

Freedom Found in India

My family has a long lineage in America with our ancestors settling before the American Revolution and then fighting in the war to free our country. My great-grandmother was even a member of Daughters of the American Revolution. Though I myself have not yet become a member, my ancestry has long-since been a source of pride and motivation for me. I am proud of their involvement through the ages, of their examples of adventure, education, and leadership. It astounds me to think that my family members might have walked the streets of Philadelphia alongside the Founding Fathers, the thinkers and initiators. I wonder if they heard Patrick Henry's renowned "Give me liberty, or give me death!" speech. I wonder if they walked by the brick building where the Declaration of Independence was written and questioned what was taking place behind those closed shutters.

When I was young, I was taught to respect the Founding Fathers, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution. As I have grown older, I have come to appreciate more for myself the bravery and sacrifice of those men. This was an incredible act of treason they did by even writing such a document as the Declaration. But they did not just write it, they signed it. They bound themselves irrevocably to the fate of the infant nation. John Hancock's quote in regards to his large signature on the document will always shock me: "There! His Majesty can now read my name without glasses. And he can double the reward on my head!" Most, if not all, of the signers were well-to-do, owned property, and had stable means of supporting themselves and their families; by tying themselves to the document, if the revolution had not been won, they would have lost absolutely everything they had, even their lives. They did not lose everything, but they did not know that at the time. Their faith and hope for the future stirs me to view my own future and this country's destiny with the same attitude.

I was thirteen when I visited Bangalore, India, but even then I could tell that the citizens did not have much faith in their country's future, nor in their government. Our trip fell right after a major election in that country which had created upheaval as several groups fought against the reigning government. I saw propaganda spray-painted on many walls lining the streets, and there were certain roads our driver would not take because they were too dangerous due to riots. The elections had led to several deaths due to shootings on the main roads and I saw what I thought might be dried blood when we passed by. Needless to say, this gave me a newfound appreciation for the freedom and relative calm that remains in our country, even during the many political transitions.

I also came to value the words "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". I saw first-hand the confinements of the caste system. If one was born into a low caste that is where one always remains. That is their identity. That is what defines them. No matter how hard they work they will always remain isolated from the opportunities that can be found in the upper castes. I came to appreciate more the amount and ability of entrepreneurship in America. Anyone can try to pursue their ideas. Yes, some are more successful than others but there are still the opportunities and freedom to attempt.

Not only was this lacking in Bangalore but so was the administration of justice. I distinctly remember driving by the men and children who would stand and beg in the middle of the streets. They would have some disfigurement, either intense scarring or limbs that had been broken and healed into odd positions. Even as a naïve thirteen-year-old, I knew that these injuries were not due to accidents. Pimps had intentionally disabled them so that way the men and children would draw more empathy from the passers-by, as well as not be able to find actual work and so be forced to beg to survive. One man—he was missing an eye and had a mutilated arm—pushed another man in a cart whose knee was broken out to the side and up. Yet another poignant memory was hearing one of the blind girls singing while she begged. I thought perhaps she had been born without her vision, but as she carefully navigated her way closer to the rickshaw I was horrified to see that her eyes had been gouged out. These types of atrocities are a common sight in the city. Even I was able to discern that from the short trip. But nothing was done to put a stop to these daily heartbreaks, the government did not seem to notice and the upper castes did not care. America is far from perfect, but I know that when such abuses occur, the perpetrator would be pursued and convicted; people would try to rescue the child. With the greater amount of freedoms in America, churches and community service organizations can step in so people do not slip through the cracks.

I respect the Founding Fathers immensely for their own personal convictions as well as their joint decision to pen the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. I value the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness that they were willing to sacrifice for themselves so that way the future of the country and its independence could be preserved for generations. I appreciate those documents for giving people opportunities- not just to be free- but to also strive for better through entrepreneurship. It is worth so much more after seeing in Bangalore what can happen, making me thankful that people are free in this country to aid others and not be trapped by caste. That is what the Founding Fathers and their work means to me: the freedom and opportunity to better the world for myself and others.

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