



Tyranny of the majority

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Tyranny of the majority-India is bombarded with electoral rhetoric that is shorn of care for citizens who inhabit desolate worlds

- In democracies, the very idea of majority rule is trumped by the grant of fundamental rights.
- Paramount among these is the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of religion, caste, class, gender and sexual preferences.
- What group we belong to, what faith we profess and what language we speak is irrelevant.
- Each citizen is an equal shareholder in the political system.

A momentous transition

- The makers of our Constitution were committed to this understanding of democracy.
- The Constitution obligates the holders of power to respect the principle of religious neutrality.
- The commitment was significant, because by the mid-1940s religion no longer belonged to the realm of private faith.
- It had been transformed into a mode of politics that laid claims to power in the public domain.
- The transition proved momentous for Indian politics.
- Take the S.R. Bommai v. Union of India case (1994). The Supreme Court ruled that equality is the essential basis of the Constitution.
- Equality is a default principle, irrespective of the religious affiliation of citizens.
- But matters are dramatically different today.
- The foundations of our democratic system tremble.

A crucial juncture

- India stands at a crucial juncture before the general elections.
- On the one hand is the party in power that has visited ill-being on the people through demonetisation and the Goods and Services Tax (GST),

harassment of universities, sabotage of institutions, violations of fundamental rights, the sanction of public lynchings, and now murder of a policeman.

- Today we see little else than religion as a frighteningly threatening form of politics.
- On the other hand stands the Congress, the inheritor of the legacies of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.
- Many Indians hoped that the party would relentlessly zero in on the dangerous threat to constitutional democracy.
- The party should have tapped minds and hearts with promises of restoration of the fundamental principles of constitutional democracy.
- But the Congress has opted to become an anaemic version of the BJP with no distinctive ideology.
- Regional parties are hailed as a perfect political institution for a federal India.
- Yet most regional leaders, and their progeny, tend to treat their States as feudal fiefs.
- In India, we are bombarded with electoral rhetoric that is shorn of care, compassion for, or commitment to citizens who live in frighteningly desolate worlds.
- Elections give citizens an opportunity to discuss policies and proposed political agendas, and exercise free choice.
- The forthcoming election breeds pessimism at the lack of choices.

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