



In the pursuit of four freedoms

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The principles that inform a lived life of dignity must dictate choices in the great Indian election of 2019

- The schedule for the 2019 general election has been announced, and the political arena has once again been transformed into a gigantic market place.
- In this space political parties proceed to outbid and undercut each other, often in shocking ways, as they desperately buy a commodity called state power.
- Power saturates every site of social interaction, from the household to the workplace, but state power is unique because it is a condensate of all power.
- The holders of state power resolve what sort of opportunities are offered by society and the economy, and whether we can participate in multiple social transactions as equals.

All that's at stake

- Understandably, politicians yearn to take over the state.
- Some of them might even agree to sell their souls, drive a Faustian bargain so that they can acquire, possess and relish power.
- We are a democracy, but citizens are unable to control the possession, exercise and implementation of power by their representatives.
- Democratically elected governments can and have divided society, kept people in penury, imprisoned and tortured civil liberty activists, destroyed civil societies, and threatened war against neighbours.
- Violence may have become the new normal in India, but there is little that is noble about violence.
- Today, new sorrows follow us around like Mary's little lamb because the government refuses to respect our need for a decent life, lived with dignity and in peace.
- Consider the way the Indian government has responded to serious economic distress in the country.

- Instead of transforming educational institutions, or taking on the onerous task of creating jobs with some determination, the Modi government offers pitiful reservations to graduates and postgraduates who have been forced to compete for positions below their capabilities.
- Worse, our government refuses to count how many Indian citizens are unemployed.
- For when we vote, we expect that our representative government will provide the basic preconditions of a good life.
- We do not expect it to tap petty passions and irrational emotions through incendiary rhetoric that targets communities, regions and other countries in the name of the nation.
- Cynics might wonder whether elections bring about change at all, or whether the outcome results in more of the same.

Freedom from fear

- Nevertheless, elections are significant.
- At stake in the 2019 election are four kinds of freedoms.
- The first is freedom from fear, from the haunting feeling that someone, somewhere is watching how we behave, and that someone is ready to penalise us through words and deeds if we dare question the mockery that democracy gives power to the religious majority.
- We have the right to vent criticism of representatives without being assaulted by crude, sexist abuse on social media that relentlessly intrudes into our everyday lives.
- The second sort of freedom we should reinstall is freedom from want.
- Seventy-one years after Independence, the government should be concerned about the quality of employment it offers our people, about suitable remuneration, about lives lived with dignity, and about the self-worth that people develop when they love what they do for a living.
- The third freedom that we have to re-capture is freedom from discrimination.
- Reservations have become a mockery, a charade, used as a deliberate ploy to delegitimise the project of social justice.
- The fourth freedom is freedom from sexual violence, for women, for men, for transgenders, and for children.
- If India cannot secure equality, which is the reason for democracy, let us at least opt for non-discrimination, a lesser form of equality.

A constitutional right

- At stake in the elections that loom large on our collective imaginations is not delegation of power to representatives, so that they can live out their sick fantasies of controlling minds and bodies.
- We vote to recapture and protect the freedom that earlier generations fought for so strenuously.
- We vote because freedom is our constitutional right and we will reclaim it.

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