BOOK REVIEW

Title: Swaraj  
Author: Arvind Kejriwal  
Genre: Non-Fiction  
Theme: Shift of power from urban rich to rural poor  
Publisher: HarperCollins, Noida  
Year of Publication: 2012  
Pages: XXIII + 151  
ISBN: 978-93-5029-544-1  
Price: Rs. 150/-

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Swaraj by Arvind Kejriwal is a ‘source book’ underlining the key issues which are creating a vacuum in the society and provides a ‘political alternative’ where the oppressed class can fight for their rights. It is a non-fictional work that truly picturizes the Indian society captivating the attention of the readers from the beginning till the end. It is not meant for a particular class but it makes a wonderful and an interesting reading for the readers belonging to different sections and age-groups.

Undoubtedly, the common man is massively entangled in the web of corruption. So, the sole purpose of Kejriwal’s Swaraj is to enlighten the people to liberate themselves from the deadening grasp of ‘politico-cracy’ (i.e. democracy usurped by politicians) and making them
aware of their responsibility towards their nation. It will lead them to work for the upliftment of the country rather than leading the nation towards degeneration. Having this idea in mind, Arvind Kejriwal wrote this work from the perspective of a common man as he dedicated the book to “the common people of India who have been waiting for swaraj.”\(^1\) His point of view clearly explains that it is meant for the welfare of the people. The book informs the reformative measures of the existing system of governance.

The book under review is an attempt to provide a framework which tends to mitigate the ever-growing gulf between the rich and the poor, the leader and the common man, the policy-maker and the policy-consumer, i.e. the powerful and the powerless. The book advocates the efficacy of empowering the Gram Sabhas by shifting the ‘power’ in the hands of the common man. It presents a comprehensive view of transforming the current system that is brimming with corruption into a new utopian world. Although it is true that we cannot kill the demon of corruption but we can tame it so that it can be reduced to some extent.

*Swaraj* provides a thoughtful insight into the illusory nature of the word ‘democracy’. In the theoretical meaning of the word, the people are given the supreme power which bluntly opposes its practical meaning. It also makes an effort to convince the readers of the faults and loopholes of the present-day system of governance. The book leaves a question mark on the readers – Is this the true meaning of ‘democracy’ we have dreamt of? If we split the word, we will find that it is the ‘people’ that is important and not the powerful political leaders (as ‘demo’ refers to people). Therefore, people must acquire the first place i.e. before government as per the meaning of the concept. In this way, *Swaraj* questions whether the common men or people have their say in the present set-up. It is also an answer - an answer to the people searching for the reasons of increasing social evils like unemployment, violence, naxalism, untouchability, so on and so forth. The book also highlights few questions and doubts that we might have after reading the suggestions and gives explanations to those baseless doubts as well.

This work paints India as a tree whose growing branches exist in the ‘neo-colonial’ atmosphere, with the roots of colonialism embedded in the soil of “centralization of power” by ‘britishers’ during the colonial India and ‘leaders, politicians, government officials and policy-

\(^1\) Arvind Kejriwal, *Swaraj* (2012) Pg. v
makers’ at present. We are living in a world where capitalism and business globalization are the tools to control a country, in lieu of direct control by the colonizer/oppressor. In this way, in Swaraj, the readers can trace the instinct of ‘neocolonialism’ i.e. the practice of using national capital for the exploitation rather than for the development and empowerment of the less developed areas.

The style and language of the book aptly suits its readers. There is clarity of thought as well as inbuilt sense of coherence between various issues that has been put forth. Although simple and easy vocabulary is used, it nevertheless lessens the forcefulness of the arguments. The originality and conciseness is quite praiseworthy. The style and the method of placing the facts have been excellently maintained in a perfect manner throughout the book. The book is not based on fictional events, characters or incidents rather on the factual ones. The author along with his team has conducted surveys by visiting numerous villages of India. In this way, Swaraj portrays the reality of the day.

The book therefore, is a narrative of the present-day political establishment analyzing what kind of ‘change’ is needed in the system and at what level? It echoes Gandhiji’s voice to attain true ‘swaraj’ or ‘self-rule’ or ‘home-rule’ where it is envisioned that every village must be self-sustained, self-managed and self-reliant. The primary purpose of the book is to create awareness among the readers about the discrepancies prevalent in the administration system of India. The secondary being the implementation of Jan Lokpal Bill (as hinted at by Kejriwal in the Preface) and the innovative ideas put forth as intended solutions to the above said problems. Hence, Kejriwal’s Swaraj challenges the excessive centralization of ‘power’ in India as all the decisions about village developments are taken in the closed air conditioned apartments in the metropolitan cities.