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When politicians turn away, 'Swaraj' is the way



JASJEET PLAHA/HT

A busy road in Saket. The residents here are unhappy with the increasing commercial activity in the area but the politicians have turned a blind eye to their problems.

Nivedita Khandekar
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ONCE PEACEFUL residential areas in the Capital have turned into nightmares, thanks to uninhibited commercial activity.

A posh locality like Saket is a glaring example of how a quiet neighbourhood can be ruined by haphazard commercialisation.

Till a few years ago, despite being close to a busy road like the Mehrauli-Badarpur road, this south Delhi colony was away from the hustle-bustle of any commercial activity.

Things have changed with multiplexes and malls in

the area. "There was a time when we could walk down to the park adjoining Qila Raipithora any time of the day. Today, it is impossible to even cross the road to go to another block," said B.S. Dixit, a senior citizen from Gaurav Apartment in Saket.

The area has seen manifold increase in people and traffic movement. Traffic problems continue through the day. Finding a place to park a car has become one of the biggest challenges.

"Old people are worried they would be hit by vehicles on the road, children cannot go out to play out and women, young or old, have to be very careful

when walking on the road," said Dixit, who is also the president of the residents' welfare association of Gaurav Apartments in Block-G of

DDA's SFS Flats.

Could the situation have been any different? Do the residents have a choice when even politicians turn a blind eye to this problem ahead of the elections?

A movement called Swaraj (www.lokrajandolan.org) believes so. Spearheaded by Magsaysay award winner Arvind Kejriwal, who is promoting the movement during this election, it espouses the concept of self-governance to find solutions to such problems.

"When the powerful retail giant Walmart wanted to open a store in the US town of Oregon, the people actually stopped it from entering

the town. It was the community, which decided if they wanted a Walmart or not. They exercised their right to decide and Walmart complied," said Kejriwal, giving an example of how the concept of 'Swaraj' works.

The movement wants to empower the smallest units of residents—be it a *gram sabha* or a *mohalla sabha*—to decide about their localities.

Another example closer home is the way residents Walkeshwar in south Mumbai, an area dominated by the Jain community, forced a fast food joint to sell only vegetarian food in their area.

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