EQUILIBRIA

Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics

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While some have become rich, others languish in poverty.
Yet some have left the nation, others build the future of the country.
While some have changed in 68 years, for others, even 100 aren't enough.

As Gokhale welcomed its new batch, Team Equilibria decided to explore different shades of freedom. We present to you, our first issue,

THE CURIOUS CASE OF FREEDOM

Look out for..

- *A Case For Participation In Freedom* by Rongmon Deka
- *The Obscuring Beacon* by Kshama Mishra
- *A Night Too Harsh* by Sudhir Swarup
- *Befuddled:* Illustration series by Shubhra Pratap

We are also happy to have onboard, the new members of Equilibria. The new team is all set to keep our readers engaged and inspired.

Freedom

- Dr. Ashish Kulkarni
Faculty, Gokhale Institute of Politics & Economics

It is a truth almost universally acknowledged that a nation in search of prosperity must provide for at least a modicum of economic freedom. The usual suspects excepted, almost every nation today aims to provide its citizens and their business concerns some degree of economic and political liberty. And while this may be a desirable goal in and of itself, it also serves as a crucial means to an important end – development, in an economic sense, has proven to be rather difficult to achieve without freedom.

The idea is hardly revolutionary, of course. Milton Friedman is perhaps its most famous exponent, but the roots of this particular notion go much farther back in time. What makes this current period unique is the fact that it is for the perhaps the first time that this idea – that economic and political freedom is a necessary ingredient in the recipe for economic development – has received near universal acceptance.

Now, while it is true that almost every nation has embraced this idea, the degree to which it has embraced it still differs. Some nations give it a bear hug, so to speak, while others plump for the rather more polite hand on the back and peck on the cheek. And it is a source of frustration to many in India that we fall more often in the latter category than we do in the former.

Not always, it is important to note. Our political freedom has been more or less assured ever since independence, with one obvious exception, and our economic freedom, while a little tawdry in its arrival, has resulted in hitherto unparalleled economic growth once it was granted.

What forms do our political and economic freedom take, and what have they implied for us as citizens of India? Consider just two examples: the freedom of movement and the freedom to dissent.

It's a word that is not as well known outside of China as perhaps it should be, but it is a word that every Chinese citizen is intimately familiar with: hukou. Your hukou is your passport to government services in China. It decides if you can send your children to school, it decides if you have access to public health services and it decides if you are authorized to apply for public sector jobs. Unfortunately, your hukou is also tied to your place of birth.

Unless the government says so, your hukou is valid only in the locality in which you are born. If you were born in the Chinese hinterland, you can't just up and move sticks to Shanghai, no matter how attractive the prospects in the city. In other words, Chinese citizens are not free to move – a freedom that we, here in India, have taken so much for granted that it takes time for us to even *understand* what a hukou implies.

And while on the topic of our neighbor, it is also worth our while to ask if the FTII protests would have even started in China, let alone the question of whether they would have lasted for as long as they have. The freedom to vote exists in China, as it does in North Korea*, which is why, in my opinion, the freedom to provide a dissenting view is rather more important.

Both of these freedoms – that of the right to move, which economists refer to an internal labor mobility, and the right to dissent, for which economists thankfully don't have a more convoluted label, are liberties that we in India take for granted, and it is a testament to our society that they *are* taken for granted. That's the bear hug part of our liberties.

On the other hand, economic freedom falls under the category of a chaste peck on the cheek. While there is a sea change in our liberties when compared to 1991 and earlier, there still remains much to be done in this regard.

We have restrictions on who can engage in commerce (the Factories Act prohibits women from being employed on the night shift in many states across India), when they can engage in commerce (nobody, irrespective of gender, can keep a grocery store open through the night), what they can sell (the appropriately named Maharashtra Prohibition Act prohibits the online sale and purchase of liquor), or, for that matter, what we can buy (it is illegal to be in possession of more than 12 bottles of liquor... in your own house. This itself, by the way, is an improvement, and a recent one at that. Until as recently as last month, you were allowed to keep all of two bottles of alcohol in your own house). Paucity of space forces me to limit my examples to just these many, but many hours of mirth can be had by thinking through the implications of almost any law passed with the 'interests' of buyers and sellers at its heart. If one starts to peruse the labour laws in our country, replace hours with ~~days~~ weeks.

When possible, however, one should look at the bright side of things. And in India's case, truth be told, it is not that hard to do. We have come a long way from the political repression prior to 1947, or the economic repression prior to 1991. Things are much better today than they were in the past, and it will require a person with extreme talents in the field of pessimism to predict that this trend will not persist in the future.

