2 also enlists the goals to be achieved as envisioned by Kejriwal.)

Transparency as the Goal

The objective of Kejriwal's model of Swaraj is understood to bring transparency in the governance by empowering Gram Sabhas in deciding their problems themselves and this ideology seems to be extracted from the pre-civilized interest protecting societies where people were not conscious about the concept of rights which now gives them power to set the machinery of the state in motion for the enforcement of their rights in lieu of the taxes paid by them to the state. The author here rediscovers the idea of development at a lower level by recalling the times when this concept of Gram Sabha was introduced.

Denying the people their due by the ego-centric present day politicians is a problem which cannot be remedied overnight. History is full of examples where it is amply clear that only long-drawn struggles led to the changes in defective political system all throughout the world. To begin with, it is necessary to discuss the problematic of the causes responsible for the drawbacks of inefficient government neglecting the wants and wishes of the common man. The root cause of the entire drama is the ego-centric attitude of the ruling class as was the case of British Rulers. It was their ego which phenomenally resulted in the oppression of the subjects ruled by them. The same is applicable *in toto* to the people's representatives in Indian political system. It is well established that violation of rights starts with 'ego'. An egoistic person develops hatred towards his fellow beings causing disrespect for persons and their interests, thus resulting in disrespect for their rights. Then, ultimately there is violation of rights which becomes the basis of struggle through strikes and demonstrations. This ego-centric mindset of the leaders needs to be done away with. They should always keep in mind Gandhiji's mantra:

I will give you a talisman:-

Whenever you are in doubt or When self becomes too much
With you, Apply the following test. . . . .

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Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if

the step you

contemplate is going to be any use to him.

Will he gain anything by it?

Will it restore him a control over his own life and destiny ?

In other words, will it lead to "Swaraj" for the

Hungry and spiritually starving millions?

Then you will find your doubt and 'your self' melting away. (Sadhu)

Power Relations

Another point implied here is that 'power' of the people generates in them the ego-centered attitude leading into "the domination and reinforcement of power relations" (Nayar, Contemp. Lit. and Cult. Theory 130) termed as 'hegemony' by Antonio Gramsci. In Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony', the powerful classes dominate particular sections of society not only "through threats of violence or the law but by winning their consent to be governed and dominated" (Nayar, Contemp. Lit. and Cult. Theory 130). If we have a look at the present-day goings-on in India, then we will observe that the governing system of India is built on hegemonic 'coercion' and not on the 'consensus' of the public. The key precept of *Swaraj* is that hegemony must work less through 'coercion' and more through 'consent' in the governance of the country.

Reconfiguration of the Present World

Kejriwal's world as exhibited in *Swaraj* reconfigures the existing state of affairs which pinpoints the need for restructuring of power politics by replacing the system of governance with the following changes that are responsible for all-round development :-

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1. Power must shift to Gram Sabhas.
2. Free funds should be available where Gram Sabha must have the power coupled with liberty i.e. discretion to spend the available fund as per their necessary requirements.
3. Decentralization of power structures.
4. Transparency in documents.
5. Direct control of citizens in policy formation.

Possible Negative Side Effects

The formula devised by Kejriwal may come out with some negative side-effects too; if applied without changing the 'big boss' attitude of majority communities in Gram Sabhas. Since most of the villages in India are inhabited by one community in vast majority and while applying Kejriwal's concept for the inclusion of Gram Sabha in governance at the grass-root level will be fallible as there will be a fear of suppression of the rights of minority because of their poor representation. This problem has not been emphatically substantiated by the author.

Therefore, the objective of this paper is to interpret Kejriwal's *Swaraj* as a strategy of resistance (to the rash and negligent drivers of the rule) and reconstruction (through voluntary and participatory social action). It is also an attempt to echo the author's voice that reconstruction must begin at the grass-root level as Gandhiji also believed that independence begins at the bottom and a society must be erected on the concrete foundation where every village is expected to be self-sustained and to be capable in managing its own affairs. Such type of society is the foundation which can efficiently bear the burden of whole of the nation. And Kejriwal hints at the need of replacing "SATTA RAJ" with "SANVIDHAAN RAJ". This is possible because of the flexibility in our constitution but the only limitation being the basic structure of the constitution should not be changed.

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