

ENDURING NATIONHOOD

At a time when the world is increasingly fragmented, divided by sharp binaries, ideological entrenchment, and the politics of suspicion, India stands apart as a civilisation that has long prioritised fraternity over friction, harmony over hostility, and collective well-being over narrow individualism. The essence of India's nationhood is not merely a political construct born of borders or governments. It is an ancient civilisational consciousness that has survived conquests, disruptions and global churns precisely because it is rooted in interconnectedness, not confrontation. The Western imagination of a nation-state emerged from long periods of conflict, from territorial wars and religious schisms to industrial competition and colonial struggles. Its frameworks evolved in a world marked by suspicion, rigid identities and repeated conflict. India's self-understanding, by contrast, was shaped by a culture that saw unity not as uniformity but as coexistence. The Indian notion of *rashtra* predates modern states by millennia, grounded not in sovereignty over land but in the shared civilisational ethos of its people. This *rashtra* was never born out of arrogance or exclusion. It grew from a recognition of the deep bonds linking humanity with one another and with nature itself. In India, fraternity is not a borrowed ideal. It is the bedrock of social life. The idea that we are all children of *Bharat Mata* is not a sentimental slogan but a philosophical truth embedded in the country's cultural DNA. Indian civilisation has never relied on human-made markers of identity such as religion, language, food, customs or geography, to determine belonging. These differences existed, as they still do, but they were never seen as dividing lines. Instead, diversity was interpreted as an expression of a larger unity, a reflection of a worldview that saw the divine in every human and the sacred in every element of nature. This is why India's unity has weathered storms that would have fractured other societies. Unlike the West, where nationalism often hardened into cultural superiority and political aggression, fueling devastating world wars, India has consistently upheld humility as a national virtue. Its nationhood does not seek domination, nor does it hinge on homogenisation. It flows from an understanding that all life is interdependent, that individual purpose is intertwined with collective progress, and that the highest duty is the nurturing of universal well-being. At a time when ideological polarisation is tearing apart societies, India's civilisational commitment to harmony offers a crucial alternative. The world today does not need more walls, more binaries, or more aggressive identities. It needs a philosophy that dissolves boundaries rather than erecting them. India has embodied that philosophy for centuries. *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam* is not an aspirational slogan crafted for diplomatic platforms. It is an ethos that India lived long before globalisation became a buzzword. As humanity confronts unprecedented uncertainty from technological upheavals, cultural anxieties to ecological distress, India's ancient emphasis on fraternity and coexistence may well be the moral compass the world needs. In a civilisation where diversity thrives without discord and unity exists without uniformity, there lies a model of nationhood that is both timeless and urgently relevant.

Tributes to Baba Saheb Dr. Ambedkar: From Labour leader to Nation Builder

■ ARJUN RAM MEGHWAL

Today, we commemorate the 70th Mahaparinirvan Day of Baba Saheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, a larger-than-life figure and a champion of progressive measures that have shaped the course of modern human society. As a jurist, economist, philosopher, reformer, and above all, a nation-builder, his tireless efforts laid the foundation of modern India. He did not merely draft a Constitution; he provided a blueprint for an inclusive and empowered nation, where every citizen enjoys dignity and opportunity. Inspired by these foundational values, the Modi government has undertaken numerous initiatives promoting welfare and good governance.

On November 27, 2025, at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, the world paused to witness the unveiling of a bust of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Indian Constitution. Among global dignitaries, the statue stood not merely as a tribute to an Indian leader but as a universal symbol of justice. The plaque reads "Architect of the Indian Constitution," yet these words barely capture the legacy of a man who not only drafted laws but helped shape an entire nation in totality.

During his entire lifetime, Baba Saheb Dr Ambedkar carried forward the struggle for justice, championing for labour rights and welfare. As the representative of the Depressed Classes in the Round Table Conference, he strongly advocated for living wages, decent working conditions, freedom for peasants from oppressive landlords, and the eradication of social evils affecting the downtrodden. He had personally witnessed the suffering of workers and the downtrodden. In Bombay, he lived for over 10 years in one-room tenements of the Bombay Development Department alongside mill workers, where there were no modern facilities and each floor had only one lavatory and one tap for all purposes. These conditions gave him firsthand knowledge of workers' lives. He mobilized the masses and founded the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1936 with a comprehensive program for landless people, poor tenants, agriculturists, and workers. On September 17, 1937, during

the Poona session of the Bombay Assembly, he introduced a bill to abolish the Khoti land tenure system in Konkan. In 1938, he led a peasants' march to the Council Hall in Bombay, becoming a popular leader of peasants, workers, and the landless. He was the first Indian legislator to introduce a bill to end the serfdom of agricultural tenants. He also strongly opposed the Industrial Disputes Bill, 1937, because it curtailed workers' right to strike.

