



"It is better to fail in originality than to succeed in imitation."

—Herman Melville



Governance that listens

Good governance begins with a simple principle of government listening to its people. In a democracy, citizens should never feel that their voices disappear into silence once a complaint is filed. That is why the recent progress in grievance redressal in Jammu and Kashmir deserves attention and appreciation. According to official data, the Union Territory has achieved an overall disposal rate of 88 per cent on the JK Samadhan Portal, with more than 1.05 lakh grievances already addressed out of the total received. This reflects a significant improvement in how public complaints are being handled and resolved. Public grievance platforms play an important role in modern governance. They create a direct bridge between citizens and the administration. When people are able to register complaints easily and receive timely responses, trust in institutions grows stronger. More importantly, such systems ensure that everyday problems, whether related to public services, infrastructure or administrative delays, are not ignored. The performance of the JK Samadhan portal shows that digital platforms can make governance more responsive. District administrations across the Union Territory have reported high disposal rates, with many districts crossing the 90 per cent mark. Even districts that receive a large number of complaints have managed to maintain steady progress in resolving them. This indicates that the system is not merely symbolic but is being actively used to address public concerns. Another encouraging aspect is the relatively short time taken to resolve many complaints. In several districts grievances are being addressed within a few weeks. For citizens who often struggle with bureaucratic delays, such responsiveness can make a meaningful difference in their daily lives. The progress also highlights a broader shift in administrative culture. For years many people felt that filing complaints rarely led to results. Digital grievance systems are gradually changing that perception. When people see their problems being acknowledged and acted upon, they are more likely to engage with governance processes in constructive ways. However, while the progress is commendable, the journey cannot stop at 88 per cent. The ultimate goal must always be complete redressal. Every unresolved complaint represents a citizen whose problem is still waiting for attention. Governance cannot claim success until every voice is heard and every genuine grievance is addressed. The remaining pending cases must therefore receive focused attention. Some complaints may require coordination between departments, field inspections or longer administrative processes. But delays should never turn into neglect. Even complex issues deserve continuous follow up until they reach a conclusion. The expansion of the portal's reach is also important. Many households across the Union Territory are now covered by the system but greater awareness is still needed, especially in urban areas. Citizens must know that they have a reliable channel to raise their concerns and seek solutions. Grievance redressal is not just about numbers or statistics. It is about dignity. When a citizen approaches the system with a problem, they are expressing trust in the institutions of governance. Responding to that trust is the responsibility of the state. A region moves forward only when all of its citizens move forward.

REWIND: SECULARISM, AMBEDKAR & COMMON CIVIL CODE



In the backdrop of the Supreme Court recently coming in open support of the UCC, we revisit this week an article, originally published in October 1990. The piece had then argued that India's secular fabric would be best served by the gradual adoption of a Common Civil Code—one that is voluntary in its initial stages. The emphasis on voluntariness is significant. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar himself had envisaged such an approach, suggesting that in future the Parliament, in the early phase, might consider making the application of the Code optional, thereby allowing Muslims to come to terms with it over time rather than through compulsion. Much of the enduring controversy and confusion surrounding the UCC stems from a combination of widespread ignorance and general disinclination among our rulers and their advisers to delve deep into matters. In that sense, this four-decade-old article remains remarkably relevant and merits a careful re-reading today.

INDER JIT

More and more people are swearing by secularism today than ever before in the past two decades. Equally interestingly, more and more people are today swearing by Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of our Constitution. Both Houses of Parliament concluded their special session on Punjab on October 5 with a fervent call to the people to live up to the ideals of democratic secularism as enshrined in the Constitution. Baba Sahib, as Dr Ambedkar was affectionately called, was also remembered time and again in Parliament as the two Houses debated the Mandal report and the tragic fall-out of the Government's decision on it. Outside the two Houses, even the Shahi Imam seemed to be standing up for secularism as he attacked the BJP Chief, Mr L.K. Advani, for his rath yatra. Yet few have paused to ask a pertinent question: How many of those who swear by secularism and Dr Ambedkar are willing to implement the secular provision of the Constitution which provides: "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the country."

Tragically, there is no sign of any common civil code even after four decades of the Constitution. In fact, the Government's failure in the matter was spotlighted in 1985 by a five-member Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, presided over by the Chief Justice, Mr Y.V. is Chandrachud, in a bold and enlightened judgment in the famous Shah Bano case. The Chief Justice went to the extent of stating that it was a matter of regret that Article 44 had "remained a dead letter." However, "a beginning had to be made... Inevitably, the role of the reformer was to be assumed by the courts... A common civil code will help the cause of national integration by removing disparate loyalties to laws which have conflicting ideologies." But the Supreme Court was halted soon thereafter in its tracks by the Mullahs and prevented from taking on the role of reformers. The Rajiv Government, as readers would recall, was prevailed upon by the fundamentalists to bring forward the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill. In one stroke, the hopes of reform roused by the Supreme Court's historic judgment were dashed to the ground.

