

FORGOTTEN SONGS OF FREEDOM

OPINION

HIMANSHU DHULIYA



Freedom struggle from the first war of independence in 1857 to the gaining of independence in 1947 was a glorious period in Indian History on many accounts despite the misery and struggles our people faced. It threw a galaxy of leadership whom we idealise till date, it generated ideas which we cherish, it made us a more progressive society in that we resolved to break caste barriers, we strove the path of emancipation of women, we made serious attempts to reduce communal tensions, we believed in the path of socialism and good for all. It was a great Nation in the making. It acted as a catalyst for Artists to create new words and songs and images. It activated cinema, theatre, Poetry and numerous artistic expressions. ‘Indian peoples’ theatre’ gave us theatre of new voice of struggle and freedom. a large number of artists came under an umbrella and creativity sprouted all over in numerous languages. The ‘progressive writers’ launched themselves in 1936 and have given us an indomitable expression. A voice to the masses, It has remained an inspiration still. These songs were written by various poets across the country as no part remained unaffected by wave of freedom. our leaders had connected to the masses and motivated them to rise to the occasion. Therefore these songs were sung by people full throated in utmost sincerity believing in each word they sang. The times were such, it was their only succour, it was their only support, it was their belief, it was their saviour, it was what all they had, some sang alone some together but sang they all. Sometimes on special occasion we remember these songs and our heart swells, yet we know that now we are free and so sing routinely, but

during the freedom movement these were nourishment for the broken hearts and medicine to uplift their morale.

BANNED-AAZADI KE TARANE /GEET

These songs were in large numbers banned by the British when they were published. In 1985 almost 50 years after the independence these songs in two volumes were published by the National Archives department of India, one volume has Hindi songs titled ‘Deshbhakti ke geet’ and the second songs originally written in Urdu titled ‘Aazadi ke Tarane’. These were published when Shri Giani Zail Singh was the President of India, and he directed after the ‘Hindi Songs’ were published in 1985 that the songs in Urdu should also be published and so in 1986 Banned Urdu songs were published as a separate volume in Devnagri as ‘Aazadi ke tarane’.

Many popular songs which we all know are there in the above volumes such as Iqbal’s famous ‘Tarane e Hind’ – ‘Sare Jahan se achha Hindustan hamara’. Subhadra Kumari Chauhan’s poem on ‘Rani Laxmi Bai’ – ‘Bundele har bolon ke much hamne suni kahani thi, khood ladi mardani wo to Jhansi wali Rani thi’. The famous gazal of Mirza Ghalib on 1857 in which he describes the atmosphere of old Delhi on account of the brutality of the British wherein the walled city had turned into a graveyard. Songs have themes of patriotism, glorification of our country, natural beauty, sacrifices of the leaders and young martyrs such as Bhagat Singh. Anger, a spirit of sacrificing ones life for the Nation, crushing the Britishers, accounts of the British atrocities on the people etc.

What is surprising and distressing is that many songs on freedom where the country is eulogised and the natural beauty is presented where there no strong anti-British language used or implied those songs were also banned. The reason could be that the ruling regime did not want any feelings of Nationalism to be invoked both harmless and harmful. Most of these songs were banned during the ‘Quit India’ movement when large number of freedom fighters were in jail