That is different from saying that we should rest on our laurels, however. Not only must liberties already granted be vigilantly preserved, but efforts must be made to add to the list, rather than reducing it.

And on those occasions on which despondency is the predominant theme, it would perhaps help to realize that even that great bastion of political and economic liberty, the United States of America, requires its citizens to apply for a license in order to become a tour guide, a fortune teller … or a horse massager.

Count your blessings. If, as an Indian, you feel the urge to knead some equine muscles, you can do so without asking the government for permission!

**There is only one candidate on the ballot in North Korean elections, but you are free to vote.*

Dutee's Story: When fair was too fair

Disturbingly rare have become stories of such emphatic human victory; I'm either hopelessly cynical or Dutee Chand's story really is distinctively heartening. CAS's (Court of Arbitration for Sports, Switzerland) decision to award the nineteen year-old the right to compete again as a professional sprinter stirred within the world media a well-meaning frenzy, many like me weren't unperturbed either. Dutee was banned a year ago from competitive sports due to excessive testosterone secretion in her body; the rules laid down by the IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federation) and in turn the AFI (Athletic Federation of India) require female athletes to have testosterone levels below the threshold level observed in male athletes, this rule then goes on, in a rather dastardly manner, to suggest corrective surgeries and hormone-replacement therapies as possible recourse. To this, Dutee responded with aplomb, impressively unbecoming of her humble origins, "I'm who I'm and will change for nobody."

While Dutee's victory implies that the Hyperandrogenism (the said condition) regulations stand repealed for at least the next two years (till IAAF can produce conclusive scientific evidence that the naturally produced testosterone in women can significantly boost their performance.) what throws me off my feet is how warped the situation is. I'm one to have earned only disgrace in the name of sports, using my lack of athletic faculty as a feeble justification (alibi?) for my utter ignorance of the same. However, I do know with unflinching conviction that there has been no greater tool to personal freedom than sports. A sport has the innate ability to transcend the socio-economic construct and ensure the ascendency of talent, willpower, hopes and dreams. Integral to competitive sports is the idea of fairness, which single-handedly ensured the need to file men and women into distinctive categories. "Although athletics events are divided into discrete male and female categories, sex in human is not simply binary" notes the CAS verdict and in here lies a sport's predicament.

Dutee's episode spawned from the efforts the concerned authorities made to create a level-playing field for female athletes. Intentions-however noble, chose to underpin a muddled definition of who that female is. To my mind, this is the only way the IAAF could have approached her case: Dutee ought not to compete with women because, in a certain respect, she's akin to men. So then, should she run against men? No, because she's after all a woman. IAAF does not contest Dutee's claim to being a woman. Their argument being that the testosterone in her body bestows on her an unfair advantage and therefore she should not compete. This assertion is contentious because, if Dutee, by IAAF's own admission is decidedly female then shouldn't the supposed edge she has over other females be regarded in the same vein as, say, the inherent advantage of long legs to sprinters? Secondly, while IAAF may well have not called Dutee a man, our society did; given our iron moulds for defining gender and in that sense IAAF's position is rhetorical. The pointed secrecy maintained around such cases is only a testament to the societal deficiencies. Pinki Pramanik, Santhi Soundarajan and Dutee Chand herself are cases in point. These women were relentlessly bullied by the media; while Dutee has silenced all, others had to succumb. The Hyperandrogenism regulation could only be invoked in case of heightened suspicion against an athlete; it can only be an overwhelming co-incident that most women pulled up lacked congruence to conventional ideas of the feminine form (Caster Semenya's gut-wrenching story); not all tested positive for Hyperandrogenism- pointing again to rigidities in our perceptions regarding gender.

If all goes as it should, Dutee will compete in the Olympics next year. Born to a subsistence weaver, in a family of nine, she will run against those who've trained with world class facilities every step of the way and then those who've had it worse than her- can a level playing field factor in everything? In a bid to be fair to some gender/ Hyperandrogenism testing becomes unfair to others. Given the impossibility of quantifying the collateral damage to the parties involved and the awkward intersection of science and ethics that this situation is, solutions will be difficult to come by.

Crouching, as she leans forward at the start line, waiting for the gun shot; I feel Dutee belongs. She's truly victorious if the girl in the next lane agrees.

-Dona Tomy
M.Sc. Financial Economics (Part-II)

Like Freedom, Like Power…

Nation as a narrative is not absolute. It realizes and evolves through meanings, framed time and again, in varied contexts. The idea of a nation state seems so essential for a fundamental world order, yet it fails to recapitulate an essential and a basic similarity in its working state, though many times stemming from the same ideals.

