

Vasant Valley₂₀₁₇

FREEDOM : REDEFINED

It is very well said and believed that the meanings of words evolve over time, depending not only on the language but also on other events which affect the word and the area with which the word is associated. Today we as Indians have reached a major milestone in our country's history-100 years of independence from the British Raj. As we enter a new century with a burden of achievements and failures on our backs, some of the values espoused by our country continue to change with regard to their meaning and relevance in our lives.

Freedom *was, is* and I am confident *will be* the founding principle of the Indian nation. 100 years after winning the battle for the first step for freedom, one realises that freedom is a multi-faceted concept, in some ways, tangible, and in others, the reverse. As an idea, it predates independence yet as a beacon of hope it lags far behind.

15th August, 1947 was undoubtedly a momentous occasion as we set foot on the long path to complete freedom. 100 years later, one can say that we have taken long strides in the right direction, radically transforming our understanding of and mindset towards freedom. However, it remains a fact that we have a long path ahead, one full of obstacles and challenges.

On the cusp of Independence, our primary goal was to secure independence from British rule and a collective freedom for the sub-continent. The essential meaning of freedom was that of freedom from external control. Other connotations of the word had developed in the minds of the people and these were compiled into our Constitution, which lays down the skeletal idea of freedom for our country. This freedom gives us the power to choose, to express, to profess, practice and propagate any religion, to move freely around the country and be free from all forms of exploitation. These freedoms form the political freedoms of our country, the basic right given to all citizens of India.

“Freedom was, is and I am confident will be the founding principle of the Indian nation.”

Slowly and steadily this meaning of freedom began transforming. The scope of this right was applied to a multitude of socio-economic issues of our country such as the caste system, occupational mobility, poverty, corruption, hunger among many others. Issues of the past continued to persist, and the pressure built on and on as rights were suppressed. As a result, retaliation from the suppressed emerged much stronger. Two notable examples in our century-old history of this are the Emergency in 1977 and the JNU student protests in 2016. These examples exemplify the desire for people to rise and speak up for freedom more holistically. The Emergency showed us the need for stronger rights in the political sphere while the JNU protests taught us to not be scared of demanding freedom from issues such as corruption and poverty. Both events highlighted the flaws in freedom at the time and shed light on the path of how to improve the meaning of freedom.

100 years have flown by and the progress of freedom has been part positive and part negative. Freedom has come to us in many forms, it has enabled the change in our lives and mindsets. At 100, we are proud to be free of illiteracy, child labour, open defecation and a number of diseases such as dengue, malaria and tuberculosis. We are proud to have brought many other ideas into the fold of freedom, such as freedom from hate, violence and terrorism. While issues of caste, religious tension and poverty continue to hamper complete freedom, a change is imminent. In fact, such progress has helped evolve the ethos of freedom.

“Freedom is a tough word to understand in depth, it's ideas and thoughts are ever changing and gives the person who exercises it immense rights and power.”

Unfortunately, even after attaining freedom, we are enslaving ourselves once more due to an exponential increase in our dependency over technology and electronics. A staggering number of jobs are going to machines and robots while we suffer at the hands of the beast we have created, especially one we do not know how to tame. Pre-liberalisation, we lived an India where business was restricted and regulated beyond our imagination and the *licence raj* ruled our state of affairs. After freedom from this new raj, the situation seems to have turned as we are working for the machines that have replaced humans in all areas of work.

Freedom is a tough word to understand in depth. It's ideas and thoughts are ever changing and gives the person who exercises it immense power. The song 'Imagine' by John Lennon is a true expression of understanding the idea of freedom and its dynamic goals. Freedom has not received a new definition, for it never had a definition that encapsulated all its aspects. Its meaning has simply been reworked and redefined to perfectly fit our 100 year young nation.

-Aditya Kapur

**RUPEE EQUALS DOLLAR
THE INDIAN ECONOMY AT ITS STRONGEST**

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THE IMPRESSIVE INCLINE OF INDIA

1947-India gains Independence from British colonial rule.

1957-Indian Democracy moves into full swing with the success of multiple general elections, held after India became a republic in 1950.

1967-Zakir Hussain is the first Muslim to be elected as the President of India.

1977-The first non-Congress government sweeps to power following the Emergency of 1975.

1987-Colour Television is used for the first time in India, broadcasting the 1st Nehru Cup in Eden Park, Kolkata.

1997-Following Liberalisation, India opens its markets to FDI and experiences exponential growth.

2007-The spread of telecommunication services makes India the second largest user of telecom services with 929 million users.

2017 -The Indian Space Programme reaches new leaps and bounds as ISRO develops a cost effective method for space travel, which allowed India to become the first country to successfully launch a mission that entered Mars' orbit in the first attempt.