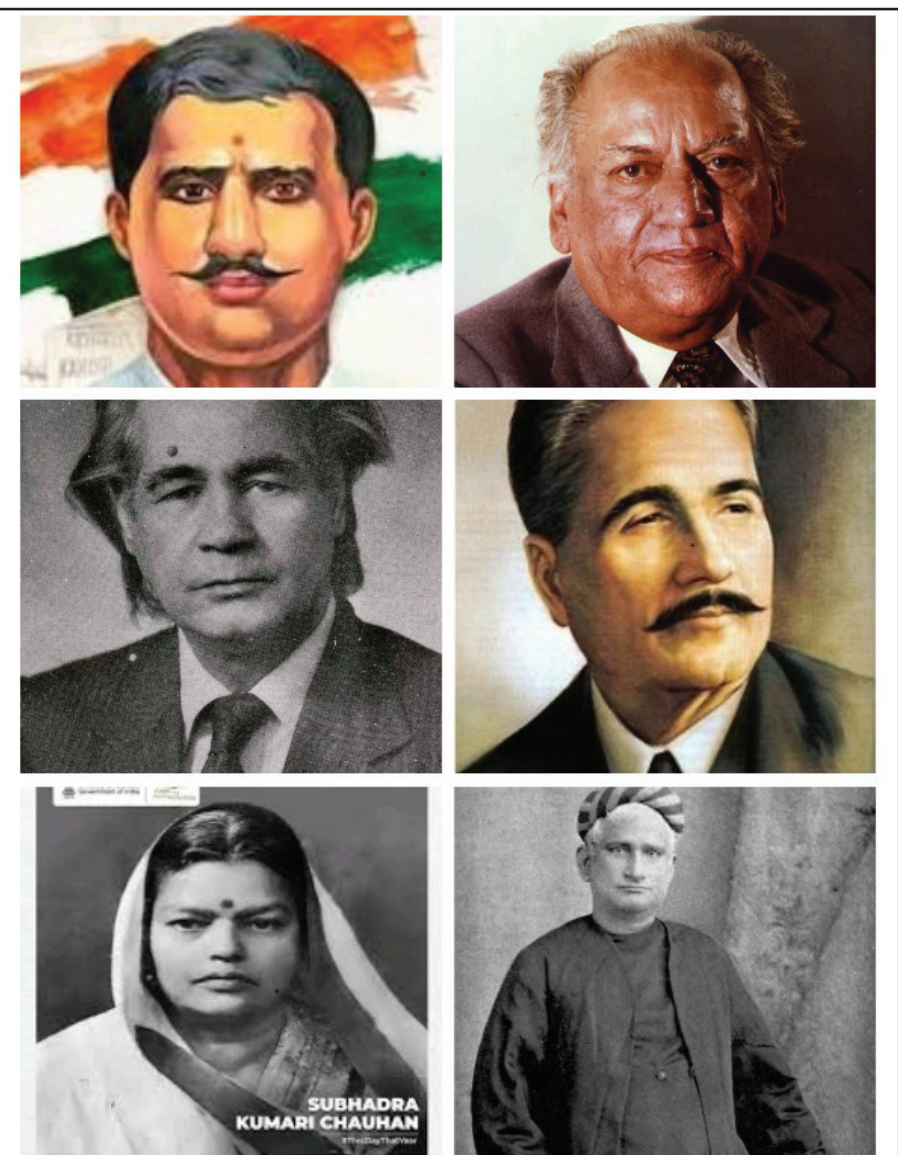
and an underground movement was active in keeping the fire of freedom alive by constantly communicating with people and so poetry was the safest means. Large number of these compilation were printed in printing press at Delhi, Dehradun, Lahore, Lucknow, Varanasi, Allahabad. What is extremely disheartening was that the people who were scrutinising these works were our own countrymen as an Englishmen would not know the meaning and content of these poems and in their overenthusiasm to please their masters they applied a blanket embargo on any song in praise of the Nation. It is a lesson to us that the enemy most of the time is within us and servility of people such as witnessed then cost us our freedom.

SONGS AND INSTRUMENTS

Songs and instruments have played a central role in peoples’ movements to motivate and mobilize people – American war of Independence, French Revolution and Russian revolution are replete with examples. So was it in our country which had deep rooted tradition of music and therefore the culture and concept of ‘Prabhat Pheri’ was born and in many towns and villages early morning before the sunrise groups of people walk the streets singing with harmonium etc bhakti and national songs. These ‘prabhat-pheris’ were popular during the struggle and thereafter too.