Much of the trouble (and confusion) over the common civil code has arisen because of widespread ignorance and general disinclination among our rulers and their advisers to delve deep into matters. Consequently, what transpired in the Constituent Assembly on the debate on Article 35 (now Article 44) of the Constitution on November 23, 1948, bears repetition, five leading Muslim members opposed the Article and were given a full hearing, unlike what happens today. Every group or community, it was argued, had a right to follow its own personal law, which was part of their religion and culture. Further, that a common civil code would clash with and undo Article 19 of the Constitution, which provides for "freedom of con-

science and the freely to profess, practise and propagate religion." Nevertheless at least two of them said something refreshing which deserves recalled. Mr Hussain Imam conceded that a common civil code very desirable thing." But this should be done at "a very date." Mr Naziruddin Ahmed also said: "The goal should be uniform civil code, but it should be gradual and with the people concerned three legal stalwarts met the concerted attack by the Muslims members on the article on behalf of the Drafting Committee. They were Mr. K.M. Munshi, Mr Alladi Krishnaswamy Ayyar and, finally, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, Mr. Munshi asserted that Article 35 did not infringe the fundamental right mentioned in Article 19. Parliament would be entitled to enact laws in the field of social welfare and reform. There was nothing tyrannical in the Article. When the Shariat Act was passed under the British regime, the causes and the Cutchi Memons were highly

Did the Muslims take exception and did they revolt against the British for introducing a single system of criminal law? Similarly we have the law of contracts governing transactions between Muslims and Hindus, between Muslims and Muslims. They are governed not by the law of the Koran but by the Anglo-Indian jurisprudence, yet no exception was taken to that. Again, there are various principles in the law of transfer which have been borrowed from the English jurisprudence. Today, even without Article 35, there is nothing to prevent the future Parliament of India from passing such laws. Therefore, the idea is to have a uniform civil code... which will run into every aspect of civil law."

Characteristically, Dr Ambedkar went to the heart of the matter and made two observations. First, the Muslim Personal Law was not immutable and uniform throughout India, contrary to what had been stated in the amendments (moved by Muslim members.)

sure a civil code for the citizens of the country. It does not say that after the code is framed the State shall enforce it upon all citizens merely because they are citizens. It is perfectly possible that the future Parliament may make a provision by way of making a beginning that the Code shall apply only to those who make a declaration that they are prepared to be bound by it, so that in the initial stage the application of the Code may be purely voluntary. Parliament may feel the ground by some such method. This is not a novel method. It was adopted in the Shariat Act of 1937 when it was applied to territories other than the NWFP. The law said that here is a Shariat Law which should be applied to Mussulmans provided a Mussulman who wanted that he should be bound by the Shariat Act should go to an officer of the State, make a declaration that he is willing to be bound by it, and after he has made that declaration the law will bind him and his succes-

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dissatisfied. They then followed certain Hindu customs for generations since conversions. Yet the Central legislature at the instance of certain Muslim members enacted the Shariat Law and the Khojas and one the Cutchi Memons were forced most unwillingly to submit to it. The British had wrongly fostered the feeling that personal law was part of religion. This, he asserted, was not so, as shown by Allauddin Khilji, who made several changes which went against the Shariat though he was the first ruler to establish the Muslim Sultanate in India.

Mr Alladi Kirshnaswamy Ayyar successfully turned the tables on Mr. Pocker Sahib saying: "you must know that the Muslim law covers the field of contracts, the field of criminal law, the field of divorce law, the field of marriage and every part of law as contained in the Muslim law. When the British occupied this country they said, we are going to introduce one criminal law in the country which will be applicable to all citizens, be they Englishmen, be they Hindus, be they Muslims.

He said: "Most of my friends who have spoken on this amendment have quite forgotten that upto 1935 the North-West Frontier Province was not subject to the Shariat Law. It followed the Hindu Law in the matter of succession and in other matters, so much so that it was in 1939 that the Central Legislature had to abrogate the application of the Hindu Law to the Muslims of the North-West Province and to apply the Shariat Law to them. This is not all... Up till 1937 in the rest of India, in various parts such as the United Provinces, the Central Provinces and Bombay, the Muslims to a large extent were governed by the Hindu Law in the matter of succession... In north Malabar, the Marumakkathayam Law applies to all not only to Hindus but also to Muslims... the Marumakkathayam Law is a matriarchal form of law and not a patriarchal form of law." Second, Dr Ambedkar assured the Muslim members as follows: "I think they have read rather too much into Article 35, which merely proposes that the State shall endeavour to se-

sors." Where do we go from here? The Government should even now follow the wise and practical advice tendered by Dr Ambedkar. Either we believe in Baba Sahib in this year of his birth centenary or we do not. India and its secularism deserves a voluntary common civil code for gradual acceptance without further delay. Enlightened opinion among the Muslims will then have a choice: be liberal and progressive or remain obscurantist and backward. My own talk with a cross-section of Muslims during my travels to various parts of our country shows that a sizeable section of the community will be happy to have such a code to satisfy their own enlightened craving. Ultimately, no one community should be allowed the veto to block progressive legislation, especially when it is voluntary and does not seek to impose any view or way of life on any one arbitrarily. Much valuable time has been lost already in implementing the Directive Principle enshrined in Article -- and in taking India towards genuine secularism and national integration.---INFA

Together, let us empower our Nari Shakti!