2027 -India succeeds with its 'Make in India' campaign, manufacturing 33% of the world's goods.

2037 -India succeeds with its 'Swacch Bharat Abhiyan' project, cleansing the Yamuna and reducing landfills to nothing.

2047 -India celebrates its 100th Independence Day in conjunction with the attainment of the status of 'World's Largest Economy', overtaking both China and the USA.

-Jay Jagannath

ONE TO ONE

Hundred years. A hundred years back, yet a hundred steps forward. It was when we achieved freedom in 1947, that the US dollar, the most powerful currency in the world equaled the value of the currency of a newly independent nation; One rupee to one dollar.

The Indian economy has seen it all. Stagnation, sudden boom, and even a grave depreciation, however hundred years of independence brought with it, more than a hundred reasons to rejoice.

Had it not been for the 'hands-on' efforts of the financial ministers of the last 4 years, the dollar would still tower over the rupee.

A moment in Indian history; one to celebrate! The Indian economy has returned to its roots, having discarded the negatives seen back then. With growing strength of the GDP and Productive Capital in the country, the exchange rate is back to basics; one is to one.

-Ishita Malhotra

100 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE AT VASANT VALLEY SCHOOL

Vasant Valley celebrated the much-awaited milestone of 100 years of India's Independence in its own special way. For an entire month, the school was decorated in white, orange and green, as the juniors painted kites and the seniors listened to their favourite patriotic songs in the hallways during breaks. Independence this year came with an elevated excitement. As we all know, on the 14th of August, the Prime Minister had announced a plebiscite for the people of Kashmir. The only question in the minds of all the citizens of India and the world was, will this symbolise a domino effect for peace? As terror and bloodshed around the world and within India sees its last embers settle down, we actually fathom what it means to be independent. We all gathered in school in the wee hours of the 15th morning, still reeling from the news of the previous day, but fueled by idea of India's 100th year of independence. As we left for the much-awaited Prabhat Pheri, we reminisced about the school tradition's roots 50 years prior in 1997. Singing songs and discussing ideas of Independence along the way, we couldn't help but feel pride for the nation that is ours – despite its flaws. We walked all around Delhi, joined by many others, as the Pheri had now become one of the highlights of Independence Day for the whole city. Back in school, members of the Vasant Valley family, 6 and 60 year olds alike, went onto stage and shared what it meant for them to be free. As we discussed the problems of climate change and technology and terrorism, we couldn't help but praise our country too, for being the worlds leading economy, ahead of China and USA, on its way to emerging as the next superpower.

Dance and music followed the discussion, as some wept listening to 'Aye Mere Watan Ke Logon' and many smiled watching the amalgamation of dance and drama on stage. As we decorated the school with the tiranga colours, participated in activities that were organized around the school and sang the national anthem with everyone actually knowing the words to it, I for one felt privileged to be a part of a school that celebrates Independence like no other. And of course, the day ended as we feasted on the much-awaited *laddoos* – It's nice to know some traditions won't ever change.

-Riya Kothari

INDEPENDENCE 2047

I have promised my son that this Independence Day I will accompany him for the Independence Day march in our school. My son is exactly the same age I was 31 years ago and studies in the same 5-C class, but only the classes are a little different. E-classes which are virtual spaces, virtual blackboards and teachers creating 3-D objects in air with the help of robots.

On 15 August we woke up at 4:55 am and with one touch of button we were ready and with another we were transported to school by 5:00 am. We went for "Prabhat Pheri" on a Segway and heard and sang many songs. Then a huge lazer Tiranga was shot in the air by the youngest child. It all was so amazing but thank God the *poori-halwa* and *laddoos* were not virtual. We all enjoyed the good old same food we ate as kids and then enjoyed ourselves in Robotic Kite flying where flying robots were controlled by remote controls.

Although the times have changed, the values and our respect for legends and Martyrs is the same in our hearts.

-Ritwick Sapra



एशिया कप २०४७



ENDS AND BEGINNINGS (अनन्या जैन)

The tale that began a century ago is now at the beginning of its end. Borne out of the recently reached consensus is another point of debate. The official announcement of a referendum on the "Kashmir issue", once proposed and rejected in 1948, has left in its wake a fresh stream of questions. Will this present an India-Pakistan choice? Or are the scales dipping towards autonomy, perhaps threatening to stoop down to anarchy? As the case may be, the walls built on distrust and bad blood at the time of Partition are finally being breached. The tumultuous relationship we have maintained with our neighbour is expected to see more stable days ahead. Jammu and Kashmir may hold a future of independence, as it once had. It may align itself with a pre-established state, as it once did. But the community's fate lies with the people that constitute it, as it always should have.

