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'Vote for the party that can help you help yourself'

Using examples from across the world, Magsaysay award winner launches a campaign that urges you to get involved and take control

What can you do if government sweepers do not clean your area? Or if the road breaks within a few months of having been constructed or if the ration shopkeeper openly siphons off ration or the policeman refuses to act on your complaint?

All you can do is complain to higher authorities, who don't act on your complaint. People have no direct control over them. Is this democracy?

And this is the reason why there is so much illiteracy and poverty despite the government spending thousands of

crores every year. Roads are broken and cities stink of garbage and overflowing sewers.

In theory, in a democracy, the people are the masters. But in practice, we merely undergo the ritual of casting our vote once every five years and then plead before the politicians and bureaucrats the next five years, who don't care to listen to us.

Swaraj (self rule) is about giving direct control over officials and funds to people's assemblies (assembly of all voters in an



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area) called *mohalla sabhas* (neighbourhood councils) in urban areas and *gram sabhas* (village councils) in rural areas. People should have the power to summon officials and directly penalise

them, if needed.

These assemblies should meet every month and take decisions regarding all issues in their area. Decisions taken by these assemblies shall have to be implemented by their elected representative and bureaucrats. The people's



assemblies shall have complete control over all public funds spent in their area.

If elected representatives act against the will of the people, the people's assemblies should

have the power to recall them. Only those issues, which cannot be managed at local level, will go to higher levels of government.

If the majority of *gram sabhas* and *mohalla sabhas* vote for a particular issue, the state government shall implement it, even if it needs amendment to a law. That would be true democracy — government by the people. This is *Swaraj*. This is self-rule.

Has it ever happened?

This is how it used to be in the pre-British period. Since Buddha's times till almost 1830,

many villages were directly run by people's assemblies. Those who invaded India merely controlled the central government but did not interfere with village administration.

The British demolished this system and instituted the 'collector *raj*'. Powers were taken away from the people and handed over to British collectors.

Unfortunately, we did not restore the powers back to the people even after independence and continued with the same system.

Even today, in many countries like US, Brazil,

Switzerland etc, people collectively take all decisions regarding their own areas through people's assemblies.

It's election time. Who should we vote for? We have tried every political party and leader in the last 62 years. Merely changing parties and leaders hasn't helped.

Demand *Swaraj* these elections. Vote for that party which directly empowers you. In the past, we put parties in power. In these elections, we want power in return for votes.

(Magsaysay Award winner Arvind Kejriwal is leading the *Swaraj* campaign)

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