




Report on "One Nation Many Paths- A Multi-Year Research and Advocacy Project on the Constitution of India"

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SENIOR RESIDENT FELLOW, LEAD, CHARKHA

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Ritwika is a Senior Resident Fellow and Lead at Charkha, Vidhi's Constitutional Law Centre. Her current research is focused on comparative federalism, local governments, and electoral reforms. From 2014-17, Ritwika was a Research Fellow in the Public Law vertical at Vidhi. She advised several departments and regulatory authorities under the Government of India, on questions concerning constitutional validity of proposed legislation, legislative competence of the Union and states, and contours of the powers and functions of regulators. Ritwika also assisted the Union of India in preparing its written submissions in the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Case. Between 2019-2020, Ritwika worked as a Research Associate at DAKSH, Bengaluru. She obtained her LL.M. from the University of Cambridge in 2018. She graduated with a B.A. LL.B. (Hons.) from the Indraprastha University, Delhi in 2013, and the LL.M. from the NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad in 2014. Ritwika is the co-editor of "Appointment of Judges to the Supreme Court of India: Transparency, Accountability and Independence" (Oxford University Press, 2018), a volume of essays addressing the politics, doctrine, and crucial developments pertaining to judicial appointments in India.

TOPICS:
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Department of Political Science organized an event on **"One Nation Many Paths- A Multi-Year Research and Advocacy Project on the Constitution of India"**. Ms. Ritwika Sharma of Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, Bengaluru was the resource person for the day.

Context

This is the 75th year of India's independence and the eighth decade of the Constitution of India. Despite initial misgivings, the Constitution and its underlying principles have endured. Having said that, several ideas which undergirded the founding of the Constitution have faced significant challenges over the course of India's independent history.

The 75th year of Independence provides an opportune moment to reflect on four principles which can be characterised as the founding ideas of India – federalism, secularism, multilingualism, and liberty. Each

of these principles has been tested in the past, and continue to be tested today. The centralisation of governmental power, a legacy of Partition continues to haunt the nation even today despite the significance of federalism to India's polity; Hindi imposition was a real possibility in the early 1960s and has become a palpable concern in current times as well; "secularism" remains present in the Preamble while the country itself is gradually turning towards unapologetic majoritarianism; and the space for liberty, best captured through discordant views, and independent opinions, has been fast shrinking.

Given the present state of affairs, this is an opportune time to articulate and identify challenges to each of these founding ideas, and develop an evolved vision of what these ideas ought to mean. India is one nation with many paths – religions, languages, governments, voices. It is this plurality that defines India as a nation where opposites cohabit and intermingle. This spirit of plurality must continue to be reflected in the Constitution over time.

Project Objectives

With the objective of appreciating the Constitution and unearthing the challenges it is currently faced with, researchers at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy ('Vidhi') have authored a research paper on the theme "One Nation Many Paths". This paper is a critical reflection on the Constitution, with specific focus on the four founding ideas mentioned above. This paper marks the beginning of Vidhi's multi-year research project on the Constitution, its relevance and need at a crucial moment in India's journey as a constitutional democracy. The paper serves as an invitation to collaborate in this multi-year project.

Simultaneously, this research will also be disseminated and made accessible to the people, at large. The dissemination will be aimed at ensuring that specific aspects of the Constitution are better understood. "The Constitution in every home" is our guiding motto.

Programmes

To achieve the above objectives and take the Constitution to the people of India, a collective vision for India as an inclusive, democratic republic must be articulated. This vision will be the product of research, consultations, and outreach.

The eventual aim of these programmes is to shape meaningful public narrative around the Constitution of India and its contents. As part of its dissemination strategy, the programme is designed to include sustained campaigns in both online as well as offline modes, with the purpose of generating deeper interest in as well as understanding of the Constitution.

For effective dissemination in an offline mode, there will be two kinds of events:

- Public discussions (in the form of a panel discussion, dialogue, debate, town halls, etc.) which engage thought leaders, scholars and eminent voices relevant to a particular theme;
- Student-facing events, which can take the form of constitution drafting competitions (in relation to pre-identified themes).

These events will be conducted across major Indian cities, namely, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Pune, and Chennai. This series of events will open with the launch of Vidhi's paper (on the One Nation Many Paths theme), and will be followed by events centred on each of the four founding ideas mentioned above.

Through a combination of online and offline means, this project aims to take the text of the Constitution, its values and its principles, closer to the people.

