

# INDEPENDENCE INDEPENDENCE

By Brigadier Chitranjan Sawant, VSM

Greetings to our compatriots on completing 60 years of independence. What a relief it was when the Union Jack, the British flag, was lowered from its mast for the last time on the soil of India and the Retreat was sounded. Indeed, it was a celestial joy when the Indian Tri-colour went up the mast all over the country, minus the parts separated from the motherland and christened Pakistan, and Reveille was sounded. The military bands struck the new anthem – Jana Gana Mana and the vast multitude raised a full throated patriotic slogan – ‘‘Bharat Mata ki Jai -’’ salutations to Mother India. A new dawn, a glorious day for the young and old alike.

## DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

‘‘Vande Mataram’’ that was the national patriotic song that had been sung by all freedom fighters battling against the rule of the British in India. However, on the august day of August 15, by a quirk of destiny Vande Mataram had been relegated to the position of a national song and what many people believe was an eulogy for King Emperor George V, when he landed in India, usurped Vande Mataram’s place as the national anthem.

The Independence Day brought a bag of mixed feelings. We Indians had fought, both violently and non-violently, and won the freedom that generation after generation will cherish. However, millions of people were displaced and uprooted from their home and hearth and lakhs had lost their lives in communal frenzy. The then leaders, across the borders, failed to rise to the occasion to defend and protect the honour and safety of the common man. They were perhaps busy celebrating their new positions of power – where the leaders had become political masters – replacing the erstwhile British rulers. However, all said and done, Freedom is freedom. We love our freedom.

What is the starting point of our freedom movement? By common consensus we give this signal honour to the uprising of the Indian sepoy against their British officers in 1857. Be it Mangal Pandey in Barrackpore in Bengal or the entire Regiment of Native Infantry at Meerut in the present Uttar Pradesh, the spark of freedom had ignited the hearts and minds of a vast multitude of people. It would be a historical mistake to call it a mere sepoy mutiny because there is enough evidence to prove that saints and sinners, Kings, captains and commoners had participated whole heartedly in the great independence movement of 1857. Legend has it that Sanyasis in their ochre robes were much in evidence in Meerut offering exhortations for freedom to Indian sepoy at water holes and other social meeting points. Who were they?

Empirical study is required to collect, collate and disseminate hard facts to prove that it was Swami Dayanand Saraswati or even Nana Sahib in the garb of a mendicant who roamed from place to place firing the imagination of the Indian soldier to fight for the freedom of their motherland. They succeeded in their mission to a great extent.

Indeed, Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Maharashtra, Lala Lajpat Rai in the Punjab, Bipin Chandra Pal in Bengal and not forgetting Rani Chennama in Kittur in the south, who had through their thought and action, word and deed had made the cry for freedom a national movement. Albeit, vast parts of princely India remained untouched because the impact of the direct rule of the British had not been felt by the common man. For him or her, the Maharaja was both the ruler with a divine mandate and ‘*mai baap*,’ to provide worldly sustenance. That explains why those parts of princely India where the ruler had no cause to pick bones with the British remained unaffected.

Coming to our own generation, we find that in 1942, the Quit India Movement that started on August 8 galvanized the Indian men and women from all parts of the country and shook the citadel of the British rule in India. Even small children of primary schools participated in processions taken out in non-descript towns against the British rule, shouting slogans and chanting Vande Mataram. Notwithstanding the police repression and the physical torture, the lathi blows and bullet wounds, the movement gained strength day after day. History bears witness to the fact even the soldier in uniform was deeply affected by the freedom movement. The Indian National Army (INA) bears testimony to this proposition.

## **RED FORT IN THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT**

Students of history are well aware of the fact the native sepoys of the East India Company who had mutinied in Meerut marched en-block to the Red Fort in Delhi. The fort had become the symbolic centre of the fight for freedom. Although the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar was old and ailing, he was persuaded to lead the movement, which he did – though reluctantly. The native sepoys held sway over Delhi for many a month but were eventually overpowered and annihilated by the superior forces and armament of the East India Company in 1858.

