**75TH YEAR OF REPUBLIC OF INDIA**

The Republic of India enters its 75th year on 26th January 2024. This is a great event that needs to be celebrated. It is also an occasion to examine how far the promises made by the Indian Republic stand fulfilled in these 75 years and what should be done to achieve the noble values of the Constitution.

India became a Sovereign Democratic Republic by adopting the Constitution. The Constitution of India is a social contract. It defines the relationship between the citizens and that between the citizens and the State. The Constitution, therefore reflects the Idea of India, the idea as to what kind of State we want to build and what type of society we intend to construct. No other written constitution with the exception of US Constitution has survived for such a long period of time. The Indian Constitution has survived because it recognised the huge diversities and pluralities in the Indian society and also because of the consensus arrived at in balancing the number of competing ideas of India.

The drafting of the Constitution was an extremely difficult task considering such massive diversities. The Constituent Assembly had to accommodate a number of competing ideas of India. They had to adjudicate thousands of competing claims and demands from various community and group interests. After 3 years of intense debate, the Constituent Assembly finally came to the conclusion that the Nation has to be built on democracy and liberty and the economy has to be so organised as to enable social emancipation and equality. The Indian Constitution is the longest written Constitution with 395 Articles and a number of Schedules. The Preamble captures the entire spirit of the Constitution. It defines Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity as the foundational principles. The Indian Constitution is unique in the sense that it not only gave the citizens certain fundamental rights but also the guidance to the State as to how the economy has to be organised through Directive Principles of the State Policy.

Thus, we decided to build a State which is Sovereign Democratic Republic. The Sovereign here are the people; with whom all power rests. They elect Legislatures and the elected representatives elect the Head of the State, President of India. Here Democracy is not just about holding periodic elections but also the essentiality of the political executive and the Institutions created by the Constitution to be accountable to the people. It is about collective leadership, it is about dialogue, it is about the art of listening to different views and arriving at a consensus. It also means affirmative action to uplift the people who suffered social discrimination for centuries and assuring the minorities security of their interests.

It must be understood that no Constitution works on its own; it has to be worked. Dr.Ambedkar had clearly warned that however good a Constitution is, it will not serve its intended purpose if the people who work on it are insincere and lack constitutional morality. Dr Ambedkar has been right on dot as we see that the people responsible for the working of the Constitution themselves are weakening and undermining its foundational principles – Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. The economic organisation today is also in clear violation of the Directive Principles of the State Policy.

How could we create a just and equal society when inequalities in income and wealth have reached gigantic proportions; when minorities are othered and demonised; when social discrimination continues to increase? Can we say that it is the failure of the Constitution and democracy? Absolutely No. Constitution has not failed India; it is the political class which has failed the Constitution.

We proudly proclaim that we are the largest democracy in the world. What is the true meaning of democracy has been outlined in the earlier paragraphs. But today democracy has been reduced to electoral autocracy. The dominant philosophy today says that all means are fair to achieve the desired election results. The political executive, corporate and bureaucrat combine has made elections unfair. The role of money in elections has reached an alarming proportion. Democracy is also about the fear of losing elections by the party in power and the hope of opposition gaining power. But the immoral use of agencies like CBI, ED and Income Tax along with creating divisions on communal lines gives huge advantage to the present ruling regime making the entire process of elections unfair and not on even ground.

Democracy is also about accountability and today we find that the political executive is not accountable to the people. Issues of national importance raised in Parliament are either bulldozed or remain unanswered. The distinction between the State and the Party is erased. This is done by capturing all institutions set up under the constitutional framework to act as checks and balances. The Election Commission, Investigative agencies, CAG, RBI – all these institutions are compromised. State is identified with BJP and these institutions have become answerable to the Party rather than the Constitution. The freedom of expression has shrunk and the majoritarian nationalism describes criticism of the government and the Prime Minister as anti-national and seditious. The hopes on judiciary to defend the constitutional values and protect the citizens from the excesses of the executive are fast diminishing. The recent pronouncements of the highest court of the land have given a feeling that it has become the Executive Court.

The country is witnessing massive communal polarisation. The minorities especially are demonised. They have been politically marginalised with no Muslim representation in the Government. It is worth noting that there is not a single Muslim Member of Parliament in the ruling party. The marginalisation of and atrocities on Dalit continue unabated. While the social and economic framework has denied any real equality, the political executive has totally failed to promote the idea of fraternity. When the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers themselves indulge in divisive agenda, how can they promote the idea of fraternity which is essential for the unity and integrity of the country?

The economic organisation today is in total violation of the Directive Principles of the State Policy. Under neoliberalism, there is massive concentration of wealth. Every sector of the economy is witnessing emergence of either monopoly or duopoly. The gap between the top 1% and the remaining population has reached unprecedented levels. The bottom 50% of the population is eking out a miserable living. Substantial section of the population is either suffering from hunger or malnutrition. The State has totally failed to build human capital by investing in health and education. Despite tall claims that India is about to claim the third rank in terms of the global ranking of economies, the fact remains that India’s per person income is just $2610 per year compared to the world average of $13330. In the absence of a just distribution of income, the benefits of growth are being cornered by the top 10% of the population while the bottom 50% live in poverty, hunger and misery.

Therefore, it is not wrong to conclude that despite some significant successes achieved in the field of science and technology, we are quite a distance away from the goals set by the Constitution of building a State and Society on the foundations of Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. What can be done in such a situation? Such a situation demands serious struggle in defence of democracy and constitutional values. Today a substantial section of the population has fallen prey to falsehood and imaginary victimhood. Therefore, truth has to be told in as loud a voice as possible. This can be done only by the working class which unites all exploited sections irrespective of religion, language and region. The working class understands that the efforts of majoritarianism to homogenise the society and impose uniformity on a country with rich cultural, religious and linguistic diversities would divide the workers and weaken the national unity. Therefore, it is through the struggles of the working class that democratic and constitutional values can be protected. The increasing unity of the trade union movement and the new found unity between the workers and the farmers give rise to hopes that a joint sustained struggle can reverse the situation. Democracy is essential to our well-being. The foundational principles of the constitution are very dear to us. Let us therefore, take up the task of defending Constitution and Democracy sparing no efforts, however big the odds may be, to build a nation which is fair equal and just for all its citizens. On the 75th Year of our Republic, let us dedicate ourselves to defend Republican values and struggle to achieve the noble principles of Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.