

Touchstone of the Republic

The unity of India is sustained by the Constitution and not by any particular faith



D. RAJA

The adoption of the Constitution on November 26, 1949 by the Constituent Assembly was a historic moment that laid the foundation for a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic. The Constitution provides a framework for good governance based on law and jurisprudence.

Finding a place

From its first meeting on December 9, 1946 till the completion of its work and adoption of the Constitution, the Constituent Assembly had to work in a politically turbulent environment. Some may not know that B.R. Ambedkar did not find a place among the 296 members initially sent to the Constituent Assembly. Only the withdrawal of Jogendra Nath Mandal, who was nominated from East Bengal, paved the way for Ambedkar to enter the Constituent Assembly. On June 3, 1947, Lord Mountbatten, the Viceroy of India, announced the Partition of India. Bengal and Punjab were to be divided. Ambedkar ceased to be a member of the Constituent Assembly when India was partitioned.

Given the dependence of the Assembly on Ambedkar, who had done extraordinary work, Rajendra Prasad and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel took efforts to get him elected from Bombay Presidency. It was only then that Ambedkar was immediately re-elected as a member of the Constituent Assembly. By that time he was already Law Minister in the Cabinet headed by Jawaharlal Nehru, who had moved the Objectives Resolution that defined the aims of the Constituent Assembly. Historians point out that Mahatma Gandhi, who knew about Ambedkar's excellent work in the Constituent Assembly and in various other committees, was keen that Ambedkar head the Drafting Committee. On August 30, 1947, the Drafting Committee formally met and unanimously elected Ambedkar as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee. Thereby he became the prime architect of the Constitution.



"Ambedkar had warned that even without altering the Constitution, administrators could use their powers to subvert it." The President of the Constituent Assembly, Rajendra Prasad, signing the full text of the Constitution in New Delhi in 1949. ■ THE HINDU ARCHIVES

Partition witnessed huge tragedies: Hindu-Muslim clashes and killings, migration of large numbers of people, and the assassination of Gandhi. Ambedkar remained firm that "the destiny of the country ought to count for everything". He did not compromise with divisive communal forces. He stoutly rejected the idea of a Hindu Rashtra. He warned that if at all Hindu Rashtra became a reality, it would be a calamity for the nation. He rejected the idea of a theocratic state and a presidential form of government. He believed in the idea of a republic and wanted India to be a secular state.

Challenge to the Constitution

Today there is an open challenge to the Constitution. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Vishva Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, Bharatiya Janata Party and Shiv Sena are all competing and coordinating with one another to achieve their agenda of converting the Indian secular state into a Hindu Rashtra. They have become desperate and aggressive in their pursuit to subvert the Constitution.

Ambedkar defined the Indian state as a welfare state in a society that is stratified by caste and deeply mired in structural forms of inequalities. The state, he said, should strive "to secure to all its citizens, Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity."

The way the Constitution was drafted and the way Ambedkar explained the provisions enshrined in it brought out its secular and socialist contents. They are of abiding significance in our time when communal and fascist forces have created a counter culture that endangers the Constitution itself. The way the Indian state is emerging as a neoliberal state goes against the socialist feature of our Constitution. When Professor K.T. Shah moved an amendment on November 15, 1948 to insert the words "secular, federal, socialist" into the Constitution, his proposal was vetoed. Ambedkar said that the Directive Principles of State Policy were declared to be fundamental in the governance of our country. In other words, the socialist contents enshrined in the Directive Principles must be the guiding force for governance. He said, "If these directive

principles... are not socialistic in their direction and in their content, I fail to understand what more socialism can be." The Directive Principles must be followed in letter and spirit when rising levels of income inequality perpetuate other inequalities. Liberalisation, globalisation and privatisation have further exacerbated the problem of unequal access to basic opportunities. As President K.R. Narayanan said in his speech on the eve of Republic Day in 2000, "Our three-way fast lane of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation must provide safe pedestrian crossings for the unempowered India also, so that it too can move towards 'equality of status and opportunity.'"

The manner in which constitutional objectives are being deliberately ignored by the present government in pursuit of the goals set by various corporates reminds me of Ambedkar's warning in his last speech in the Constituent Assembly. He said that if political parties put creed ahead of the interests of the country, then we would stand to lose our independence forever.

Protecting the idea of India

Ambedkar had warned that even without altering the Constitution, administrators could subvert it using their powers, causing it to collapse. We need to address such problems, which have assumed the proportion of a crisis today. We need to defend the Constitution and cultivate constitutional morality. In Kerala, for instance, we are seeing people being mobilised to prevent the implementation of the Supreme Court judgment that allows women to enter the Sabarimala temple. This is a violation of the law and the Constitution. The leaders of the ruling party are openly making statements which are inconsistent with the constitutional scheme of governance. Let us be mindful of the fact that the unity and integrity of India are sustained by the Constitution and not by any particular faith. Constitutional values combined with the civilisational values of acceptance and tolerance are the need of the hour to defend the idea of India. In undermining the Constitution, we are undermining and diminishing the very idea of India.