Freedom is the fundamental right of every human being, the right to live, to begin with, in its most primeval form. Yet freedom gets defined, again, through relative contexts, standards, and to say needs of the mainstream. The process of the working of the ruling class, in the form of democracy or dictatorship, or any other form of power for that matter, confirms the hierarchies that take shape in any structure, in this case, a nation state. It contains within itself the discourses of a hetero normative sense of sexuality, gender definitions, punishments, the role and place of bureaucracy, moral and social conduct, and a stringent preservation of a cultural or socio religious order. This is done through a soft hegemonic process of defining right and wrong, and in shaping a collective conscience of the people. It is here, that the idea of nation state gets redefined through the prism of power relations, so intrinsic to its being and structure, that it contradicts its own fundamentals and "ideals".

History stands testimony to the oppression and the subsequent freedom struggles of many nations. The charters that were drawn, the ideals that were espoused, the idea of a nation, of people, essentially speak of intolerance of any form of an oppressive regime. At the same time, however, history also contains those oppressed silences that turned into cacophonous oppressive dispositions, through the tides of time; as orders were sought through struggles for freedom and a nation, how those orders translated into the same cycle of oppression.

The history of North Korea is significant in this context. Japan was the brutal oppressor of Korea. History records the Japanese war crimes that make us ponder in the most normative sense, how inhumanity exists. From murders and rapes to cannibalism, Japan as a colonizer did not leave any stone of atrocities, imaginable, unturned. Yet with all the ideals and haunted memories, and also a bitter civil war that created North and South Korea, North Korea registers one of the worst violations of human rights. Amnesty International also reports of severe restrictions on the freedom of association, expression and movement, arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment resulting in death, and executions in North Korea.

Another example is of one of the most brutal genocides that the memory recollects; of Jews by the Nazis. The Jews were faced with one of the most horrendous and violent ethnic cleansing by the Nazis. However, the memory resurrects itself only through a historical discourse, elaborated upon in literature and a sheer historical account. It does not imbibe any ideals of peace and non-violence in the subject. The infringement of human rights in Palestine by Israel is a proof of that. The brutality with which Israel carried out atrocities in Gaza, recently, can be juxtaposed with the extermination Jews had faced at the hands of Nazis- violence imaginable in the most unimaginable form. This juxtaposition summarizes the power hierarchies that the idea of nation state imbues within itself. The acts of violence and oppression by Israel on Palestine or by the North Korean government on their own people, even though they themselves contain the history of such a holocaust, builds on the pattern of a power structure. This power structure not only seeks to question the very basis of a nation, but also, the very idea of freedom in a collaborative sense. Why do the oppressed become oppressors? Why the voices demanding freedom turn into voices that command oppressive regimes? The answer may be contentious, uncertain too, but it builds on the basic fact of history. A simple fact: to rule. This simple desire takes the form of violence and oppression, when soft policing does not work, leaving the idea of freedom vulnerable to discourses of ruling the "powerless" or being ruled by the "powerful", thus confining it to the narratives of power structures in the context of a nation state.

-Hafsa Sayeed
M.Sc. Economics (Part-I)

A Case for Participation In Freedom

When our forefathers heard the freedom bells ring, it must have been a wondrous feeling. A time of boundless hope and possibility, of an outpouring of relief and joy, and most of all, of exhilaration of unrestricted being, in mind and body. Those nascent years must surely have been sprinkled with feverish excitement, a spirit of enterprise and full blooded determination. As bearers from a few generations down the road, the above supposition cannot be entirely devoid of nostalgic romanticism. Despite so, there is an urgent need to remind ourselves of the sheer scope freedom enables us with. This is especially pertinent for a privileged class, such as readers of this newsletter, propped by education, money and power.

In its simplest form, the notion of freedom involves the sovereignty of the state and its people and the establishment of the fundamental rights of the individual. This is a correct if quite succinct notion to begin with. We may consider some deeper lying connotations to this idea; for example, the individual is bound by the laws of the land, and we can unanimously attest that this is no bad thing. By extension the individual is also bound by the diktat of the state under exceptional circumstances and, indeed, of the laws governing foreign territories when applicable. In this discussion, the author draws attention specifically to the responsibilities and capabilities entrusted by freedom to the individual and considers some important implications.

The political and social climate prevailing in our country today has re-ignited some of the eternal debates that hound every part of the world: redrawing rights to freedom of thought and expression, separating education from politics, issues of equity and so forth. For those inclined to rumination and observation, a good deal of turbulence persists close enough to home so as to necessitate a deliberation on the role the educated youth may play in the deepening malaise. In this regard, aspiring social scientists, that is, our ilk, should feature as prominent actors that rekindle and further the dreamy spirit of days past.

