

Save the Constitution – Save the Nation

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When we were fighting for our independence, throwing away the British yoke and imagining a better future went hand-in-hand in our almost a century long freedom struggle. Work and ideas of social reformers, political leaders, philosophers, writers & revolutionaries were converging to shape the future republic. When we finally won our independence from the British 75 years back, we tried to give a coherent shape to the aspirations of the deprived and impoverished millions who were reduced to destitution under British misrule. The horrors of partition were fresh in memory. Leaders and masses both were in agreement about the heinous consequences of religion-based mobilization which blinded people to the common good. Conscious of the need of the hour, our Constituent Assembly under the able leadership of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar tried to enshrine the values of our freedom movement and desires of the masses into our Constitution. After almost 3 years of hard-work, on 26th of November 1949, we declared our resolve to “constitute India into a Sovereign Democratic Republic” through the Preamble of our Constitution. The values of our Constitution represent the blood and sweat of millions who fought and perished so that future generations could breathe in a free India.

The last eight years have seen a substantial retreat from the premise envisioned in our Constitution. Our Constitution drew the framework for a secular polity with the state maintaining equidistance from all religious denominations. This was done to ensure fair treatment to all and protect the minorities. The secular setup is being systematically dismantled today which all-pervasive attempts being made to elevate one particular religion to the status of de-facto religion of the state. Senior members of the government holding constitutional offices, including the Prime Minister, are taking part in religious ceremonies, for example the inauguration of the Kashi Vishwanath corridor or the foundation stone laying ceremony for the Shri Ram Temple in

Ayodhya. Worse, even state functions are being reoriented to give the semblance of religious ceremonies of the majority religion as was seen recently when the PM unveiled the state emblem atop the new Parliament building or when the foundation stone was laid for the Central Vista. A section of population is also celebrating these unconstitutional acts. However, they are sure to be outraged if the ceremony is to resemble the practices of the minority.

It should be understood that these attempts are not isolated. They are part of a well-thought design to establish a hierarchical Hindu-Rashtra regime of the RSS subverting our secular democratic Constitution. These attempts are not new but with the vigor these are being pursued now clearly indicates state patronage. The RSS never accepted our constitution, the principle of equality, secularism or safeguards for minorities and deprived sections. They have opposed democratic framework right from the beginning and stood solidly with the British. There is nothing new in their contempt for the Constitution. When the BJP first came to power under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, it wanted to constitute a commission to review the Constitution but had to take two steps back because of President K.R. Narayanan's sharp reaction. Under a former RSS *Pracharak* Narendra Modi, they are pursuing the aim of Hindu Rashtra with greater zeal in an all-pervasive manner. Very recently, a *Dharma Sansad* or Religious Parliament took place in Varanasi. This Dharma Sansad has come up with a draft by the 'Hindu Rashtra Constitution Nirman Samiti' openly advocating for a Hindu Rashtra. The Samiti has prescribed snatching away voting rights from Muslims and Christians. Along with the proposal to make Varanasi the capital instead of New Delhi, the Varna system legitimizing caste, segregation and hierarchy is part of the draft. What is astonishing is the silence of the government on these brazenly un-constitutional proposals, including that of the Prime Minister who is the Member of Parliament from Varanasi and under-oath to "do right to all manner of people in accordance with the Constitution and the law, without fear or favour, affection or ill-will." The negligence, running contrary to the oath of the high office,

indicates complicity of the ruling regime with Hindutva forces intending to take the country back hundreds of years into the shackles of caste and gender discrimination. This studied silence on the part of government and BJP shows that the government will likely to call such things as “fringe”. But citizens should questioned this on every instance.

Concurrent with the secular-democratic framework, the Constitution also had a substantial welfarist orientation. It was considered necessary that the state intervenes to provide essential amenities to citizens for their overall upliftment from poverty and disease. Only then the equality of opportunity and right to life with dignity can be realized. Thus, the constitution that came into force guaranteed not only fundamental rights and liberties but also provided for Directive Principles of State Policy which provided a roadmap for the future governments. These principles were meant to ensure the overall wellbeing of the country and its people and were intended by the constitution makers to be “fundamental in the governance of the country” as the Constitution declares in Article 37 of Part IV that “it shall be the duty of the State to apply these principles in making laws.” It is evident that retreat from these principles has been quite substantive. Rampant privatization, inequalities, unemployment, lack of social security & inclusion, increase in hunger all have been hallmarks of the Modi years. The spirit of scientific temper, critical inquiry and debate are being hounded by right-wing forces and Parliament itself is being made redundant.

In the face of these assaults, our twin objective is to protect the secular-democratic egalitarian framework of the Constitution while fighting for the overall material upliftment of the people. As we see, the attempts to subvert our Constitution and redefine the legacy of our freedom movement are all-pervasive. Our counter to them should also be all-encompassing, ideologically raising the issues of masses. The Left has the historical responsibility to frustrate the forces of right-reaction through an ideological struggle. That ideological struggle

should underpin our proud inheritance of sacrifice for our country's freedom, our consistent commitment to secularism and upliftment of all sections of working class. We should raise our banner of equality against this frontal assault on our Constitution. As the most committed and concerned workers to the people and the nation, we must save the Constitution, we must save the nation.