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FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

What's in a name?

We need to interrogate some words for their pejorative connotations



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

The crucial difference between technology companies and news organisations came out in an unambiguous manner over the last fortnight. Two instances clearly showed that platform companies, despite their financial muscle, have few moral and ethical resources to deal with diversity, contentious issues and public discourse on such issues. The first was a major investigation by *The New York Times* headlined, "Delay, Deny and Deflect: How Facebook's Leaders Fought Through Crisis". The second was how Twitter handled the controversy of its CEO Jack Dorsey's interaction with a group of women journalists, activists and organisers in New Delhi. While the former showed how inadequate internal structures led to the manipulation of democratic processes in the U.S. presidential elections and the Brexit referendum, the controversy in India erupted over Mr. Dorsey holding a poster that read, "Smash Brahmanical Patriarchy".

The importance of self-reflection

News organisations are accountable to the public, they provide attribution in their stories and have established rules of engagement. All this ensures that they report on multiple issues without being bulldozed by intolerant sections. On the other hand, platform companies need to understand the rules of public engagement, which go beyond metrics and algorithms. They can learn a lesson or two from responsible media organisations on these issues. This requires reflection and contemplation – being self-critical is a virtue and not a sign of weakness.

A debate has been playing out online over the use of the word 'tribe' by the media, and this calls for discussion and self-reflection. This happened after John Allen Chau, an American national, was killed by the protected Sentinelese in North Sentinel Island in the Andaman and Nicobar region. *The Hindu* carried an explainer on the Sentinelese which read: "The Sentinelese, a negro tribe who live on the North Sentinel Island of the Andamans, have not faced incursions and remain hostile to outsiders. The inhabitants

are connected to the Jarawa on the basis of physical, as well as linguistic similarities, researchers say. Based on carbon dating of kitchen middens by the Anthropological Survey of India, Sentinelese presence was confirmed in the islands to 2,000 years ago. Genome studies indicate that the Andaman tribes could have been on the islands even 30,000 years ago."

The use of the term tribe

Some people objected to the use of the word 'tribe' to describe the Sentinelese. Poet Ranjit Hoskote tweeted: "I'm appalled that many of us still use the contested and demeaning term 'tribe', with its baggage of colonial taxonomy and early, invasive anthropology (perhaps I should say 'primitive anthropology') while discussing the predicament of such communities as the Sentinelese people." Some readers wanted to know what was wrong in the use of the term.

Nomenclature is a political act. There has been effective criticism against the term 'tribal' from Africa, for instance. Anthropologist Michael Olen wrote: "The term tribe has never satisfied anthropologists, because of its many uses and connotations. Societies that are classified as tribal seem to be very diverse in their organisation, having little in common." Some scholars argue that if the term 'tribe' accurately conveys and clarifies truths better than other words, even if they are hard and unpleasant truths, we should use it. But some also contend that the term is vague and confusing.

How can journalists describe a group of people who have been officially categorised using objectionable words is the question. The Government of India has categorised the Sentinelese as "Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups" along with the Onges, the Jarawas, the Great Andamanese and the Shompens of the Great Nicobar. This is a progressive change from its earlier classification of them as "Primitive Tribal Groups". In the case of Africa, given its strong anti-apartheid struggle, the term 'tribe' has given way to different words such as ethnic group, nation, people, community, chiefdom, kin group and village with the focus on empirical accuracy and intellectual honesty. We need to interrogate some words for their pejorative connotations. Journalism does not have answers to many questions. But unlike the ostrich-like responses from the Silicon Valley giants, it grapples with contentious issues.

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SINGLE FILE

Pursuing Lashkar-e-Taiba

The U.S. has sought to pressure Pakistan over the terror group but the fundamental problem remains

MICHAEL KUGELMAN



Today, on the 10th anniversary of the Mumbai terror attacks, it is worth considering how U.S. policy towards the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) has evolved over the last decade. The conventional wisdom is that the Afghanistan war has compelled Washington to give more attention to Afghanistan-focused militants in Pakistan than to the LeT and other India-oriented jihadists. This is accurate to an extent – and especially today. Senior administration officials often emphasise that U.S. President Donald Trump's top foreign policy priority is to protect American lives. With 15,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, the Taliban is a much more clear and present danger to American lives than the LeT and its India-focussed ilk.

Still, the U.S. hasn't exactly sidelined the LeT issue. And one wouldn't expect it to. This is an organisation with American connections and enablers, including the infamous David Headley. And it killed six Americans in Mumbai.

The U.S. government has sought to pressure Pakistan over the LeT in ways that go beyond its formal designation of the LeT as a foreign terrorist organisation in 2001, and the \$10 million bounty it put on Hafiz Saeed in 2012. Jason Blazakis, a top State Department counterterrorism official between 2008 and 2018, recently wrote of U.S. attempts to get the UN to designate individual LeT members as terrorists. Such efforts fell short, given China's opposition. Early this year, however, the Financial Action Task Force penalised Islamabad for failing to curb the finances of the LeT-affiliated Jamaat-ud-Dawah. Additionally, China has signed on to BRICS and Heart of Asia declarations condemning the LeT. In April, the State Department designated the LeT's newest affiliate, Milli Muslim League, as a terrorist organisation.

