

Constitution is Our Sword and Shield

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Some dates are intractably linked with our life as a nation. Along with our Independence Day and Republic Day, the day our Constitution was adopted by the Constituent Assembly is one of those solemn occasions which have impacted our lives deeply. On 26th November 1949, the Constituent Assembly of India, under the stewardship of Dr. BR Ambedkar passed and adopted the Constitution of India. Our life as a democratic republic may have begun on 26th January 1950, but the role of Constitution Day in clearing our path to become the polity we resolved to give ourselves remains indelible. In this light, Constitution Day is both a conclusion and a new beginning. On 26th November 1949, our great freedom struggle's legacy and the aspirations of our people were united in a single document and thus began our national life towards the fulfilment of the ideals enshrined in the Constitution.

It is an irony of our times that a government moved by the ideology of the RSS, which despised the achievements of our Constitution, has started observing Constitution Day from the year 2015. In January of the same year, the Planning Commission, a noble vehicle to further the values enshrined in the Constitution was dissolved. Irony is that the government started celebrating the adoption of the Constitution at a time when the Constitution and the ideals it represented are facing an unprecedented threat from the Narendra Modi led majoritarian elected autocracy. Subversion of the Constitution and trampling the ideals of Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity has been a consistent feature of the Modi years. The situation reminds me of an observation made by Dr. Ambedkar when he moved the resolution to pass the draft constitution. He said "if things go wrong under the new Constitution. The reason will not be that we had a bad Constitution. What we will have to say is, that Man was vile." It is this 'vileness' in the garb of majority that we are to fight.

The Constitution is not just a legal document nor a collection of passive sagely maxims. It is the result of our century long freedom struggle and imbibes the values that brought millions together first to fight the British and later to build an egalitarian India on the foundation of unthinkable sacrifices. Those who were sitting in British lap did not and cannot digest the inclusive country we aspired to become through this organic document and launched a tirade against it from the very beginning. Protecting the Constitution becomes really important to us in these testing times because it effectively weaponizes our struggles against majoritarianism. This is reason of RSS' contempt to it because it provides a solid bedrock to a just, equal and democratic society, all of which are anathema to the RSS' notion of exclusive, theocratic Hindu Rashtra.

The executive's responsibility to the legislature and the judiciary's oversight under the constitutional framework form the core of our parliamentary system. Constitution makers voted in favor of the parliamentary form of democracy for they valued responsibility. In this so-called 'post-truth' world, a slurry of misinformation, myths and lies are making the objective truth blurry. The megalomania of the RSS, centered around worship and subservience to one leader, is proving to be decisively detrimental to our parliamentary democracy. Laws are being passed without debate, opposition even inside the parliament is being dubbed anti-national and judiciary's independence is being encroached upon. This systematic slaughter of the institutions of parliamentary democracy is going on under the cult

of personality, where one individual's interests are taken as national interests. We must pay heed to the advice of Dr. Ambedkar when he said "Bhakti in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship." It's still not late to follow his advice.

The RSS and its political arm, the BJP are aggressively trying to dismantle the vision of the Constitution in their march towards communal authoritarianism. Secularism is one of the foundational tenets of our Constitution and constitution makers were acutely aware of the imperative of heralding the nation into a secular republic. Temptations around religion were high but rejected emphatically by Dr. Ambedkar as he warned the assembly of the dangers of theocratic state. He made provisions for enabling people coming from historically discriminated backgrounds like SCs, STs, women and children. Considering the sheer regional and linguistic diversity of the country, the Constituent Assembly opted for a federal state and Dr. Ambedkar clarified that "the States under our Constitution are in no way dependent upon the Centre for their legislative or executive authority. The Centre and the States are co-equal in this matter." All of these values run counter to the illiberal, monolithic and divisive agenda of the RSS and make protecting the Constitution an integral part of our struggle for a better future.

Along with equality and secularism, constitution makers placed equal emphasis on the emerging state being a welfare state, committed to the needs of its citizens and dedicated to their upliftment. All three of them are inseparably linked and provide us with a blue print for society. Our times are crucial for defending the very nature of Indian polity and all secular, democratic and progressive forces will have to join hands for this. Many critics argue that the opposition is without any agenda to take on the RSS-BJP. Let us boldly declare that the Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in our Constitution are our agenda and come together for their fulfilment. The vision that was expressed in the Constitution was diametrically opposite of the RSS-BJP's nefarious designs for the society, and we must embrace the vision of the constitution makers. When some members questioned Dr. Ambedkar about the need for having Directive Principles, he elaborated on their centrality in deciding the fate of the nation. He was at his prophetic best when he said "what great value these Directive Principles possess will be realized better when the forces of right contrive to capture power." Now when the forces of right have captured power and are abusing it, we must make the vision of the Constitution our sword and shield and come together to save our nation from the calamity of Hindu Rashtra.