

**Individual obligation is meaningful only when rights are guaranteed by the state.**

The evolution of a democratic society is centred around the expansion of rights — civil, political, economic and cultural, leading to the empowerment of people. Democratic nations respect individual and group rights for moral and instrumental reasons.

Duties, both legal and moral, are cherished in order to reinforce those rights. The obligations of the individual to the collective must be understood in that context; rights and duties complement each other, just as responsibility comes with freedom. Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought to suggest a dichotomy between the rights and duties of citizens when he said last week that the country had wasted a lot of time “fighting for rights” and “neglecting one’s duties”. His speech was not the first time that he or other Hindutva protagonists have called for a foregrounding of duties over rights.

Service and the sacrifices of nameless and faceless nation-builders have formed the bedrock of the modern Indian Republic, but their sacrifices were indeed for rights, dignity and autonomy. Any notion of rights and duties being adversarial or hierarchical is sophistic. The Indian Constitution enshrines equality and freedom as fundamental rights, along with the right against exploitation, freedom of religion, cultural and educational rights, and the right to constitutional remedies. The deepening of Indian democracy has led to an expansion of rights — education, information, privacy, etc. are now legally guaranteed rights.

The state’s fidelity to these rights is tenuous at best. Citizens are generally duty-bound to protect the integrity and the sovereignty of the country, and this is true for India though there is no conscription. Other constitutional duties expected include a duty to promote harmony and brotherhood, and to develop scientific temper, humanism and a spirit of inquiry.

Any shift in state policy emphasis from rights to duties will be absurd and a disservice to many for whom the realisation of even fundamental rights is still a work in progress. An enlightened citizenry is critical to progress and good governance.

But duty is not something that the citizens owe to the state. The obligation of individual citizens to the collective pursuit of a nation can be meaningful when their rights are guaranteed by the state. The citizen has a right to use a public road, and a duty to obey traffic rules.

The right and the duty are meaningful only in conjunction. The Prime Minister's comments come against this backdrop — formal and informal restrictions on the rights of citizens are on the rise along with coercive powers of the state. The emphasis on duty along with the de-emphasis of rights also raises the spectre of a descent into pre-Republican norms in social relations.

The celebration of India as a traditionally duty-driven society carries with it the inescapable connotation of an exploitative division of labour and norms that are antithetical to constitutionalism. Needless to say, that is not progress.

### Expected Question (Prelims Exams)

- Q. Recently the Prime Minister has unveiled the hologram statue of which of the following leader at India Gate?**
- (a) Sardar Patel
  - (b) Subhas Chandra Bose
  - (c) Bhagat Singh
  - (d) Veer Savarkar

### Expected Question (Mains Exams)

- Q. "The obligation of individual citizens to the collective pursuit of the nation can be meaningful when their rights are guaranteed by the state." Comment (250 Words)**

**Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.**