

# Fifty Seven Years of Freedom - Where to from here ?

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## Abstract

This article introspects our worthiness to enjoy the hard earned freedom of our motherland, earned by the valiant and bold freedom fighters of yesteryears. It also touches upon the positive aspects of the occupation, the different ways it has transformed the lives of the Indian masses for the better and how it can be leveraged by the present generation to bring India to the forefront of the comity of nations.

Freedom, the word rings loud and clear in our ears. Freedom from the exploitative and domineering rule of the British. Freedom to decide our own destiny, freedom of self rule, freedom to decide our policies, internal and external. Freedom to elect governments and to throw them out. Is this all ? Is there anything more to freedom ?

Our leaders have during the freedom struggle period suffered hardships, endured sufferings and worked hard to wrest freedom from the British. Right from the time of the sepoy mutiny in 1857 till the midnight of August 14, 1947, our great fathers and freedom fighters have cherished in their minds the dream of a motherland where the people are free. A land where people are treated at par with anybody, have the freedom to take any job or vocation, settle anywhere in India, the freedom to practice any religion, freedom of speech, expression and assembly and so on. All these years we have been enjoying all these freedoms without any let or failing. The Constitution and the judiciary have been playing a proactive role in preserving the ordinary citizen's right to these freedoms.

After fifty seven years we look back and introspect for ourselves whether we are worthy of this concept, whether we have proved ourselves worthy of the sacrifices of our forefathers, whether we are worthy of living in this great noble land of tolerance and understanding. Have we belied their expectations by our many actions ? The rampant corruption and the communally polarised society are the fallouts of our actions. Have we done incalculable damage to the fabric of communal harmony in our societies ? Do we somewhere in our minds still carry the remnants of the degrading caste system ? Are we ready to treat the weaker sex as equals in all spheres of life and are we ready to give them respect they deserve ?

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Looking back to history there have been freedom movements on a smaller scale in different parts of the country in different kingdoms. Rulers have been overthrown with new kingdoms taking over. These movements were totally localised in character and never attained a national character, as there were many kingdoms and states fighting and bickering with each other over the right to rule over the different dominions of the vast landmass spreading from the Indus in the West to the Bay of Bengal in the East, from Kashmir in the North to the Indian Ocean in the South. But never has there been such a mass movement with such mass participation and appeal as the Indian Freedom Movement. The Indian Freedom struggle was unique in the world too, with the presence of mighty leaders who were indoctrinated with the concepts of freedom and equality during their studies in Western Universities. These leaders used these same concepts which they acquired from these universities as the cause to fight for.

The tools used for the Indian Freedom struggle were indeed different. That in fact, makes the Indian Freedom struggle so unique in the world. For the first time in the world, mass movements which believed in non-violence and non-cooperation with the occupying forces had sprung up in India. The common enemy was opposed not with any of the modern, expensive weaponry. The weapon was the mighty willpower of the people and their determination to oust the occupying, aggressive enemy from their homeland using non-violence and non-cooperation.

At this moment, it is also worth recalling the benefits or fallouts of the foreign occupation. The important of them are listed below.

- Unitary status

For the first time in it's known history of about ten thousand years, the country acquired a unitary status. ie. the different kingdoms and states which were separate and fighting with each other were now united and fighting a common enemy. The enemy had succeeded in making himself the common enemy of a united people.

- Benefits of Industrial Revolution

The Western countries where the Industrial revolution had started had realised the immense potential of the fallouts of the revolution and was looking out for colonies elsewhere in the world to provide the fertile consumption grounds for their products and services. These colonies also served as suppliers of the raw materials needed to run these giant engines of development of the western world. For the first time the benefits of the Industrial revolution, which was reaping rich dividends in the Western world, had reached the masses (though we must agree there was undue exploitation everywhere).

- Railway System

Another noteworthy contribution of the British was the railway system. Even though there is difference of opinion on whether they were actually for use by Indians, catching

up from where they had left the system, India has presently got the longest railway network in the world with one among the most dense usage patterns in the world. We have also showed the world our engineering skills and strengths by building the impossible Konkan Railway through the Konkan coast of Western India.

- Postal System

The postal system, another efficient engine of development, till the advent of the Internet and e-mail over the past few years is another contribution of the British occupation. Till about fifteen years back, before the advent of the courier revolution, the postal services department was the main engine of communication along with the telephones. Even this day it is the cheapest mode of communication serving the rural and urban masses alike.

- Bureaucracy

Whatever we may say of our bureaucracy, the brightest brains in India still find the civil services, the most demanding and challenging of professions. The Indian Civil services is a contribution of the British Raj.

- English Language

One of the greatest contributions the English gave to our country was the English language. Even though we have a more popular national language in use, English has become the lingua franca of the world. Our proficiency in the English language has put us ahead of the rest of the world in the software and IT outsourcing revolution. Indians continue to be the most affluent and hardworking group in any country in the world alongside the Chinese, Japanese and the Koreans.

- Education System

The present education system in the country owes a lot to the British. The age old gurukula had it's own merits and drawbacks. The permeation of education was limited to the upper castes and the rich in the society. The British system of education enabled education to reach all sections of the society.

Nelson Mandela of South Africa, one of the great proponents of non-violence and Martin Luther from the US learned their first lessons in non-violence from our freedom movement. The principles of non-violence have been practiced and perfected in real life by the father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi during the freedom struggle.

Looking back in retrospect, recollecting the positive fallouts of the freedom movement in a better perspective, even though very few of the living are able to recollect the days of the freedom struggle, the new generation, GenX, needs to associate themselves with the principles and values our leaders have upheld and which gave them the strength to fight the empire in which the sun never set and bring it to it's knees. The fact that in course

of time we have had women Prime Ministers and members of the non-majority communities leading the country at different points of time, something unheard of in the western, so called *advanced democracies*, points to the maturity of the Indian democracy. When we remember our independence movement, let us evaluate the the bright and dark side of the freedom movement and how it has influenced the shaping of the march of our country to self-sufficiency and development in all spheres of life.

The challenges the country is going to face in the coming years will be the fight against hunger, nutritional deficiency, illiteracy leading to poverty, unemployment, fundamentalism, pressures on land, housing, transportation, degradation of the environment and urbanisation. In our quest to conquer the earth, let us not forget the other species who share the earth with us, lest, future generations not forgive us. A sustainable model has to be developed to ensure the equitable distribution and consumption of earth's resources. The pressures on the depleting sources of freshwater points to one of the greatest concerted actions humanity will need to undertake on water management. The recurrent floods and droughts affecting different parts of the country needs to be tackled urgently. Linking of regional rivers can be first attempted before taking up projects of gigantic dimensions. It is the responsibility of the present generation to see that these issues are tackled one by one efficiently and jointly and thus help in the march of the country towards self sufficiency and all round development.

Nation building is a much more arduous task and requires future leaders of greater ability and mettle to take us forward. While personal sacrifices of one kind were needed by the generation which fought for our freedom, a different paradigm is needed for nation building. It brings us to the meaningful conclusion that gaining independence is different from nation building.

While appreciating the efforts of our leaders of yesteryears, presently we have to concentrate on nation building. Analyse our strengths and weaknesses, compare it with the strengths and weaknesses of other successful nations and the global community and direct our efforts focused on the above mentioned issues. Not belying the hopes and aspirations of our President and each one of us, irrespective of one's community and social status, desiring the good of the country, let these actions be the catalyst for the emergence of India as the nation with the best indicators of life, socially, economically and *spiritually* by the year 2020. Because it is the development on these three fronts which has been the cornerstone of all Eastern civilisations.

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