The two words made famous during the period were- ‘Vandematram’ and ‘Inqilab Zindabad’ primarily by the poets. ‘Vandematram’ (salutation to mother/I bow before you my mother) was the famous poem written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in late eighteenth century and later incorporated in his novel ‘Anandmath’. It is now our ‘National Song’. ‘Inqilab Zindabad’ was the slogan coined by the poet Hazrat Mohani and made famous by Bhagat Singh. Another phrase made famous by the poet and revolutionary Ram Prasad Bismil was ‘Sarfaroshi ki Tamanna’ from the famous Gazal of the poet Bismil Azimabadi – ‘Sarfaroshi ki Tamanna ab hamare dil mein hai, dekhna hai zor kiina bazue katil mein hai’.

Many eminent poets such as Iqbal, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Jaan Nisar Akhtar, Brij Narayan Chakbast, Maulana Shibli, Akbar Ilahabadi, Ismail Merthi, Maulana zafar Ali Khan, Majaz, Ali Sardar Jafri, Ram Prasad Bismil, Mirza dabang have written verses which were banned and are listed in the collections. However the name of



(Top) Bismil and Faiz, (Middle) Sardar Jafri and Iqbal. (Bottom) Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.

the poet in the Hindi compilation is not listed, only the name of the printing press and compiler are stated.

NOTEWORTHY VERSES- IQBAL

Some noteworthy verses are listed below. We normally know of the four famous verses of ‘Sare Jahan se Achha’ but there are nine verses in the original the ones which we do not know are given below with explanation, It is interesting to note that this song is both in Hindi and Urdu compilation. In the Urdu compilation it is titled – ‘Tarana e Hind’ and in Hindi – ‘Hindustan Hamara’:

‘Gurbaat mein hon agar hum, rehta hai dil watan mein
Samjho hamen wabin par dil bo jahan hamara’
(If we are away from our country and our heart is in our country
Consider me there only where my heart resides)
‘Aye aabe roude Ganga wah din hai yaad tujhko
Utra tere kinare jab kar-waan hamara’
(O Ganga river do you remember the day when our Carawan
Arrived by your side)
‘Unaan Misra Roma sab mit gaye jahan se
Ab tak magar hai baki namon Nisban hamara’
(Greece Egypt and Rome civilizations exist no more
But our existence and name is still alive)
‘Kuch baat ke hasti mitti

Nahin hamari
Sadiyon raba hai dushman daure jahan hamara’
(There is something in us that our name is not wiped away
Since centuries the world has been against us)
‘Iqbal koi mahram apna Nahin jahan mein
Maloom kya kisi ko darde niban hamara’
(Iqbal there is no person so close to us
What do the people know of our deep and internal pain)

SAR FAROSHI KI TAMANNA AB HAMARE DIL MEIN HAI -BISMIL AZIMABADI

The above though original Urdu song is the first song in the Hindi songs compilation indicating that the difference between the language was that of only the script.
‘sarforishi ki tamanna ab hamare dil mein hai
Dekhna hai zor kiina bazue katil mein hai’
(the desire to sacrifice my head is in my heart
Let us see how powerful are the arms of the killer)
‘Rabware rabe muhabbat reh na jana raah mein
Lajjete sebra navradi dooriye manzil mein hai’
(the love of the country should remain do not be lost on the way
Do not worry of uniform and headgear the destination is far away)
‘Waqt aane de bata denge tu-

jhe e aasmaan
Hum abbi se kya batayen kya hamare dil mein hai’
(let the time come we shall let you know O sky
How do we tell now what is in our heart)

‘AAZAADI KI DEVI’ – SUBHDRA KUMARI CHAUHAN

‘Bundele barbolo ke mukh bame suni kabani thi
Khood ladi mardani wah to Jhansi wali rani thi
Singhasan bil gaye, Raajwan-shon ne brikuti tani thi
Budhe bharat mein bhi aayi pbir se nayi jawani thi
Gumi hui aazadi ki keemat sabne pechhni thi
Door pbirangi ko karne ki sabne man mein thani thi
Chamak hui san sattavan mein wah talwar purani thi’

RASHTRIYA JHANDA-BY SHYAMLAL GUPTA IN 1924

‘Vijayi Vishva Tiranga Pyara Jhanda Uuncha rabe Hamara
Sada shakti Barsane wala, Prem Sudha Barsane wala
Veeron ko harshane wala, Matri Bboomi ka tan man sara
Iski Shaan na Jane paaye, chabe jaan bhale bi jaaye
Vishva vijay karke dikhlaien tab hoye pran poorn hamara
Jhanda Uuncha Rabe hamara...’