It was again in the Red Fort that Bahadur Shah Zafar who owned the palace, was imprisoned, tried and later exiled to Rangoon ( Burma ). In 1944-45, Red Fort again came to life with the slogans of the sepoys and officers of the Indian National Army who were imprisoned in Salimgarh. The court martial of those valiant soldiers was held in the British Barracks of the Red Fort. *“Lal Qile se aayee aawaaz: Dhillon, Sehgal, Shahnawaz;”* this fiery slogan was heard not only in Delhi but throughout India. Dhillon, Sehgal, Shahnawaz were the brave officers of the INA who had been charged with the grave offence of waging war against His Majesty the King. The sentence pronounced was “Death,” later commuted to life imprisonment by the Viceroy and under public pressure they were set free. Freedom of India was around the corner.

A mention must be made of the “August Kranti Udyan” carved out near India Gate to commemorate the Quit India Movement of August 1942. It was started with great fanfare on the Golden Jubilee of the movement but the Udyan has been gathering dust since then. The less said about honouring the dead and departed, better it would be. That applies equally to men in uniform and to those not in uniform. Perhaps that explains why we have not yet been able to raise a national memorial to the great and valiant soldiers who fought and fell for the nation. The present structure called ‘Amar Jawan’ was hurriedly made and is an apology for a national memorial to those who became martyrs for the motherland.

## **DEFENDERS OF THE DHARM**

Dharm is a way of life. Defending the country is Dharm. Doing ones job properly is also Dharm. Righteousness is the essence of Dharm. Since independence a large number of young men, now women too are engaged in the task of defending the country. They not only protect our borders but also our way of life. Right from the first invasion of Kashmir by Pakistan in October 1947 till the Kargil conflict of 1999 our young men have defended the country to the last drop of their blood and have acquitted themselves with honour. We as a nation pay homage to them and also encourage our young men and women to follow the glorious example these young men and women. A number of young officers and soldiers won the highest gallantry award for bravery in the face of the enemy, some posthumously. The first one among them was Major Sonmath Sharma of Kumaon Regiment and the latest recipients among the posthumous awardees were Captain Vikram Batra and Lieutenant Manoj Pandey. It will be in the fitness of things if the nation voluntarily raises a war memorial for the dead and the departed.

Many a young boy or a girl have a nagging doubt whether it is essential to die to win a gallantry award. The answer is absolutely not. Many young officers and men have won highest gallantry awards. The nation honours them by requesting them to lead the Republic Day Parade standing in Jeeps, every 26<sup>th</sup> January. We are proud of them. However, one should not be afraid of becoming a martyr in the battlefield. After all this is not the first life of our souls and in any case not the last one. One must recall the stirring advice of Yogeshwar Shri Krishna given to Arjun, at the commencement of *Mahabharat* and is repeated by Indian soldiers battle after battle. It runs thus:

***Hatova Prapyasi Swargam, Jitva va Bhokshsi maheem,  
Tasma duthist Kaunteya, Yudhaye krit Nishchaya***

When a soldier attains martyrdom in battle, his soul goes to heaven, when he wins the battle he enjoys the worldly riches; therefore, or son of Kunti, Arjun, arise and fight against the enemy with DETERMINATION.

While we recall these words to boost the morale of young soldiers we also recall the age old saying handed out to generation after generation

**How else can a man die better  
Than facing fearful odds  
For the ashes of his fathers  
And temples of his gods.**

Suffice to say that as long as man lives he has to battle against forces of evil so that the Good can prevail. In a nutshell that is what Independence is all about.

That is what we fought for and that is what we will keep on fighting for.

## **INDEPENDENCE AND THE YOUTH**

The responsibility that has fallen on the shoulders of young Indians today, both boys and girls is to preserve, protect and defend the freedom of India with all their might. We have enemies across the borders and we have enemies within. There are fifth columnists within our society and they have to be eliminated.

It would be a wonderful idea for the young men and women to take a vow to fight corruption. This corruption is like termite which is eating into the vitals of our national health. Only young men and women who make ***Bhishma pratigya*** not to allow themselves to be corrupted financially, politically, socially or individually will have a steel like resolve to root out corruption.

The youth should also remember that freedom is not licence to contravene the law of the land. It is through self discipline that we make the society strong and the society in turn makes the nation strong. Let us recall the stirring words of Field Marshal Sir Philip Chetwode, the then Commander-in-Chief of India who said:

***“Honour, safety and welfare of your country come first, always and every time  
Safety and welfare of men you command, come next  
Your own honour, safety and welfare come last, always and every time.”***