

Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan

Draft Resolution for National Convention, 6 February 2023, New Delhi

Today We the People of India embark upon a mission, a seven year long journey, to defend the future of India. Today we launch a movement, the Bharat Jodo Abhiyan, that can reclaim our republic, renew our Constitutional values, rescue our democratic institutions and rekindle the spirit of our freedom struggle. A movement of resistance to the unfolding assault on our constitution, our nationalism, our civilization – indeed, the very idea of India. A movement of national reconstruction that extends its horizon from helping political change to fostering socio-cultural change and indeed combating climate change, that offers a credible hope to secure the Constitutional promise of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity for every Indian.

We are a group of citizens who have worked with various peoples movements, voluntary organisations and political formations. Many of us have participated in the historic *Bharat Jodo Yatra* from Kanyakumari to Srinagar, from despondency to optimism, from keeping quiet to expressing ourselves, from finger pointing to taking personal responsibility and from apolitical stances to explicit assertion of our political role as citizens. The unprecedented success of this yatra places an extraordinary responsibility on everyone who shared this journey with their body, mind or soul. We launch *Bharat Jodo Abhiyan* to fulfil this responsibility, to exercise our right to protect our hard won freedom and to discharge our sacred duty to defend our Constitution.

The preamble to the Constitution of India defines our ideology. It is incumbent upon us to redeem the pledge of securing for all our citizens “social, economic and political justice, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and of opportunity; and fraternity”. This commitment to constitutional values entails some concrete non-negotiable positions that we all stand for:

1. A secular state that has no official religion and that offers equal respect to and maintains principled distance from all religions;
2. Social justice via state policies to recognize, monitor and neutralize caste and gender based inequalities and oppressions;
3. Participatory, transparent and decentralized democracy that ensures freedom of expression and values independent functioning of all democratic institutions;
4. A welfare state that puts people before profit, places wellbeing of the last person first and rejects unthinking privatization and crony capitalism;
5. Policies that recognize peoples’ right to natural resources and our responsibility to promote climate resilience by balancing the interests of environment and economy;
6. Positive nationalism, that focuses on achieving national unity, promotes dialogue with our own citizens in conflict zones and seeks peace with external neighbours; and

7. Pride in our cultural and civilizational heritage in its glorious multiplicity that entails a responsibility to filter out caste, gender or any other oppression in its name.

These values are under an unprecedented assault today. For nearly nine years now, we have witnessed a brick-by-brick dismantling of our republic. We have seen brute majoritarian takeover of democratic apparatus, subversion of institutions, suppression of free media, choking of freedom of expression, criminalization of dissent, breakdown of rule of law and use of state and street power to crush political opponents. We have seen rolling back of the secular state, de facto demotion of religious minorities to a second grade citizenship, state sponsored campaigns of hatred and bigotry against them, retreat from affirmative action and sanction of caste-based oppression and exclusion, and blatant endorsement of patriarchal norms and practices. We have seen ordinary people facing the brunt of economic recession, unemployment and inflation, while the present regime is busy favouring its bloated cronies, defending their financial frauds and selling the family silver. Diversion, distraction and division are the favourite political tactics of this regime. We have seen the rise of a diabolic propaganda machine, led by mainstream media that has turned into a megaphone for the government, to cover up the current regime's criminal indifference to handling the Covid pandemic, professional incompetence in managing the economy and dereliction of the national duty to safeguard the country's borders. We have seen and had enough.

During this period we have witnessed, and drawn inspiration from, peoples' movement that led to reversal of amendments to the land acquisition law, popular resistance to the Citizenship Amendment Act that halted its implementation and the historic farmers' movement that forced this government to retreat. We have noticed, at the state level, several electoral reversals for the ruling party despite its money, muscle and media power. We have witnessed umpteen instances of social resilience that give us confidence that the legacy of the freedom struggle still lives on. We have learnt from the Bharat Jodo Yatra that a majority of the country's majority community has not given in to the divisive politics of the ruling dispensation, that bigotry and monumental lies can be held to account, that the country yearns for a language of love and compassion. We have seen a narrative shift and the possibility of a political change.

Today we stand at crossroads. The 75th year of India's independence is a moment of reckoning in our collective tryst with destiny. The country's future hangs between hope and despair. Another term for the BJP-RSS at the centre could mean formal rewriting and de facto abrogation of the Constitution. Dethroning the current regime by democratic means is a necessary to keep alive a functional democracy that provides space for dissent, opposition, struggle and resistance. At this juncture in history, we cannot practice routine oppositional politics. We need nothing short of an all out unity encompassing all democratic forces of resistance. We must unite the energies of opposition parties with that of peoples movements and peoples organisations. While we work towards a regime change in 2024, we must simultaneously start the long-term ideological, cultural and political struggle against these forces.

