

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF INAUGURATION OF CONSTITUTION DAY**

New Delhi, November 26, 2020

I am happy to be speaking with you on the occasion of the Constitution Day. I would have been happier to interact with you all in person, but the pandemic has imposed restrictions on us.

Today is the 71st anniversary of the adoption of our Constitution. Since 1979, the legal fraternity had been celebrating November 26 as 'Law Day' every year on a call by the Supreme Court Bar Association. In 2015, commemorating Babasaheb Ambedkar's 125th birth anniversary, the Government decided to celebrate November 26 as the Constitution Day.

I believe we are blessed in having our founding document drafted by the great visionary leaders of our freedom movement. They were conscious of the fact that they were writing the collective future of the nation only on behalf of the people at large. Not only is democracy at the heart of the Constitution, the Constituent Assembly itself was formed in a democratic manner. It had popular representation from across the country, and included some path-breaking women among its members too. People also took great interest in the lively debates of the Constituent Assembly. Over 53,000 citizens sat in the visitors' gallery over a period close to three years and watched the debates, according to the records.

Thus, what we have before us is – if I may say so – a document truly of the people, by the people and for the people. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln I can say with conviction that this document, a creation of Indian genius and ingenuity, too shall not perish from earth, as citizens continue to repose faith in it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our Constitution is said to be the lengthiest document of its kind. But then, as the President of the Constituent Assembly, Rajen Babu, rightly observed, its bulk is not an issue if its provisions are well thought out. This spirit of the epic of our times, however, is elegantly captured in the Preamble. In mere eighty-five words, it spells out the core values that propelled the Freedom Struggle, the vision of our Founding Fathers, the dreams and aspirations of every Indian. Many of these solemn words were discussed threadbare by the learned members on 17th October of 1949.

The Preamble has rightly been seen as the heart of the Constitution, and at its core are certain values. They are justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. This is the moral compass of our journey together to a glorious future. Dr. Ambedkar, as chairman of the drafting committee, spoke eloquently about their significance in his concluding speech: [Quote] “What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy.” [Unquote]

Ladies and gentlemen

The task before us, is to recognize these noble ideals as a way of life; that is, to translate these words into everyday acts. What does it imply for the Judiciary? The Preamble speaks of the resolve to secure for all its citizens social, economic and political justice. At the risk of repeating myself, I reiterate that the notion of justice itself implies access to justice. In other words, justice can be secured only to the extent that it can be accessed.

Improving access to justice for all is, of course, a work in progress. It is bound to be by its very nature. The hurdles in the way are many, the

cost being the topmost among them. In that regard, I have spoken before of my passion for pro-bono service. I am glad that I had the opportunity to provide free counsel to the needy when I was a practising advocate.

Another hurdle has been the language, and on this count I am pleased that the higher judiciary has started making available its judgments in more and more regional languages. This is surely the best way to keep more and more citizens in the loop, and thus bringing the institution of judiciary closer to the citizenry at large.

Solutions, on the other hand, are numerous too. Technology is emerging as the foremost among them – more so now, as we grapple with restrictions the pandemic has imposed on us. I am happy to see that the Supreme Court has continued to function and dispense justice amid the pandemic, using technological solutions like video-conferencing and e-filing. I commend the bar, the bench and the officials for not letting the coronavirus come in the way of fulfilling the duty of securing justice for all. The compulsion induced by Covid-19 can indeed help us further in finding more creative ways to fulfill that task and augment the access to justice.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On this solemn occasion, let us further ponder upon the task of making the noble ideals part of our lives. I recall the words of Rajen Babu, the first among my illustrious predecessors. On 24th January, 1950, the Constituent Assembly met for the last time. It was during this sitting that Dr Rajendra Prasad's name was announced as the first President of India. Responding to cheers and congratulations from the fellow members, the stalwart freedom fighter said, [and I quote], "I have always held that the time for congratulation is not when a man is appointed to an office, but when he retires, and I would like, to wait until the moment comes when I have to lay down the office which you have conferred on me to see whether I have deserved the confidence and the goodwill

which have been showered on me from all sides and by all friends alike.” [Unquote]

Rajen Babu probably had in mind the timeless lines of Sant Kabir who spoke of returning the covering cloth to the Maker in the same condition, without spoiling it:

दास कबीर जतन करि ओढी, ज्यों कीं त्यों धर दीनी चदरिया॥

That, I believe, is an appropriate image to keep in mind to guide our conduct in public life. Should this not be the aspiration of those holding high constitutional posts? We should strive to set an example, always rising above partisanship and prejudices. These observations of Rajen Babu applies to all of us. While discharging my responsibilities, I have always tried to hold his words as guiding Mantra for me. Let us introspect how we can better live up to the ideals of the Founding Fathers, as enshrined in the Constitution in general and the Preamble in particular.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Supreme Court of India has earned a reputation for its superior standards and lofty ideals. Landmark judgments passed by this Court have strengthened the legal and constitutional framework of our country. It's Bench and the Bar are known for their intellectual depth and legal scholarship. I am confident that this Court would always remain the sentinel of justice. I wish the Chief Justice and the Judges of the Supreme Court the very best for the future. I also wish very best to members of the Supreme Court bar who are regarded officers of the court for their fruitful future.

I am thankful to you for giving me the opportunity to share my views. I congratulate you all on the Constitution Day.

Jai Hind!