-Nikita Dhawan

मान्यवर,

उत्तर-पूर्वी भारत की ओर से हम आपको कुछ कहना चाहते हैं। एक स्वतंत्र भारत का सपना देखते हुए, आपने १९५० में हमारे संविधान में समानता, न्याय और भाईचारे की चर्चा की थी। २०० वर्ष की आज़ादी की लड़ाई इसी स्तंभ पर आधारित थी कि आज़ाद भारत में प्रगति और विकास हर कोने तक पहुँचेंगे। यहाँ तक कि राजसी रियासतों को मुल्क का हिस्सा बनाने में कई वादे भी किए गए थे। आज तक भी हम उन वादों, उस प्रगति, विकास, न्याय और समानता की खोज में लड़ रहे हैं।

जब पूरा भारत आज़ादी का जश्न मना रहा था, मिज़ोराम, नागालैंड और आसाम जल रहा था। हम भारत का हिस्सा बन तो गए परंतु क्यों हमारी माँगे सबसे अंत में सुनी जाती हैं? क्यों हमारे ही मुल्क के लोग हमारे राज्य के नागरिकों पर हमला करते हैं? क्यों पूरे भारत में हिंदी, मराठी, तमिल और तेलुगु जैसी अन्य भाषाओं को राष्ट्रीय भाषाओं का खिताब दिया जाता है और मिज़ोराम, नागालैंड और अरुणाचल प्रदेश को राज्य का दर्ज मिलने के लिए भी १९८७ तक रुकना पड़ता है? हमारे राज्यों में भी अर्थव्यवस्था को बढ़ावा देने के लिए अनेक साधन हैं परंतु अपने ही प्रयासों का फल हमें क्यों नहीं मिलता?

एक उत्तर भारत के नागरिक से हमारे राज्यों का नाम, राजधानी का नाम और मुख्यमंत्री का नाम पूछो तो वह भी दो मिनट के लिए दुविधा में पड़ जाता है। बारवी कक्षा की राजनीतिक विज्ञान की किताब के पन्नों में पहली बार उत्तर-पूर्वी राज्यों की विस्तार में चर्चा होती है। क्या इतिहास के पन्नों में हमारा महत्व बाकी राज्यों से कम है?

यदि हम आज भी अलगाववादी आंदोलन या फिर अफस्पा के खिलाफ लड़ रहे हैं तो शायद इसमें अनगिनत सरकारों का भी कुछ हाथ है। हम आज भी वही चाहते हैं जो १०० वर्ष पहले चाहते थे- विकास की ओर एक कदम बढ़ाया जाए, हमारी आवाज़ों को सुना जाए और जिस समान भारत का सपना हमारे पूर्वजों ने देखा था उसे अपनाया जाए। तब ही यह भारत सचमुच अनेकता में एकता का प्रतीक बनेगा।

-काम्या यादव

THE 4 TYPES OF (MODERN?) INDIANS

Tamilians: India's smartest are amongst them yet the community still manages to dazzle the rest of the country with some habits. Curd rice, was a delicacy restricted to the Tamilian community since the beginning of time and has always confused the world. Another popular stereotype that the people of Tamil Nadu have not been successful in evading is their profound love for Rajnikanth, but lets face it this one does often hold true. Before his time the state was flooded with MG Ramachandran fans (they really do love their actors!).

Punjabi: They are the life of the party; their bubbly personalities carry the essence necessary to add a spark to any event. Still, even in the year 2047 they haven't weaned off their diet of ghee, lassi and parantha. But of course means of preparing these dishes have changed, lassi is churned in washing machines now! Although the community has witnessed many a change over the years, they still remain hard working, courageous and iron willed.

Bengali: Fish, Fish, and Fish! The typical Bong aunty is characterized by her big red bindi, and for them it has always been the bigger the better! And if lassi was the way for the Punjabi's for the Bengali community mustard is the way. Simply mustard is the answer to everything. But we can forgive some of these quirks for they provide us with some great literary minds.

Gujarati: They know their business! Unfortunately they are the stereotyped as the stingiest people you will come across. Don't bother asking for a rupee, the odds are against you. Also Gujju food is essentially sweet. And if it tastes like sugar, it still isn't sweet enough. But yet we thank them for the great business they have provided us with.

-Aryan Sadh

भारतीय सरकार को एक खुला पत्र...

BORDER ANTHEMS

Ms. Shazia Singh, leant heavily upon her walking stick, her daughter under her arm as she stumbled over the threshold of the old home. It was her mothers death anniversary in 8 days. She was returning to clean up the last of her possessions. 11 years had passed since her death in 2036 at the ripe age of 94. She was now 65, and she missed her mother dearly. She shuffled through the photographs and old documents silently, while her daughter, Harlene, dusted the windows lightly with a cloth and opened up the drapes. Her hand falling upon a withered yellow paper, blank ink staining it. She opened it delicately reading the familiar handwriting that she had read so many times before.

