

India of my Dreams

Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny; and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new -- when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India, and her people, and to the still larger cause of humanity.

India has a long history of colonial rule. We were governed by the Imperial British masters for over a period of 200 years before we finally gained independence on 15 August 1947 after a long period of struggle during which several nationalist bravehearts gave up their lives for the cause of Indian freedom. They dreamt of a free motherland where all its people would be happy, safe and prosperous. The freedom fighters wished to establish a free India where all its citizens would be free and equal and where all of them would enjoy several rights and liberties and at the same time, they would be responsible enough to follow their duties and contribute towards taking the nation to greater heights. 75 years since Independence some of these dreams have been cherished while several others still wait to be fulfilled. Moreover, over the course of years several new dreams and aspirations concerning our great nation have crept up in the hearts of its citizens who want to see their motherland at the top in all the spheres be it science and technology, medicine, sports or entertainment.

Even though a lot of progress has been made in various fields a lot of efforts are still required to transform India into a Land of the Golden Bird as it was previously referred to as. Several of the goals as laid down by our esteemed freedom fighters and Constitution framers lay

unaccomplished. India is still very far way from being the land of their dreams, the land of our dreams, the land of my dreams.

Even after 75 years of Independence, India is still not a place where all its citizens, especially women and the people from the queer community can actually claim themselves to be free. They are free from the alien rule but bounded by the shackles of patriarchy which disguises oppression in the garb of love and togetherness and family values. A woman is expected to fit into the socially defined standards of femininity whereas there are no such standards for men. In fact, girls are not free and safe even inside their mother's womb. No matter how much we claim ourselves to be modern and free from the traditional patriarchal mindset, the truth remains that still almost each household in India desires at least one male child. Some of them even go the extent of practicing female feticide. Even after the girls are born, they are subject to a lot of discrimination even inside their own household. There are many girls who are not allowed to have higher education and are married off at a very young age because most families sees girls as a big burden which needs to be disposed of as soon as possible. 'After all it is a man's duty to go out and earn while it is the duty of the woman to stay at home and care for the children so what will the girl do with her education!'

The increasing number of crimes against women such as rapes, dowry deaths, honor killings, witch craft related torture and deaths, etc. are a testimony to the patriarchal and backward mindset of India. India is touted to be one of the most unsafe places for women in the world with many countries issuing precautionary warnings to their own citizens before they travel here. This is the image of India in the world; India which is a land of Goddesses who are worshipped in various stone idols placed in temples and other divine forms by the Indians but the same Indians forget to respect the Goddesses who live in their homes or roam around in the streets.

It is said that a woman's greatest enemy is another woman. This can be seen as absolutely true in the Indian context. While our mothers continue to teach their daughters how to become a good wife and a good daughter-in-law, they fail to teach their sons to become good human beings who respect people regardless of their gender. Instead, they pamper them and spoil them to the extent that they fail to respect the choices and dignity of other people, especially girls. Even today mothers-in-law continue to harass their daughters-in-law for dowry and a male child.

Moreover, our patriarchal society also refuses to acknowledge other gender identities. Individuals are deemed to be male or female on the basis of their biological sex, and their perceptions and expressions of self are disregarded. The concept of gender is based on the binary of masculinity and femininity. Since times immemorial, Indian society has had a limited culture for LGBTQIA+ community and even today there is a presence of widespread social stigma which is a cause of concern in modern times. LGBT people still face the issues of acceptance within their home, family, school, work place and peer group and the freedom to express their gender choices is a cause of constant struggle. In recent years, social media and corporate initiatives have tried to create a more inclusive space for the community but their progress is limited to the urban upper-class population. The rural and lower-class population is still far from being all-inclusive. Even though we have seen several political movements in favour of LGBT rights in recent years, there remains a large amount of homophobia among the Indian population and even after the scrapping of Section 377 of the Constitution by the Supreme Court of India in 2018 and the subsequent legalization of homosexuality in India, same sex marriages are not yet legally recognized in India and same-sex couples are also not given limited rights. Being disowned by family, torturous "conversion therapies", honor killings, physical and verbal abuse and suicides continue to remain the harsh reality faced by LGBTQ people in India.

How can we claim ourselves to be truly independent when such large sections of our population continue to be slaves of the prevalent societal conditions? In reality, we'll actually be free only when all the children of Mother India will actually be deemed equal not only on paper by the so-called laws and the Constitution but by the society and the general people. We'll actually be free when our newspapers and news channels will be free of news about rapes, domestic violence, bride burnings, honor killings, suicides, etc. We'll actually be free when no girl would have to think about her dress or the time before venturing out of her house. We'll actually be free when no parent would have to spend all their life saving to pay their daughter's dowry. We'll truly be free when the household care work and nurturing of kids won't be looked upon as a wife's duty and would be willingly and gladly shared by the husband. We'll be truly free when no person would have to feel ashamed of their gender choice. We'll truly be free when the society realizes and accepts all human beings as children of God and treats them equally.

We still have a long way to go before this actually happens but all of us responsible citizens of India must come together and pledge to continue to strive hard to create an all-inclusive country where no one, absolutely no one is discriminated against on any ground whatsoever. We need to abolish patriarchy instead of finding ways to sustain within it. 75 years ago, we freed ourselves from the chains of British slavery and I feel now the time has come for us to undertake another freedom struggle to gain independence from this patriarchal stronghold over our country so that all its citizens and the future generations get the space, an inclusive environment and all the basic rights and liberties to grow and develop to the best of their capacities and in turn give their contribution towards the growth and progress of our great nation.

Let's hope that we live to see these changes in our society which will not only be free of gender discrimination but also other forms of discrimination such as those based on religion, caste, colour, economic status, language, etc. where everyone lives together with peace and

brotherhood. So that India truly becomes the tolerant land which Mahatma Gandhi desired it to be so that it can steer its path towards progress and success and become a superpower.

“Intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit”

(Mahatma Gandhi)

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