To understand the gist of the matter at hand, it is worth recalling the properties of freedom. When sought for, freedom is near impossible to cogently define but easy enough to get behind; once granted, it has often proven to be quite difficult to contain and altogether bears an ever changing dynamic. But freedom is very much a tangible! The sacrifice and valour one learns of in history is testament to this fact. We consume heaps of it each day while it imperceptibly lulls the mind into a sense of security, self-containment and, ultimately, stagnation. Why, freedom is a dangerous drug. It deludes the mind like no other substance, dulls the spirits and divides the union, instigates fallacies, lets standards slip and, under circumstances, leads to suppression. In short, an ominous double edge.

To combat against these and other grievous consequences, it is important to engage actively with the law and authority, debate legitimacy and equity, counter blind doctrines and superstition and build an accessible round-table of checks and balances. In other words, the imperative is to become the engaged stakeholder, the driving force behind a resurgence out of the status quo. As members of society who have resources at our disposal it is our duty to participate in and critique the process of policy making, governance and administration.

To realise this, we need to take cognizance of the fact that our smoothed, privileged lives have had nothing like the upheaval of a freedom struggle, the Partition, and travails of first-time governance. Conversely, we can never know what it really was like to become a free state as the clock turned to midnight. The lightness freedom brought then sits still among us now, taken for granted and supposedly assured. This is a trap we cannot fall prey to. Instead, the situation demands that we rise as a collective and with purpose, exercise our rights and espouse principles that embody justice and tolerance. Freedom exists today, we cannot deny, but whether we are truly independent is moot. By these arguments, shy reader, this voice ought to be treated as agitated, urgent and fearful.

-Rongmon Deka

M.Sc. Economics (Part – II)

The Obscuring Beacon

“By academic freedom I understand the right to search for truth and to publish and teach what one holds to be true.”

A simpler definition than the one suggested by Albert Einstein could not have been present in history. The notion of independence has transformed from physical oppression of countries to more abstract and less absolute concepts. Deliberations had resulted in the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure and UNESCO’s International Conference during which the mostly unheard of, elementary yet intricate principles for academic governance of universities, were projected:

“The right to pursue knowledge for its own sake and to follow wherever the search for truth may lead;”

“..the tolerance of divergent opinion and freedom from political interference;”

“..the obligation as social institutions to promote, through teaching and research, the principles of freedom and justice, of human dignity and solidarity, and to develop mutually material and moral aid on an international level.”

Yet when *Sahitya Akademi* Award winner A.K.Ramanujan’s internationally acclaimed essay, ‘Three Hundred *Ramayanas*: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translations’ was included in the undergraduate curriculum of the University of Delhi, the staunch students right wing felt the urge to vandalize the college premises and assault the authorities they held responsible for the ‘unholy’ step taken. All of this because the literary piece of work illustrated some lesser known versions of the epic that portrayed Rama and Sita as siblings, contrary to Valmiki’s popular rendition which Hindus adhere to. The agonizing religious sentiment that it was feared to provoke was reason enough to have it scrapped off the syllabus five years later, against the vote of a scholarly committee appointed by the Delhi High Court itself. What was hoped to have inspired cultural tolerance and literary creativity, ended up becoming a target of religious rigidity.

Closer to home, the polemic protests by the students of the premier Film and Television Institute of India, traces the fault lines in India’s educational bedrock. What they are dissentient about is the appointment of Gajendra Chauhan as the new chairman of the institute, with authorities having turned a blind eye to befitting candidates such as Amitabh Bachchan and Govind Nihalani. The students are of the opinion that the newly appointed head has had forgettable contributions to the field of television and cinema and lacks requisite credentials for a post of such stature except having a feather of a ruling-party-loyalist in his cap: this, they feel, demeans the academic and cultural might of the foundation and bogs down the independently creative aura with the political streaking. The liberal sphere of thought was felt threatened.

A similarly astonishing series of events unfurled at IIT-Madras earlier this year when the Director imposed a ban over the students association, Ambedkar-Periyar Study Circle, following directions issued by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The students’ body was accused of colouring common opinion against the Modi government by circulating copies of a speech that censured the regime’s pro-business policies and ban on beef. What had been initiated as a forum for brainstorming over socio-political and economic concerns, ended up being disrupted, with the students being barred from utilizing the institute’s common facilities and platforms.