This is why we are launching the Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan [BJA]. Our immediate objective is to ensure a resounding defeat of the anti-people and anti-India politics represented by the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections of 2024. At the same time, acutely conscious of the challenge beyond regime change, we are embarking on a seven year mission, till January 2030, to protect and promote constitutional values and democratic institutions. We shall do so by:

- Articulating a vision of India for our times in line with the Constitutional vision;
- Amplifying this vision through mainstream and alternative media;
- Creating a community of believers in the constitutional idea of India by recruiting and training a battery of volunteers to shape public opinion on the ground;
- Supporting movements and launching campaigns; and,
- Engaging with political parties that are committed to defending the republic.

Part II: Organisation

Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan is a mission. It is a time-bound campaign undertaken by like minded citizens who are passionate about a cause. The functioning of BJA must reflect the spirit of this mission and be guided by the following principles: urgency, agility, swift decision making; flexibility, informality in responding and adapting; promoting and encouraging autonomous self-directed work; team work through consensus building and mutual trust; and, transparency in finances and functioning. The Abhiyaan will remain an open, public platform that functions through the following bodies:

Mentors: a group of senior and eminent citizens to guide and advise the Abhiyaan.

National/State Council: a broad based representative body for major policy decisions.

National/State Working Group: a smaller executive body for day to day decisions.

The first National Convention shall nominate the first group of Mentors, a provisional National Council [NC] and a provisional National Working Group [NWG]. The NC will organise state level conventions of BJA to constitute state level bodies. State Councils shall nominate constituency level teams. NC and NSG shall be reconstituted following state level conventions in most of the states.

Abhiyaan may create the following functional bodies at different levels:

Teams: Regular functional teams for Strategic Planning & Coordination; Analytics and Data Management, Communications, Training, Finance and Operations and Support etc.

Task Forces: project team for a specific campaign or event.

Collectives: loose collaborative teams of self directed groups or persons.

Secretariat: standing team connected with each of the Teams or Task Forces.

Part III: Action Plan

For the next 15 months, the BJA shall focus on making a difference in the next Lok Sabha elections by working closely with political parties that offer effective resistance to the politics and ideology of BJP-RSS, without getting into the intra-opposition differences. We propose to undertake the following:

A. Truth Army: that would identify and counter misinformation and hatred, counter the pre-existing narratives and proactively promote alternative narrative. This will require:

- Strategy team to create alternative narrative (by March 15, Responsible: NWG)
- Content teams in multiple languages and regions (within a month of state convention, Responsible: State WG)
- Dissemination hubs in each of the Targeted Parliamentary Constituency (within 2 months of State Convention, Responsible: State Council)

B. Targeted Constituency Campaign: to provide active ground level support to political parties and candidates that can defeat the BJP and its allies.

- Initial focus on the five states where assembly elections are due in 2023: Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Telangana
- Identify Target Assembly Constituencies [TAC] those where the BJP may win or lose by small margin [JBA Analytics Team] and the main party that can counter it.
- In each of the TACs, the State Council shall establish physical and virtual presence. That means a TAC Team of at least 25 Abhiyatrins in each TAC of which 5 persons each will be responsible for Planning and Coordination, Event and Campaign Organisation, Communications, Finance and Operations and Training and Door to Door Campaigning. (Responsible - State Council)
- Each TAC Team shall be given intensive training on the key local issues and on the mechanism of Election Preparation and Management. (Responsible: State Training and Communication Teams)
- For the Lok Sabha elections, selection of about 200 Targeted Parliamentary Constituencies (about 1600 TACs) and training of 40,000 abhiyatrins, who in turn can recruit 2 lakh campaigners.

C. Movement support: Identify some key national and local movements that are helping to raise real issues of the people and support them to take their message forward and to coordinate with one another. Set up task forces for some of the key movements that cut across states. (Responsible: NC and SC)

D. Opposition Unity: A committee of Elders to go and speak to senior leaders of every opposition party by June 2023 to impress on them to work in a united front to defeat the BJP in 2024. (Responsible: NC)

E. Finance and Operations Team to first develop a multipronged fund raising strategy by Mar 23 and then act on it from Apr onwards. (Responsible: NC). Enrol several BJA Support Services Organisations. (Responsible: Finance and Operations Team)