True, such moves have done little to address the fundamental problem: the LeT, its various front organisations, and many of its top leaders enjoy relative freedom in Pakistan, and Pakistani legal action against the Mumbai perpetrators remains limited. Nonetheless, impelled in great part by counterterrorism imperatives, the U.S.-India defence partnership continues to grow. Indeed, the Mumbai attacks are a tragic yet powerful symbol of the shared threat of terrorism that brings the two nations together. U.S.-India counterterrorism cooperation is poised to increase.

This isn't to say Washington is about to start raining drones down on anti-India militant facilities in Pakistan. But there are other ways America can help India. Recent bilateral deals have paved the way for more intelligence sharing, arms sales, and technology transfers. Rumours persist that America may soon provide India with drone technologies. Such cooperation could go a long way towards helping strengthen India's capacities to pre-empt and tackle terrorist threats and reducing the likelihood of another 26/11.

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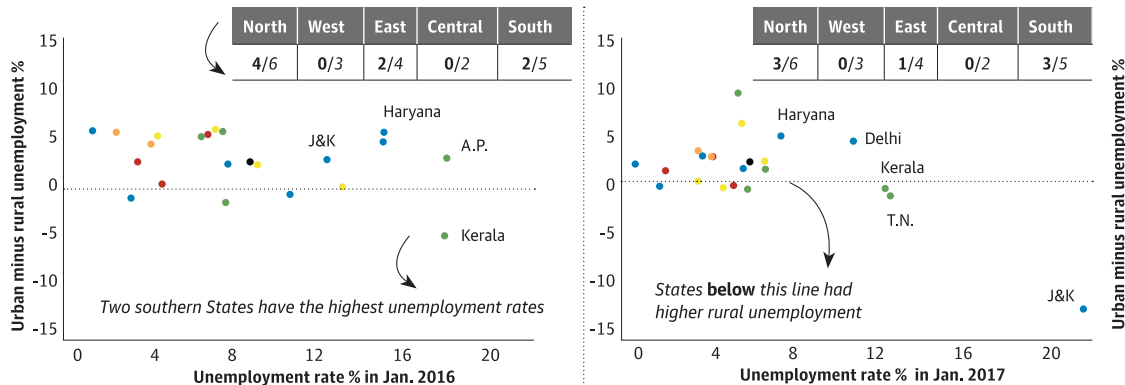


DATA POINT

Jobs going south

A look at country-wide unemployment rates* (●) over time shows that the rates had come down in 2017 after demonetisation (due to a spike in MGNREGA jobs) but increased again in 2018. The hike in 2018 has been fuelled by increases in the northern (●), eastern (●), western (●) and central (●) regions, while unemployment has receded in the southern States (●)

Tables show number of States with a higher unemployment rate than the Indian avg. / Number of States in the region



* The CMIE's 'Unemployment Rate in India' database provides estimates of the unemployment rate based on a panel size of over 158,000 households across 20 States

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 26, 1968

Armed attack by Marxists

About 200 Marxist-led agricultural workers are reported to have attacked the office of a big landlord in Kuttanad (Alleppey District) to-day (November 25). According to the report the attackers were armed with lethal weapons like daggers, knives, lathis, sticks and country-made guns. It is stated that the workers went in two country boats to Chitrapuram lake, an area belonging to Mr. Murickan, the landlord. They entered his office, damaged some articles there and also threw paddy, crude oil, etc. into the nearby lake. A son of Mr. Murickan who was in the office at that time managed to escape and took shelter in a nearby church. The workers were reported to have pelted stones at the church also. Soon after, when Mr. Murickan came to the scene with his men, the Marxists ran away, and while retreating fired three rounds in the air.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 26, 1918.

Famine in Bombay.

The Government have under consideration the question of formal declaration of the existence of scarcity or famine in tracts of the [Bombay] presidency affected by the failure of monsoon. Measures which are required to be taken by Collectors and other officers on first warnings of scarcity including liberal distribution of takair, institution of enquiries for suspension of revenue, test works for distribution of gratuitous relief, etc., have been adopted. Although observations of district officers and results obtained by the institution of test works have not as yet disclosed anywhere a general prevalence of distress among the people, the failure of crops in certain areas had been so complete and the pressure of high prices so severe that it is evident that sooner or later distress in a more or less acute form will appear and that even if the maintenance of regular relief works does not become necessary, distribution of gratuitous relief on a considerable scale and other relief measures will have to be resorted to.

CONCEPTUAL

Rational choice theory

SOCIOLOGY

This refers to a model of human behaviour which states that people act the way they do because they believe that the benefits of their actions will be higher than the associated costs. Proponents of the theory believe that people act in such a way that they are able to maximise their benefits while minimising their costs. A person committing a crime, for instance, will likely weigh the benefits and costs of such action. Rational choice theory, since it tries to model the general behaviour of individuals within any particular society, can be used to explain wider phenomena across any society.

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