From the resignation of Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, a distinguished professor at Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, from the Presidency University to Amartya Sen stepping down from the post of Chancellor of the renewed Nalanda University, recent events throw light on how the liberal atmosphere needed for sustenance of any educational organization is being suffocated. Teachers in established institutions constantly try to neutralize classroom lessons so much so that students are left with no zeal or curiosity for the subject. For a nation that vaunts its ability of up keeping “unity in diversity”, India exhibits little tolerance, religious, political or otherwise towards adoption of independent ideas. There are constant efforts, active and passive, to conform to the views of a power-holding or majority group, even within the boundaries of the educational framework. Socrates was sentenced to death for corrupting the minds of Athens against the gods the city worshipped; “I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think”- being the crux of the matter and the purpose of educating the world.

-Kshama Mishra

M.Sc. Financial Economics (Part-I)

Freedom, In A Family Way!

"Do not tell Dad or Mom that I am going on a trek with my friends", said Ravi. "Ok, fine. But please act responsibly while you are out there and take care of yourself", replied Ravi's younger brother and all time confidant, Prakash, reluctantly. "Yes. Love you bud, see you", said a thrilled Ravi before hanging up. Today, Prakash regrets his "Ok, fine" and wishes if only this was not the last time he talked to Ravi and that he could actually see Ravi again. The above paraphrase is the concluding excerpt from the conversation Prakash had with Ravi prior to the latter's ill-fated trip to Kheer-Ganga last July, where he was washed away by a gush of water that came rumbling downhill, during a flash flood.

Here is an insight, not only for Prakash, but for everyone in general. The opening line of this essay should lead any thoughtful person to see what rests at the genesis of the problem. Openness and fearless communication of one's thoughts and desires with beloved ones are the two things that instantly come to my mind. So, let us talk about the optimality of free atmosphere and freer interaction among family members, which play a crucial role in shaping up a child into a mature adult and subsequently help finding a rightful place in society. As the clichéd apothegm reads, 'Child is the father of a man'. A budding mind is the most impressionable piece of slate, with a tinge of human touch, that exists in this world. It does not only see, but observes. It does not just hear, rather listens. Along time, as it grows, it does not merely read, but learns and imbibes every action and their corresponding reaction. For all these to possibly transpire in the most efficient way, some preconditions are required to be fulfilled, which can be studied through a spread of Rights and Duties in a family setup. When a couple is blessed with a child, the child comes with a natural right of being groomed in a free and secure environment, where she can nurture her free thoughts, taking the right shade, and express one's individuality in a unique way, rather than just blending into a common average. Corresponding to this right is the duty of parents to provide her with the prerequisites. A surrounding which leads to suppression of an inquisitive mind, innovative idea and expressive heart might prove to play havoc with the morale of a budding individual. Take an example of puberty. Study proves that this is a period when an individual undergoes not only physical changes, but also, if not provided for or if handled in an immature way, it causes irreparable dent to the level of confidence one has. To relate to this notion, think about your classmates when you were in class IV and then when you were in class VIII. I guess you can more certainly than not cite a few examples where the behaviour of some of your classmates changed phenomenally. Without limiting the influence of any other factors being a possible cause of such a change, one cannot deny what has been stated above.

Also, it would not take much effort to recollect about your friends, who are doing what they are doing in life just because it was their parents' wish. Again, not denying that there might be cases where the child still manages to excel in that particular field, just because of sheer brilliance of his mind, but the fact of the matter remains that he is not doing what he otherwise would have done. Another contended front is the exposure to Sex Education at the right age. It can only be blamed on the lack of openness and atmosphere where one does not feel free enough to discuss about the same. This leads the pliable minds to conceive misplaced notions and delve in experimentation of varying degrees of stupefaction. A recent study suggests that Urban Indian kids have their first brush with sex at as early an age of fourteen.

A casual investigation among today's youngsters reveals that on an average one might be more overt regarding the happenings in one's personal life with his or her pal rather than a family member. This of course is not a desired situation. Being related by blood ought to have a certain personal privilege but unfortunately it's not the general case. Ask why and you will get an answer that it's not because of one-off events but happenings throughout the years of upbringing. Authoritarian parenthood raises the best liars!

