

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT DROUPADI MURMU
ON THE OCCASION OF INAUGURATION OF CONSTITUTION
DAY CELEBRATIONS ORGANISED BY THE SUPREME
COURT OF INDIA**

New Delhi, November 26, 2023

I am happy to be here among you on the Constitution Day, an occasion of great national importance. Today, we commemorate the day the Constitution was adopted by the Constituent Assembly of India in 1949, after close to three years of brainstorming.

Earlier, this day was celebrated as Law Day. In 2015, as the nation celebrated the 125th birth anniversary of the key architect of the Constitution, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the Government of India declared 26th November as Constitution Day. The twin aims were to help spread awareness about the Constitution as well as about Dr. Ambedkar's crucial contribution to it. Today, we celebrate the values enshrined in this founding document and rededicate ourselves to uphold them in the day-to-day life of the nation.

What are these values? They are justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, which are especially highlighted in the Preamble. These are the principles on which we have agreed to conduct ourselves as a nation. These are, of course, the civilisational values of humankind, finding their best expression in the wisdom of this land. During a collective journey from darkness to light over the centuries, people in different parts of the world have rediscovered the same repeatedly.

In our case, it was during the great freedom struggle that we came to realise their importance once again. The people from different corners of this vast and diverse country – the rich and the poor, men and women, the educated and the uneducated, city-dwellers and villagers, followers

of different faiths – found a common objective in the liberation of the motherland. As they struggled against the foreign rule, they came to appreciate the significance of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. These values helped us win independence. It is no wonder these find a special mention in the Preamble and continue to guide our nation-building efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If there is one word that sums up the four foundational values, it has to be democracy. If we imagine someone from outer space visiting the earth, this creature would be amazed at Indian democracy, the largest of its kind in the world. Consider the phenomenon: nearly a fifth of humanity has decided to put one's individual destiny in the collective hands of the billion-plus fellow citizens. This is an immense trust; so immense that we fail to notice it in routine.

Moreover, India has been nurturing and enhancing this trust, by deepening democracy ever since it won freedom. How? By upholding justice, by stressing equality. All possible efforts have been made to empower every citizen, irrespective of gender, caste, creed, and other distinctions. That is why India has had people from highly varied backgrounds occupying high offices and excelling in various walks of life.

If we consider gender, for example, the offices of the President, the Prime Minister, and the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, among others, have been held by women. Though their numerical strength in legislative bodies was less, the long-awaited Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam will increase their proportion too. In the bureaucracy, armed forces as well as scientific and technological research institutions, women's representation has been rising. This is true not only for women but also for other socially disadvantaged groups including Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. While the place of the judiciary in the constitutional framework remains rather unique, I am confident that this institution too has been welcoming diversity with open arms. More varied

representation of India's unique diversity on Bench and Bar definitely helps serve the cause of justice better.

One way to hasten this diversification process can be the creation of a system in which judges can be recruited from varied background through a process which is merit based, competitive and transparent. There can be an All-India Judicial Service which can select brilliant youngsters and nurture and promote their talents from lower levels to higher levels. Those who aspire to serve the Bench can be selected from across the country to create a larger pool of talent. Such a system can offer opportunities to the less-represented social groups too. I leave it to your wisdom to devise any effective mechanism that you deem fit to achieve this objective of strengthening the justice delivery system.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The cause of justice is best served by making it accessible for all. This also strengthens equality. We should ask ourselves, especially on occasions like today's, whether every single citizen is in a position to seek justice. On introspection, we realise that there are many barriers in the way. Cost is, of course, the most significant factor. It is a matter close to my heart. That is why I appreciate all the initiatives taken by the Supreme Court in particular and the judiciary in general to expand the scope of free legal aid. Lawyers and civil society too have contributed to it.

Then, there are other barriers too. For example, language, which is beyond the comprehension of a majority of citizens. I feel reassured by the recent steps taken by the Supreme Court to make the verdicts available in various Indian languages. The live webcast of court proceedings too will go a long way in making citizens true stakeholders of the judicial system.

The question of access to justice often reminds me of the so-called "bell of justice" which often features in our mythological stories. Such tales highlight some king's love for justice by pointing out that he had installed

a bell that any citizen could ring at any time of the day if he was seeking justice. When I heard such stories as a child, I wondered if the king would have any peace of mind at all, with people clamouring for his attention all the time. Later, I realised that such a king would have made the justice delivery system so efficient that the bell would need to be rung only rarely. Therefore, in order to improve the access to justice, we should seek to make the overall system citizen-centric.

Speaking of our systems, we realise that they have been products of time; more precisely, products of colonialism. Clearing away its vestiges has been a work in progress. I am sure that we can speed up the remaining part of de-colonisation in all domains with more conscious efforts. I believe involving the young generation in those efforts, by making them more knowledgeable of the Constitution, its making and its working, will bear excellent fruits in that direction. The youth have become more interested in our history, and if they learn more about the transformative work of visionaries like Babasaheb Ambedkar, the future of the Republic will be in safe hands.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we celebrate the Constitution Day, we should note that the Constitution is after all only a written document. It comes alive and remains alive only if its contents are put into practice. That requires the exercise of interpretation. I must congratulate the Supreme Court for playing the role of the final interpreter of our founding document to the perfection. Well aware of their role and responsibility in India's democracy, this Court's bar and bench have constantly raised the standards of jurisprudence. Their legal acumen and scholarship has been par excellence. Like our Constitution, our Supreme Court too has been a model for many other nations. With a vibrant judiciary, I am sure the health of our democracy is never going to be a cause of concern.

I convey my best wishes to all the members of the judiciary in their endeavours.

Thank you.
Jai Hind!
Jai Bharat!