14th August 2029

New Delhi, India

Dearest Farah,

It has been a long time since we last spoke and I miss hearing the amusing anecdotes and stories that you tell me about your life back in Karachi. I miss hearing the laugh that you bring to my lips and the smile that you stretch across my face, it is perhaps the uniqueness brought about by the relationship of two sisters.

I am writing to you today because a strange reminiscence has settled upon me. Like a thick fog sitting upon my shoulders, thickening in front of my eyes, I am feeling nostalgic. I don't know whether it is because I am writing to you upon the brink of a new day of importance to me or because it is a day of importance to you, which is now ending. I am writing to you on the brink of independence. You sit in Karachi and I sit here in Delhi, and how I miss you my darling sister. I am an old maid now, 88 years of age and you are 85, I haven't seen your face in 82 years and the memory of your three year old face has vanished from my memory. We do not share the relationship that most siblings share. You with our mother and I with our father, separated at childhood and never reunited. Our relationship has been forged upon phone static and bad signal. We have lost each other to a broken sisterhood of two countries, too scarred to move away from our own comfortable settlements and I am saddened by the fact that I know your wrinkled smiling face only through the black and white of pictures.

This is unlike most of my rather formal letters to you because today I had a startling realization. It was brought about by a line of skipping school children outside the bungalow in the narrow galli, making faces at the wrinkled darzi and mustached paani-puri seller. They were singing patriotic songs, and I wondered why they would sing on the 14th of August instead of the 15th. So I draped my shawl around my head and slipped on some chappals before hurrying behind the wavering line of noisy children. When they finally stopped, I was panting with the exertion, for as much as I may boast of my still slender body and strong bones I am quite unfit. So I walked, bent over, breath catching in my throat and asked their teacher why the children were singing these nationalistic songs on this day instead of the next, the actual day of Indian independence. She gave me a warm smile and beckoned over a little girl to answer my question.

Now to add to the drama of my letter, I would say that this girl shared the face of your three year old self, toothy and pale, but I would not know for I do not remember your face except in flashes. It is the curse that old age brings. She had a head full of thick air, lovely dark skin and a full set of teeth. And her answer startled me. It is hard for me to explain her words so I shall quote whatever I remember.

'Madam ji! Hum aaj aazaadi ke gaane isliye ga rahe hai kyunki aaj India kee behen Pakistan ka indeependens hua! They are also our seester no madam ji? Aur Bharat kaise behen hogi eef she does not sing for her seester'

I bought that whole group of children ice cream. The chaos of a partition has separated us both from each other. We Indians consider you to be another world altogether, yet we are forgetting that the same mother gave birth to your nation as she did to our India. A sisterhood separated in their childhood giving rise to a chaos that clouded our senses. Just like you and me. We behave not like sisters should but like distant relatives. Separated at childhood. We are a sisterhood torn asunder much like our own two nations. It is but our folly to treat you as though you are a distant world not worth our time, patience or respect. I remember loving the cities in Pakistan, running around as a young child of 6 in the crowded streets not too different from Delhi. We were wrongly torn apart, the same way you and I have been snatched away from each other. A wall has been put up between us and our nations. A border.

Still they fight. It has improved greatly since fifteen years ago. Yet still they spit at each other. Hindus and Muslims, the many exchange programs and Kashmir campaigns going futile with a few dirty words and stares. I so hope that one day, I will get to see this rift being stitched back together. One day soon before the breath ebbs from my body and my eyes are unable to see anymore. And so in hopes of that dream, today I too sang patriotic songs and donned a white and green kaftan. The way we sing on the birthday of our loved one to convey our respects and our love, I will sing both today and tomorrow. I will sing border anthems to show my love to my nations sister torn away from her in her childhood. I sing these anthems to strengthen a sisterhood that I could never experience, this anthem if sung in unity could forge a relationship so strong nothing could ever break it. I will sing in remembrance to our relationship. On the brink of independence I sing for you and your nation and me and mine.

Love Always,
Yasmin Aapa

Shazia controlled tears. She wondered why, her mother had never sent the letter to Farah Khaala. And she smiled, in times of crisis and the current plebiscite, she could see the end of the turmoil her mother and aunt had lived with all their life. The scars of partition constantly being opened with the knives of religion and the strife in Kashmir. She was envisioning it end, and she smiled knowing that her mother and aunt would be reunited far above somewhere in the world in 2047, a hundred years since they had last seen each other. Holding hands cradled by the joint contentment and peace of two sister nations...

-Zoya Hassan

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