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75 YEARS OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION – A JOURNEY OF DEMOCRACY AND UNITY

AUTHORED BY - DEEPA G NAIR

Introduction:

Seventy-five years ago, on 26th January 1950, India gave itself one of the most comprehensive and visionary constitutions in the world. It was not merely a legal document — it was the blueprint of a nation’s soul. Drafted with deep thought, immense debate, and a keen understanding of both history and future aspirations, the Indian Constitution has been the guiding light for the world’s largest democracy. Over these decades, it has weathered storms, adapted to changing needs, and stood as a testament to the idea that diverse people can unite under shared values of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity.

When we celebrate 75 years of the Indian Constitution, we are not just looking back at a document. We are celebrating a living, breathing system that continues to shape the lives of over 1.4 billion people.

The Birth of the Constitution

The Indian Constitution’s creation was no ordinary task. Imagine this: a newly independent country emerging from centuries of colonial rule, facing challenges like poverty, illiteracy, communal tension, and economic instability — and yet, within less than three years, producing a constitution that was both visionary and practical.

The Constituent Assembly met for the first time on 9th December 1946. Over the next two years, eleven months, and eighteen days, its members debated, disagreed, compromised, and finally agreed upon a constitution. The result was a 395-article document (in the original version) that combined the best features of constitutions from around the world but still retained a uniquely Indian spirit.

A central figure in this process was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Drafting Committee. He once famously said, *“However good a Constitution may be, if those who are implementing it are not good, it will prove to be bad.”* His words remain relevant today —

reminding us that a constitution is only as strong as the people who uphold it.

Why the Constitution Matters

The Constitution of India is not just a legal framework; it's the glue that holds our incredibly diverse nation together. With hundreds of languages, multiple religions, and varied cultures, there was always the risk of fragmentation after independence. But the Constitution offered a unifying vision.

Its Preamble clearly sets the tone — we, the people of India, promise ourselves justice (social, economic, and political), liberty, equality, and fraternity. These aren't just lofty words; they've served as a compass whenever the nation faced moral or political crossroads.

My grandfather often recalled how, on the morning of 26th January 1950, there was quiet excitement in the air. Radio announcements kept repeating the historic news — India had officially become a Republic. While most ordinary people didn't fully understand the legal intricacies, they knew one thing: from that day on, India's destiny would be decided by its own people, not foreign rulers. This pride, he said, was priceless.

Features of the Constitution

The Indian Constitution is often called the longest written constitution in the world. But it's not just long — it's remarkably detailed and inclusive. Some of its standout features include:

1. A Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic – India belongs to its people, promotes social justice, respects all religions equally, and ensures the voice of the people matters.
2. Fundamental Rights – Guaranteeing freedoms such as speech, equality before the law, and protection against discrimination.
3. Directive Principles of State Policy – Guidelines for the government to ensure social and economic welfare.
4. Federal Structure with a Unitary Bias – Balancing powers between the Centre and states, while ensuring national unity.
5. Independent Judiciary – A safeguard against misuse of power.

75 Years of Challenges and Triumphs

Over the decades, the Constitution has faced its share of trials. Some periods tested its resilience — the Emergency of 1975–77 being a key example, when certain freedoms were suspended. Yet, the Constitution emerged stronger, as democratic forces reasserted themselves.

Landmark amendments, such as the 42nd Amendment (which added words like "Socialist" and "Secular" to the Preamble) and the 73rd and 74th Amendments (strengthening Panchayati Raj and local governance), showed the Constitution's ability to evolve with time.

Judicial decisions like *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973) also played a huge role, especially by introducing the Basic Structure Doctrine — which ensures that certain core principles of the Constitution can never be altered.

I still remember my first Civics class in school where we were handed a small, printed copy of the Preamble. At first, the words felt heavy and formal. But as the teacher explained them with simple examples — equality meant everyone in class having the same chance to speak; liberty meant being free to express ourselves without fear — the meaning clicked. It struck me that these weren't abstract ideas; they were principles meant to guide how we treat each other in everyday life.

The Constitution in Everyday Life

Many of us think of the Constitution only during national holidays or in political debates. But it quietly shapes countless everyday moments:

- The right to vote in elections.
- The ability to approach courts if our rights are violated.
- Reservations in education and jobs to promote social justice.
- Freedom to practice any religion, wear what we like, and speak our minds.

Even ordinary things — like the language used in official documents, the structure of government offices, or the rules for starting a business — all trace their roots to the Constitution.

Criticism and Debate

A healthy democracy allows space for criticism, and the Indian Constitution has faced plenty. Some feel it gives too much power to the Centre, reducing state autonomy. Others believe the amendment process has been used too freely, sometimes diluting its original spirit.

There's also the challenge of implementation — rights on paper that don't always translate to reality. For example, despite constitutional guarantees, issues like caste discrimination, gender inequality, and religious intolerance persist. These gaps remind us that a constitution is a starting point; it's up to citizens and leaders to live by its ideals.

75 Years Later: Where We Stand

As we mark this 75-year milestone, certain achievements stand out:

- India has remained a functioning democracy despite being one of the most diverse nations on Earth.
- Peaceful transitions of power have become the norm.
- Judiciary, media, and civil society have acted as watchdogs, ensuring accountability.

At the same time, we must acknowledge challenges — polarization, misuse of technology, and threats to freedom of expression test the strength of our constitutional values.

Looking Ahead

The next 75 years will present new questions. How should the Constitution deal with artificial intelligence, climate change, or digital privacy? How can it better protect the environment or adapt to global economic shifts? These are not just legal matters — they will shape how our democracy functions in the 21st century.

One thing is certain: the spirit of the Constitution — empowering people, promoting justice, and protecting freedom — must remain at the core.

Recently, during a college debate, I heard a classmate speak passionately about why the Constitution should include stronger environmental protections. She argued that if we don't safeguard nature, all other rights will become meaningless. Her conviction reminded me that the Constitution is not just for lawyers or politicians — it belongs to every citizen, young or old.

Conclusion

The Indian Constitution is more than ink on paper; it's a living document that has guided our Republic for 75 years. It has absorbed the shocks of political crises, adapted to social changes, and inspired millions to believe in the power of democracy.

As we look back, we see a journey filled with struggle, resilience, and hope. As we look forward, we carry the responsibility of keeping its spirit alive — not just by remembering its words, but by living them in our daily actions.

In Dr. Ambedkar's own words: *"The Constitution is not a mere lawyer's document, it is a vehicle of life, and its spirit is always the spirit of the age."* The next chapters of India's story will depend on how faithfully we, as citizens, drive that vehicle into the future.