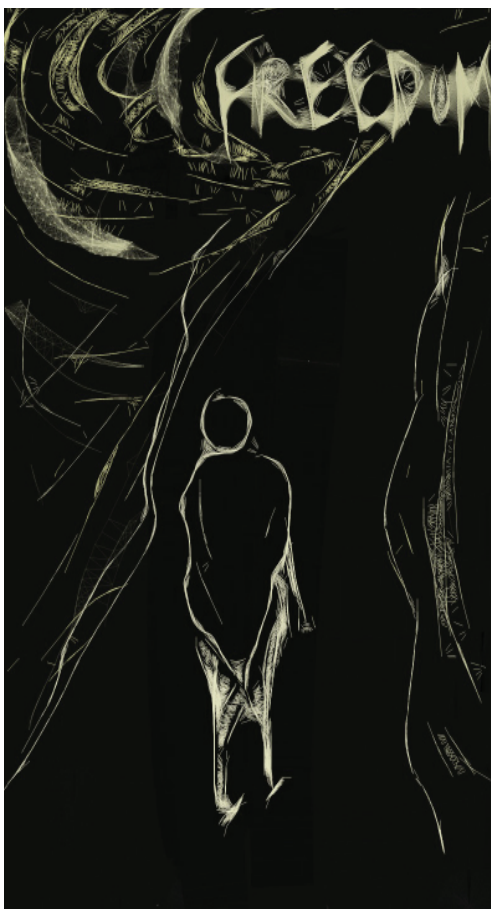
Going back to the case cited in the beginning, it cannot be clearly said that if the environment at Ravi's home had been such that he could talk to his Mom or Dad about his desire to go on a trek, then it would have saved his life or not but this can clearly be said that years of worldly experience and parentage might have endowed them with some expertise or advice about the trip and the site in particular, which could have been put to effective use by Ravi. Who knows, today might have been a regular day in Ravi's life in that case. 'Charity begins at home'. Most of us have heard of it. So is true for 'Freedom'. When seen at the level of a household its connotation is at as micro a level as it gets. Thus titled, Freedom…in a family-way!

-Abhishek Jha
M.Sc. Economics (Part-I)

A Night Too Harsh

It was just a matter of hours few,
The skinny dark skin,
Of dirt, of sweat,
Would give up on the chill.
Would give up on that thin shawl,
Which he found in the rags, on one of his job days,
Just before the commencement of this winter.
That day was a lucky one.
The days were lenient enough to make up for the nights,
They provided healing to the wounds inflicted by the nights,
With the divinity of the Sun,
They brought smiles.
But this night was nowhere done.
Walking down the misty road,
Walking in an odd pair of slippers,
His bony chest had started to beat slowly,
His shaky legs did not want to be a part of his journey,
His dirty face had stopped feeling the chill.
The chill showed no mercy.
Along with the winds, the temperature dip to a sorrow low.
His shawl was the only armor,
His slippers the only guard.
But there was something that kept him going.
Far away in the fog,
At a distance unpredictable by human eyes,
There was a light.
A yellow light of hope.
The light had a blur around it,
A blur by the fog.
That interim destination was the final one for tonight.
He kept telling his body,
"It's not far, it's not far",
And the reply he got was only otherwise.
The warmth in his mind,
Of ambition, of glory,
Tries to fight his cold body,
With all might, with all tricks,
But it was just a matter of hours few.
The day next,
Again the sun showed it's divine,
Again the body started warming,
But only this time,
It was the skin alone.

-Sudhir Swarup
M.Sc. Economics (Part-I)



The Curious Case of whose Freedom?

I'd like to have the cake and eat it too. Or better, I'd like to have the bigger half and eat it all. The haves and have-nots have long been fighting over the same creamy icing of high incomes, coveted government jobs, higher education from the so-called elite institutions and all that jazz that our country offers. We speak of a country so diverse that every rupee note announces it's nominal value in fifteen languages. A country which had more than four hundred parties contesting in the 2014 General Elections and a country with numerous ways of draping the humble six yards saree.

Yes, we are diverse and yes, I am proud of it. However, inspite of being as eclectic as an art collector, we have managed to identify ourselves as belonging to the particular majority or the (unfortunate?) minority. Let us examine the most obvious bifurcation- I am a Hindu and if I may be so bold, which religion do you belong to? If you're a Hindu I sort you in the majority crowd, and if not, I filter you into the minority club. And if I may go a little overboard, I ask you your caste too! I then classify you into broad categories of apparent hierarchy, in order of superiority of course. The aforementioned diversity now reduces to broad categories of the apparent "have-it-all" majority and the "deprived" minority. This notion of inequity is what most of us are familiar with. But has the resource allocation changed recently?

Before I begin my argument I ask you a few more questions. Have you ever conditioned your opinions such they that are in tandem with what the majority thinks? Have you ever refrained yourself from speaking your mind just so you don't end up hurting somebody's sentiments? Do you think you are exercising your freedom of speech? The point to note here is that we live in a world where people with different sensibilities and beliefs live side by side, so the question becomes how do we exercise freedom of speech in this new world?

