

Republic of the Constitution and Modi's India

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When Indian republic inaugurated itself on the 26th January 1950, it was a major historic transformation in our nation's journey towards emancipation of its masses. After getting itself free from colonial clutches, India embarked on a journey of building a society that our freedom fighters sacrificed their lives for. That society was to build on the premise of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice as enshrined in the Preamble of our Constitution. The enactment of the Constitution of India was a great achievement as it established political equality among the differently situated citizens of our vast country and placed safeguards for the vulnerable sections of the society. The Constitution also placed a great task before the nation, that is to graduate to social and economic equality on the foundations of political equality. Unfortunately, our country is witnessing a retreat from the promises of the Constitution under the rule of an ideology which always held contempt for our Constitution and despised equality.

Article 14 of the Constitution made equality the cornerstone of our life as a nation. By making equality before law or equal protection of law a guaranteed fundamental right, the Constituent Assembly heralded the nation into an era of political equality dismantling the structures of religion, caste, class, gender, language and region in the eyes of the law. Can this said to be true in our times? The Modi regime has been systematically denying equality before law or equal protection of law to certain sections of the society in the most illegal fashion. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act is one big example of this which introduced religion as criteria for granting citizenship while openly discriminating against one religion. Former RSS Chief Madhav Sadashivrao Golwalkar lamented at the Constitution that "framers of our present Constitution also were not firmly rooted in the conviction of our single homogeneous nationhood." The RSS-BJP regime is trying to establish this "single homogenous nationhood" which is another name for a Hindu Rashtra. The crimes and hate that is being incentivized against minorities in this process, are cutting through the ideal of political equality defeating the labors and dreams of freedom fighters.

While putting the draft constitution to vote, Dr. Ambedkar pointed out a significant contradiction for the future republic. That contradiction was that after 26th January 1950, "in politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality." The gap between political democracy, where one person meant one vote, and social and economic democracy troubled Dr. Ambedkar. He asked the assembly the for how long we will continue with this contradiction in the life of our nation before we realize the goal of one person, one vote, one value? Social discrimination on the basis of caste and gender clouded this cherished vision of Dr. Ambedkar as much as economic inequality. The RSS, on the other hand, upholds the Chaturvarna system of social division which subjugates workers to slavery and wants to confine women to the household. Economic inequality and concentration of wealth have grown exponentially under the RSS-BJP regime. The ideal of social and economic equality which was a guide to our freedom fighters has developed cracks under Hindutva Capitalism.

Our Constitution also provided an administrative roadmap for a country of India's magnitude. Constituent Assembly debated such provisions at length and envisaged a federal polity for the country sensitive to our rich linguistic and regional diversity. However, the RSS has always been obsessed with homogeneity instead of unity. Unity among people respects and celebrates diversity. During the freedom movement, our anti-colonial nationalism brought people from diverse backgrounds closer to liberate the country. Unity in diversity is not tolerable to the RSS as it seeks to flatten out varieties of language, faith, dress, food habits and so on. This makes the federal system indigestible to the RSS-BJP regime resulting in ruthless encroachments on the powers of state. Similarly, being a totalitarian organization, separation of powers between different organs of state - the legislature, the executive and the judiciary - is contrary to RSS ideology. Thus, the regime is turning the Parliament redundant, the Executive into just one man and the judiciary compliant. This institutional implosion under the RSS-BJP is not only diametrically opposed to the constitutional scheme, but will have dire consequences for the nation as a whole.

At the end, the Preamble to the Constitution declares India to be a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic. India under Modi has not performed on any one of these characteristics from the Preamble. Our sovereignty is being compromised by increasing dependency on the US-led global order. The socialist traits of our system like representation, social justice and a strong public sector are being erased. Secularism is being replaced by de-facto official status to a particular religion. As for democracy, its vitals like free and fair elections, freedom of speech and expression, right to dissent are being done away with. Dr. Ambedkar said "Democracy is not merely a form of Government. It is primarily a mode of associated living" and that democracy "is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellow men." Under Modi, attempts are on to displace respect and reverence by hate and contempt. Saving our republic needs solidarities, we need to build them to confront the idea of unitary, authoritarian and illiberal India. If we are to protect the solemn promise we made to ourselves on 26th January 1950, when we declared ourselves a Republic, we must defeat Hindutva Capitalism. Hindutva Capitalism must go if liberty, fraternity, equality and justice are to survive.