

# THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA DESERVES BETTER

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Members of the central cabinet signing copies of the Constitution of India. Picture issued on January 24, 1950 | Photo Credit: PIB/THE HINDU PHOTO ARCHIVES

The [Constitution of India](#) was [adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949](#) for 'We the people of India'. After being unnoticed for long, the day began to be [celebrated as Constitution Day since 2015](#). This day is indeed a historic day for the nation, with the framing of a Constitution for the governance of independent India.

But it is imperative to go beyond the celebrations and look at the substantive issues relating to the primary parchment of the nation. For example, if we pose a question about the level of awareness about the Constitution among 'we the people', the answer may not be encouraging. It is understandable if unlettered people are not aware of the Constitution. But the situation is not much different among the educated sections either, despite the fact that the Constitution is an integral part of our life.

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The Constitution has a clear imprint on day-to-day life, though we may not be really conscious of it. If we ask a policeman why he is stopping us, it is because the Constitution has given us that right. The newspaper we read, the TV channels we watch; our travel by bus, train or in our own car every time; getting a passport and flying; taking up a profession we like; eating the food we relish in a restaurant; and buying fashionable outfits in malls — it is the Constitution which made this possible through fundamental rights. The freedom of movement, freedom of expression, freedom to choose a calling of our liking, freedom to buy, sell and carry-on any trade, freedom to wear garments of our choice; all these freedoms emanate from the Constitution in the form of fundamental rights. These freedoms were never available to us before we won independence from the British.

When we were on the verge of Independence, our freedom fighters wanted to make a clean break with the past and build a brave new society through the Constitution. Thus, the Constitution declared with the stroke of a pen that all Indians are equal citizens irrespective of caste, creed, colour, gender, estate, education, etc. This is, indeed, heady stuff for a nation steeped in religion, rituals, ignorance and poverty which gave rise to unacceptable inequalities between men and women, the rich and the poor, the literate and the illiterate, and the learned and the laity. Setting aside all these aberrations, the Constitution put everyone on an even keel,

even while providing a level playing field for the weak and the meek.

There is no denying the fact that the law is a weak source to bring about change in human thinking and behaviour. Just because the Constitution declared all Indians as equals, equality does not prevail from the day of such a declaration. But, if we inculcate it in our offspring, social change is distinctly possible. We all teach our children not to tell lies and not to steal. Cannot we teach them to treat their classmates without bias? And, that is what the Constitution says too. But, we are hardly conscious of the constitutional ideals enshrined in the Preamble.

How do we explain this indifference to the Constitution? We pay great respect to religious books and treat them as sacred doctrines, while we are oblivious to the Constitution which has changed our lives. It is unlikely that even those who are well educated and well-placed have a copy of the Constitution in their houses unless they are advocates. While educated people broadly know that there is a thing like fundamental rights, we are largely unaware of the fundamental duties enshrined in the Constitution. The Constitution is a holistic doctrine. Rights bring responsibilities with them. There is a chapter on Fundamental Duties in Part IVA of the Constitution.

But, how do we know the Constitution unless we have a copy and bother to open it even occasionally? Hardly any parent thinks of gifting the Constitution to their child in their birthday, while every parent wants their offspring to grow up as a responsible adult with mature minds and restrained manners. It is a vague ideal unless we inculcate values such as respect for women, empathy towards the weak and the meek, and reject dowry, caste and creed as the basis to measure the values of a person. And, where do we find these values? In the Constitution.

Article 15 says: "The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them." How beautiful this sentence would have read had "The state" been replaced by society. Has any parent thought along these lines while raising their child and teaching them good manners and values? The values we teach are essentially damaging to the mind, such as 'become a doctor or an engineer and get a hefty dowry'.

Unfortunately, there is hardly any focus on the Constitution at the school level, not to speak of tertiary education. The Constitution should get due recognition across the educational system. Celebrating November 26 as Constitution Day is fine, but we should not restrict ourselves to symbolism. We should look at the substantive issues dealt with by the Constitution, thereby enriching our life.

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Our ancient texts teach us that Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which means the entire humanity, is one large family. Every man is related to every other person. We should first learn to treat fellow Indians as a fraternity. We will know this only if we care to open the first page of the Constitution. For this we need a copy of the Constitution. And it costs less than a movie ticket these days.

Gummadidala Ranga Rao was Director (Research and Information) in the Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi

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