When the world order was in uncertainty during the 2nd world war, Dr. Ambedkar as a Labour Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council was guiding the path for the labourer in India. As economies transformed and industries expanded, entrepreneurs gained opportunities for prosperity, but labour was not given its fair share. Dr. Ambedkar introduced key measures for labour welfare, laying the foundation of the Government's labour policy. He handled complex labour issues with great efficiency and earned the respect of both employees and employers.

In his 1943 All India Radio address from Bombay, Dr. Ambedkar urged securing a "fair condition of life" for labour, grounded in liberty, equality, and fraternity. His efforts helped bring workers under social security. He made lasting contributions through key labour legislation, including the War Injuries (Compensation Insurance) Bill, the Indian Boilers (Amendment) Bill, 1943—addressing unsafe inspections that caused many mill deaths—the Indian Mines and Trade Unions Amendment Bills, the Miners Maternity Benefit Amendment, the Coal Mines Safety (Stowing) Amendment, and the Workmen's Compensation Amendment.

On 9 December 1943, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar visited the Dhanbad coalfields, going 400 feet underground to inspect operations and labour conditions. This visit led to the Coal Mine Labour Welfare Ordinance of January 1944, creating a fund for workers' welfare. He strengthened this fund by doubling the tax on extracted coal, ensuring better health and safety measures for miners. On 8 November 1943, he also introduced the Indian Trade Union (Amendment) Bill, requiring employers to recognise trade unions.

On 8 February 1944, during the Legislative Assembly debate on lifting the ban on women's underground work in coal

mines, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar stated, "It is for the first time that I think in any industry the principle has been established of equal pay for equal work irrespective of the sex." This marked a historic moment for the nation. Through the Mines Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 1943, he strengthened maternity benefits and addressed absenteeism. In 1945, he further amended the Act to prohibit women from underground work for ten weeks before childbirth and ensured fourteen weeks of maternity leave—ten weeks before and four weeks after confinement.

Addressing the Indian Labour Conference in New Delhi on 26 November 1945, he reviewed the State's obligations to labour and urged laws to raise Indian labour standards to international levels. Emphasizing the need for progressive labour welfare legislation, he said:—

"Labour may well say that the fact that the British took 100 years to have a proper code of labour legislation is no argument that we should also in India take 100 years. History is not to be studied merely with a view to know how well to imitate the mistakes of other countries. We study history with a view to know the errors people have made and how they could be avoided. History is not always an example. More often it is a warning."

The next day at the same conference, he proposed legislation to reduce working hours to a 48-hour week in factories, introduce statutory industrial canteens, and amend the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1934. He also announced plans to draft laws for minimum wages and for amending the Indian Trade Union Act, 1926. On 21 February 1946, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar moved the Factories (Amendment) Bill to reduce weekly working hours to 48, fix overtime rates, and provide paid leave. After review by the select committee, this landmark legislation—championed by Ambedkar—was passed on 4 April 1946.

The Mica Mines Labour Welfare Fund Bill, introduced by him to create a fund for welfare activities in the mica mining industry, was passed on 15 April 1946. It improved amenities and working conditions for child and women labourers, including hours and wage issues. Dr. Ambedkar also moved a Minimum Wages Bill on 11 April 1946, proposing advisory committees and boards with equal employer-labour representation. This bill was later enacted into

law on 9 February 1948.

Dr. Ambedkar opposed the labour movement led by communists, rejecting Marx's totalitarian approach of controlling all means of production. He disagreed with Marx's view that abolishing private property would end poverty and suffering. In his essay *Buddha or Karl Marx*, he writes:—

"Can the Communists say that in achieving their valuable end they have not destroyed other valuable ends? They have destroyed private property. Assuming that this is a valuable end can the Communists say that they have not destroyed other valuable end in the process of achieving it? How many people have they killed for achieving their end. Has human life no value ? Could they not have taken property without taking the life of the owner?"

While drafting the Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar placed labour in the Concurrent List to ensure uniform legislation and alignment with international standards. His foresight also eliminated bonded labour by declaring it illegal in the Constitution.

Guided by the Mantra of "Reform, Perform, Transform," and taking inspiration of Dr. Ambedkar's values, the government has implemented four comprehensive labour codes—the Codes on Wages, Industrial Relations, Social Security & Welfare, and Occupational Safety, Health & Working Conditions. These reforms aim to ensure universal social security, protect workers' rights, boost productivity, create jobs, and strengthen India's economic growth toward a *Viksit Bharat* by 2047. The Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Yojana, launched in February 2019, provides old-age protection for unorganised workers, while the Maternity Amendment Act, 2017, extends maternity leave from 12 to 26 weeks and mandates crèche facilities. As we honor the countless contributions of laborers in nation-building, guided by the enduring spirit of Shramev Jayate, Dr. Ambedkar's Mahaparinirvan Diwas offers a fitting moment to reflect on the vision and actions of this great nation-builder. His ideals remain a guiding light, inspiring us to achieve the goal of a *Viksit Bharat* by 2047.