One solution is that if you do not offend my sensibilities, I will refrain from offending yours. While this approach sounds nice (or safe), if applied consistently and democratically, will lead to the tyranny of silence. It is difficult to say whether your opinion won't be perceived as offensive by somebody either in your society or in a far-away country.

Another way to go is to ask, what are the minimal limitations on speech in a liberal democracy in order to be able to live together in peace? Most countries have "hate-speech" or "insult" laws except the US. It means that people would have to accept that the price we pay for living in a democracy and enjoying its benefits is that we cannot insist on a special right not to be offended. Elaborating on US's approach to free speech, the right to freedom of expression has a special status in the sense that regulation of speech is content neutral. On the other hand in countries like India we criminalize certain opinions as they are perceived to be inciting hatred.

Referring to the publication of the twelve cartoons of Prophet Mohammed, it is important to distinguish between targeting a religious doctrine for ridicule and mockery and attacking a group of people like the Jews in cartoons in the Arab world or in Nazi magazines. To assert that only minorities may tell jokes about themselves or criticize other minorities is both grossly discriminating and foolish. By such logic, only Nazis may criticize Nazis. Today majority of Indians oppose female foeticide, child marriage and ritual violence against women. Should we be unable to criticize cultures that still adhere to these practices just because they are minorities?

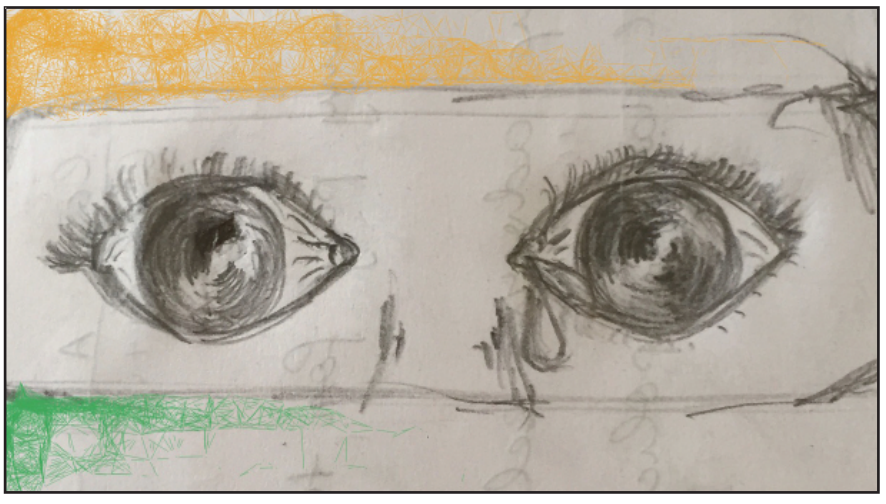
Reflecting on the minority/majority question, liberal democracy has granted minorities equal rights and protection against discrimination. That's extremely crucial. Sometimes, though, we forget that the most important minority in a democracy is the individual, not the group. If the fear of censorship by the sensitive minority or majority curtails an individual's freedom of speech then unfortunately this glorious right bestowed upon us by our constitution is merely a smoke screen. What's so curious about freedom? We think we have it. But do we really?

-Medha Shekhar

M.Sc. Financial Economics (Part-II)

Gift Yourself A Little Piece Of Freedom

This independence day I was talking to one of my closest friends about my new life at Gokhale. By the end of our call she expressed her regret for not experiencing an independent life. Her parting words left me wondering about life and the choices we make as we grow old. Now to elaborate, my friend actually got into Gokhe but was not allowed to come to Pune as she is a girl and in her relative's opinion should not be living alone .The thing that bothered me the most was her mute acceptance of her relative's decision without any protest. While we were celebrating our 70th independence day, there are people like my friend who have never lived an independent day in theirr lives. We admire and idolize our freedom fighters but in reality we don't fight for our own personal freedom.



Personal freedom is a battle that we have to fight on our own. We can be awarded with all the civil and social liberties, have all the rights but until and unless we don't fight for what we want we'll always remain enslaved. In our daily lives we make so many decisions keeping other people's opinions, thoughts and social norms in mind. The most amusing part is we seek our own fulfillment by accepting the dictatorial rules that various people impose on us. Can we really be fulfilled or live an enriching life by following orders or by taking permissions for our every little desire and ambition? In our country women are told that teaching is the profession for them and some other stereotypical profession is suggested for men, whether you'll go outside to study or not is decided by your families, even your career choices are made by somebody else. Almost all of our adult life decisions are taken by somebody else and the most infuriating part is that we accept this willingly. The thing is if we never protest we'll have to ask permission for every little thing in our lives starting at familial level and ending at a societal level. This is a lifelong pattern that we never notice or care to change. .