NARENDRA MODI

In the coming days, India will be immersed in a festive season, with celebrations taking place across the length and breadth of the nation. The people of Assam will mark Rongali Bihu while Odisha will celebrate Maha Bishuba Pana Sankranti. In West Bengal, Poila Boishakh will usher in the Bengali New Year and in Kerala, Vishu will be observed with immense enthusiasm. In Tamil Nadu, Puthandu will be celebrated while in Punjab and other parts of Northern India, it will be Baisakhi, which will usher in a spirit of hope as well as positivity. I convey my best wishes to all those across India and the world who are marking these festivals. May these auspicious occasions bring happiness and prosperity to everyone's lives.

Furthermore, on the 11th of April, we will commence the 200th birth anniversary celebrations of Mahatma Phule and on the 14th, India will pay homage to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on Ambedkar Jayanti.

In addition to these special occasions, when the spirit of renewal fills our hearts and minds, our nation stands at the threshold of

another historic occasion. It is an opportunity to deepen the foundations of our democracy and to reaffirm our collective commitment to equality and inclusion.

On the 16th of April, Parliament will be convened to discuss and pass an important bill that advances women's reservation. To describe this merely as a legislative exercise would be an understatement. It is a reflection of the aspirations of crores of women across India. It is an affirmation of a principle that has long guided our civilisational ethos, that society progresses when women progress.

Women constitute nearly half of India's population. Their contributions to our nation are vast and invaluable. Today, India is witnessing remarkable achievements by women across every field. From science and technology to entrepreneurship, from sports to the armed forces and from music to the arts, women are at the forefront of India's progress. Over the years, sustained efforts have been made to create an enabling environment for women's empowerment. Greater access to education, improved healthcare, enhanced financial inclusion and better access to basic amenities have strengthened the foundations of women's participation in economic and social

life.

Yet, their representation in the world of politics and legislative bodies has not always been commensurate with their role in society. This is particularly unfortunate because when women participate in administration and decision-making, they bring with them experiences and insights that enrich public discourse and improve the quality of governance.

It is imperative that the 2029 Lok Sabha elections and the Assembly elections to the various states in the coming times are conducted with women's reservation in place. Over the decades, there have been repeated efforts to provide women with their rightful place in democratic institutions by the previous governments. Committees were made, bill drafts were introduced but they never saw the light of day. But the broad consensus has remained that women's representation in legislative bodies has to increase. In September 2023, Parliament passed the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam with the same spirit of consensus. I consider it to be among the most special occasions of my life.

This opportunity to ensure women's reservation also resonates deeply with the spirit of our Constitution. The makers of our Constitu-

tion, envisioned a society where equality is both enshrined and realised in practice. Strengthening women's participation in legislative institutions is an important step towards fulfilling that vision. It reflects our commitment to building a society where every citizen has an equal stake in shaping the nation's destiny.

This is a moment that cannot be deferred any longer. Every delay in advancing women's representation is, in effect, a delay in strengthening the quality and inclusiveness of our democracy. For decades, the need for greater participation of women in legislative institutions has been acknowledged, discussed and reaffirmed. To postpone action now would mean extending an imbalance that we already recognise and have the capacity to correct. At a time when India is moving forward with confidence and purpose, it is essential that our institutions reflect the aspirations of all citizens, especially those who form half our population. Timely action will not only honour long-standing commitments but also ensure that the momentum of progress is sustained. This is truly a historic opportunity to make our democracy more representative, responsive and future-ready.

This moment calls for collective action. It is not about any one government, party or individual. It is about the nation as a whole recognising the importance of this step and coming together to realise it. It is what we owe to our Nari Shakti. That is why the passage of a bill for women's reservation should reflect the broadest possible consensus and be guided by the larger national interest. Such opportunities call upon us to act not for ourselves, but for future generations. They remind us that the true strength of a democracy lies in its ability to evolve and to become more inclusive over time.

As we approach this historic Parliament sitting, I appeal to all Members of Parliament, across party lines, to come together in support of this important step for the women of India. Let us seize this opportunity with a sense of responsibility and purpose. Let us act in a manner that reflects the highest traditions of our democracy.

India has always shown that when it comes to matters of national importance, it can rise above differences and act with unity. This is one such moment. Let us move forward together and strengthen Constitutional values and empower our Nari Shakti for national progress.