Voices of Sisters

A child on a man's shoulders holds an Indian flag in Attari, Punjab, India, Feb. 13, 2025. (Unsplash/Raju Kumar)

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The biggest democracy in the world seems to be crumbling under the leadership of people who have never been part of our freedom struggle. The signs are not encouraging; there are several threats that we face as a nation.

Perhaps many of us have taken our 79 years of independence for granted. Our foremothers and forefathers fought bravely for many years to establish an independent Indian nation. Some of the younger generations have not been taught about this rich heritage we have inherited.

Having enjoyed freedom of speech, freedom to have a different opinion, and no hesitation to express dissent, to practice my faith, my food, my dress and many other things, an atmosphere of freedom and harmony existed. There was happy coexistence, each respecting the difference of the other with reverence, participating in each other's prayers and festivals. We mingled easily without a doubt, fearlessly; there was freedom in the air, you could feel it, smell it. The chattering of children and grown-ups at festivals brought communities together expressing our diversity.

Now, I stop to think and ask, what has changed? Who has infiltrated our freedom? Is this the same country into which I was born and grew up with the values of Jesus?

Patna, the northeastern part of India, is an historically important place where Gandhi began the long journey of our freedom struggle. It baffles me that 65 lakh people from this area have been deleted from the electoral roll. Now people who had voted in 2024 for the general elections must prove their citizenship. This is very much against the spirit of India's constitution. By birth we gain citizenship to this great country.

What is even more alarming is that the onus now falls on the person to prove their identity. The season of cultivation is during election season, when farmers are busy tilling the land, preparing to sow, and now they have this extra burden of proving their citizenship.

Monsoons also bring challenges as the rivers swell, causing floods, and people struggle to save their belongings. Against this background is untold misery. In spite of pressure from the opposition party and civil society, those at the helm of affairs are trying to keep violating what is sacred to our country.

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There is great engagement of many religious women and men, educating the people about the importance of finding their names on the electoral roll. It is a strategic move to deny the people their fundamental and constitutional right. Those who belong to the minority group, the lower strata of society are removed, though they had voted in the last general elections in 2024. Never before in the history of this great country were such moves made. It sends a shudder down one's spine to wonder what's next?

The opposition parties have united together to protest against the ruling party. The election commission has backed the ruling party, claiming that the new revisions requiring proof of citizenship are necessary to update voter registrations for those who have moved or have died.

The situation in Bihar state seems to be a laboratory to test how successful the ruling party can be. If they succeed then it will be implemented in the entire country. It will be a sad day, to lose our freedom.

We kneel down in prayer and implore all people of good will to join us in praying that evil plans will fail. The power of God will shine and we will remain a free country, a gift that has been won with great struggle.