

An Appeal

This appeal is addressed to all peoples' movements, organisations and activists, all civil society organisations, public intellectuals and all who hold the Constitution as our most sacred text, all who dream to see India beyond caste, creed, language and political partisanship, all of us who have inherited the great civilization and care for its future:

From September 7th 2022 , *Bharat Jodo Yatra*, a Padayatra of 3500 kms from Kanyakumari to Kashmir is being organised by the Indian National Congress. The objective of the Yatra is to stir the conscience of the people in times when the constitutional values and democratic norms are being brazenly undermined and the very idea of India has come under a systematic assault.

Never before have the values of our Republic faced as heinous an assault as they have in the recent past.

Never before have hate, division and exclusion unleashed on us with such impunity.

Never before have we been subjected to surveillance, propaganda and disinformation at this scale.

Never before have we seen a regime so callous to the plight of the people while the economy lies in ruins, propped up only by a few favoured cronies.

Never before have the real nation-builders -- an overwhelming majority of the farmers and workers, Dalits and Adivasis -- faced such effective exclusion in the shaping of the nation's future.

The Bharat Jodo Yatra takes place in the context of this grave national crisis. The Congress party has appealed to all "like minded political parties [and] civil society groups ... to unite and join the Bharat Jodo Yatra". Taking note of this appeal and recognising the dire need for such an initiative, a conclave was organized on 22nd of August in Delhi by nearly 200 representatives of people's movements. After a day-long deliberation, that included a dialogue with the Yatra organisers in the Congress party, the conclave unanimously welcomed this initiative. Expressing broad solidarity with the initiative, it was agreed to engage with this yatra and issue an appeal to everyone in the civil society to join hands with it.

For over the last few years we have witnessed some of the most glorious moments of democratic resistance in India since independence. Classes, communities, and individuals have risen fearlessly to defend our Republic. The historic struggle of the farmers has forced this authoritarian regime to

repeal the anti-farmer laws. Millions of people came on the streets to demand equal citizenship. Scores of individuals – activists, journalists, lawyers, writers, and ordinary citizens -- have defied threats, faced imprisonment, and staked everything to speak truth to power. These voices of the people must join hands with political parties that are willing to defend our constitutional democracy. Hence this appeal.

This is a moment of reckoning. Every one of us needs to say: No, not on my conscience. At stake is our unique pluralistic social fabric, which is our greatest civilizational inheritance, reflected in our Constitution. We represent the overwhelming majority of the people, the spirit of this great nation, the heritage of this civilization. We cannot allow the will of the Indian people to be stolen and subverted. We shall resist and struggle – in a democratic, lawful and peaceful way -- until we defeat the small group of bigots who seek to use money, media and political power to derail this country. We shall unite the people of India in this mission. Bharat Jodo is the need of the hour.

We appeal to every Indian who takes pride in this great civilization and who believes in a great future for our nation to support the Bharat Jodo Yatra and similar initiatives undertaken by any other organisation. People's movements have a consistent record of protesting against and resisting unjust acts of any government, irrespective of party in power, and will continue to do so. In extending one time support to an initiative like the Bharat Jodo Yatra, we do not tie ourselves to a political party or a leader, but simply affirm our readiness to set aside partisan considerations and stand with any meaningful and effective initiative to defend our constitutional republic. Our engagement with this yatra can take multiple forms - we can do so as individuals, as groups, as a party; we can create participatory events; we can join as performers, as creative artists or as intellectuals and academics; and, we can join as yatris, as fellow travellers in this journey. Let us all make Bharat Jodo Yatra the decisive step towards renewing our pledge to reclaim an India that is a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic with Liberty, Equality, Justice and Fraternity as its guiding lights.

Jai Hind!