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How safe are we?

■ RAJIV GUPTA

It has not been even a month since the horrific bomb blast at the Red Fort, but already it seems like a distant memory; news related to the incident having been relegated to one of the inner pages of newspapers. One might be tempted to believe that whatever danger was present immediately after the incident is history and we are safe now. But are we really safe?

Immediately following the blast, several of the busy markets in Delhi were "fortified" to prevent any similar incident. The term fortified is in quotes to stress the lack of seriousness this action conveys. The reason for this assertion will be examined next.

Most markets in Delhi, as also in other parts of the country, are pedestrian areas. The explosives that were blown up at the Red Fort were carried in a car, suggesting that they were larger and heavier than what could have been carried on a person. How does a pedestrian marketplace be secured when the threat is from a car bomb? Most market places in Delhi are closely integrated into residential areas and restricting car traffic is impractical as it would virtually bring a large part of the city to a standstill.

Second, securing the pedestrian areas is a very big challenge because these areas are porous and have multiple points of entry and exit. This is largely true of older markets in

Delhi such as Chandni Chowk, Lajpat Nagar, Sarojini Nagar, etc. Unlike malls which have restricted points of entry and exit, the other open markets cannot easily be secured. It is interesting to note that, in the case of malls, there is usually a security check at entry even when there is no threat of violence. In the case of open markets there is an appearance of some tightening of pedestrian traffic, but that is short lived in the aftermath of a blast such as the one in the Red Fort area.

It is not only true that securing an open market poses a significant challenge, but the way in which this is done sometimes reveals a less than serious approach to maintain the safety of the common shoppers as well as the shop keepers in these markets. For example, in the New Friends Colony market barricades were put up at one end of the market. The market is open from three other sides, and nothing was done to secure those points of entry. Even the barricades that were put had a huge gap to allow people to bypass the checkpoint. To top it all, there were no security guards or policemen stationed at the barricades. A question naturally arises, "What purpose does the barricade serve?"

Similarly, in the Lajpat Nagar market, any semblance of extra security vanished after about 10 days following the Red Fort incident. What made the authorities confident that the area was safe enough to remove the security arrangements. Is there a process that the police or the government uses to determine the length of time for increased security? Why

would any potential terrorist follow up immediately in the wake of a bomb blast? It would be logical for the terrorist to strike when a strike is least expected. In the above two cases cited above, it would mean after the authorities have eased controls.

The question that needs to be asked is, if malls can have security checks year round, why is increased security in markets not provided in a similar fashion? One suspects that a possible reason might be the lack of adequate police and security personnel. But, why are the existing personnel not deployed more effectively in the market areas? There is never a dearth of security personnel that are assigned to safeguard our politicians. It is well known that most public figures consider their personal security as a mark of status, and not a real safety requirement. It is time that either this practice has to be reviewed comprehensively, and without political interference, or at the very least, additional personnel recruited so that the police can truly be considered a source of public safety.

Better patrolling of crowded areas by the police could go a long way in making our cities secure. It was done very effectively during Covid, to prevent unnecessary movement of people in public areas. While the same level of patrolling may not be needed for security purposes, it would be helpful if the current level of boots on the ground is improved. The police are typically not considered an ally by the common man. This situation needs to be addressed by training of the police personnel as

well as by education of the population. People need to feel comfortable and not afraid in the presence of the police. This could lead to more co-operation among people and the police where citizens would feel encouraged to report any suspicious activity that they may observe.

The police force has been used in India by political parties to seek retribution on their opponents. This has gone a long way to erode the public confidence in the police as they are seen as serving only the politicians, and not the general public. The trust deficit between the police and the people needs to be restored.

Incidents such as the one at the Red Fort are stark reminders that danger can lurk in any place.

These incidents cannot be completely prevented, in spite of the best efforts by authorities, but their chances can be reduced. The best example of this is Israel, where terrorist incidents continue to happen although the country uses very stringent security measures. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to prevent a suicide bomber from blowing himself/herself up.

However, better intelligence about suspicious activities can help forewarn of a future incident. There are several reports which mention how a terrorist plot was foiled by information gained by our agencies. This capability should certainly be strengthened. If the police and the citizens work collaboratively, it can be hoped that fewer such incidents occur in the future and fewer unnecessary innocent lives are lost.---INFA

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