This is very paradoxical that an educated, independent working girl has to beg her family to go to a club with her friends. And those who are actually allowed to go out are supposed to be grateful for this gift of freedom given by their elders. Is freedom really a gift that we need to beg for or be grateful for or a right that has been taken away from us? Who can give us back our right to live our lives the way we wish to? In my opinion nothing will change if you yourself won't take a stand for your personal independence. No social worker, no politician, no friend or relative can fight for you. You, yourself have to champion your cause and become a freedom fighter to lead your personal struggle for freedom. Your friends and peers can join you, support you or be there for you in your hour of need but at the end of the day it's your battle to win. Then maybe one fine day we would not have to ask anyone's permissions to live the way we wish to and our own freedom would become our right rather than a gift. So In the spirit of this Independence Day let's fight for what we want and just gift ourselves a little piece of freedom.

-Anupama Singh

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Does Independence Equate to Social Freedom for India

On the 69th day of independence, at the stroke of midnight , how much did Indians awake to life and freedom. Are we still making a tryst with our destiny?

As violence marred the joy of independence, we solemnly took an oath in the name of the sacrificed souls to build a nation from the dust that it been turned to.

Essentially after nearly 7 decades, have we been able to bury our past? Have we been able to grow mutual respect for our brethren? Have we been able to erase the borders that were used against us to rule us for two centuries? The answer from the most jingoistic nationalists would be that we have matured quite a bit. But is that enough, is the question we need to ask ourselves.

Religious intolerance over the years between our two dominant communities is a constant reminder of the holocaust during the years of partition. Although India is generally known for religious pluralism but the word "secular" was still required to be inducted in the Indian Preamble in the year 1976 by the 42nd Amendment Act. Such a necessity arose due to series of communal clashes in Gujarat in1969. But even after such inclusion, communal disharmony continued in India. The 1984 Anti-Sikh riots in which almost 10,000 to17,000 Sikhs were burnt alive or otherwise killed after the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was one of the most horrific communal cleansing in India since partition. One of the largest ethnic migrations of the 20th century again took place during the year 1989-1990 in Kashmir. Estimates indicate that around 300,000 to 500,000 Kashmiri Pandits have migrated out of Kashmir due to persecution by Islamic fundamentalists. The Godhra incident in which Hindus were allegedly burnt alive by Muslims, by closing all train exits, led to the 2002 Gujarat riots in which many Muslims were killed as an act of retaliation. According to the death toll numbers given to the parliament on 11 May 2005 by the United Progressive Alliance government, 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed. Such acts of communal disharmony and violence due to religious intolerance are quite prevalent even today, mainly in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal.

Ideologically they belong to various trends of Maoism. Initially, the movement had its centre in West Bengal. In recent years, they have spread into less developed areas of rural, central and eastern India, such as Chattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. through the activities of underground groups like the Communist Party of India (Maoist). The CPI (Maoist) and some other Naxal factions are considered terrorists by the Government of India and various state governments. Here we need to question whether these groups are terrorists or freedom fighters fighting for the poor and the weaker sections of the society whom our political class for so long have ignored and exploited. The conflict between economic progress and aboriginal land rights continues to be the dominating cause that fuels this movement, where the tribal community finds the government as their oppressors and the naxalites as their liberators.

Caste-related violence and hate crimes in India have occurred despite the gradual reduction of casteism in the country. Independent India has witnessed considerable amount of violence and hate crimes like "honour killings" that are motivated by the caste system. Over the years, various incidents of violence against Dalits, such as Kherlanji Massacre have been reported from many parts of India. At the same time, many violent protests by Dalits, such as the 2006 Dalit protests in Maharashtra, have been reported as well. "Honour killings" in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh under the order of "khap panchayats" (kangaroo courts) as a deterrence against inter-caste marriage are still prevalent today.

The invisible barbed wire of religion, class and caste still dominates the social scenario of our country. The nation that was conceived by our forefathers is still a long walk from the present scenario. Until and unless we achieve our freedom from social injustice, we must cease to consider ourselves as citizens of a nation state, as boundaries only carve out a state but the nation is formed by the social contract of equality among its people.

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Naxalism is an informal name given to communist groups that were born out of the Sino-Soviet split in the Indian communist movement.

BEFUDDLED

-By Shubhra Pratap