‘Pyara Hindostan Hamara’- compiled by Aksir Siyalkoti. The Tarana of Iqbal had immense popularity and it influenced other poets too who wrote in a similar fashion as below:

‘Bulbul bein hum watan ki, yeh gulistaan hamara
Pyare hum uske pyara Hind-ostan hamara
Mit jayaenge wah khud bi, ‘bundum’ jahan ke baton
Jo chabte mitana namon Nisban hamara’

Hulas Verma ‘Premi’ has edited the volume ‘Kranti Gitanjalai’ and was printed in Bhaskar Press Dehradun in the poem below the famous couplet on the ‘Martyrs’ is written which is quoted till date:

Shabidon ki chitaon par Jundenge har baras mele
Watan pe marne walon ka yahi baki Nisban boga
Kabbi wah din bhi aayega ki jab swaraj dekhenge
Jab apni hi zamin hogi jab apna aasman boga’

HAI WATAN KE WASTE AKSEER VANDEMATRAM

Like Iqbal’s Tarana e Hind Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya’s song ‘Vandematram’ was an inspiration for many songs, one example is below:

‘Hai watan ke waste akseer vandematram
Desh ke khaadim ki hai jagir vandematram
Jalim ko hai agar bandook par apni garur
Hai idhar hum bekason ka teer Vandematram’

KHADDAR

Khaddar and Charkha were the symbols of freedom struggle established by Mahatma Gandhi. There were songs written on the theme of ‘Khaddar’ and ‘Charkha’: Gulami se Humko Chudaega khaddar
Jalim ko jad se mitaega khaddar
Bharat ki izzat hai ismen bi Bhanu
Bharat ke tan par bo bharat ka khaddar
Hamen yeh bharaosa hamen ye yakeen hai
Ki aazadi humko dilayega khaddar

CHARKHA

Charkhe se Svaraj
Karengi mulk mein kayam swaraj charkha se
Milega bind ko pbir takhto taaj charkha se
Banega bigde hue kaam kaaj charkha se
Rabega desh kea lam mein laj charkha se

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

Some influence of religion as a source of motivation was also prevalent among the songs of freedom one such was ‘Aum Naam Ka pyala’. Composed by Zoravar Singh ji ‘Singh Kavi’ and printed from Arya printing press Lucknow under ‘Singh Naad -7’:
Pikar aum naam ka pyala bo ja tu matwala
Pi sakta hai is pyale ko kya adna kya ala

Hindu Muslim Isayi gora boye kala
Nirbhav dbaramvir ban jata iska pinewala
Dara Nabin sakte pbir isko toup tamancha bhala

BHAGAT SINGH

There were many heroes of the period but the name of Bhagat Singh since his sacrifice at an early age was among the top martyrs and many poems were composed in his name, one such is produced below:

Phansi ka Jhoola jhool gaya mardana Bhagat Singh
Duniya ko sabak de gaya mastana Bhagat Singh
Rajguru se shiksha lo duniye ke naryukon
Sukhdev ko poocho kaban mastana Bhagat Singh
Rosban kaban ashfaq aur lebbri kaban bismil
Azaad se tha sacbba dostana Bhagat Singh

COMMUNAL HARMONY

Unity among people was primary to fight the British and so songs of amity and communal harmony were also composed and banned like others:

Tum Ram Kabo Wo Rabim
Kaben dono ki Garaj Allah se hai
Tum dee kabo wo dbaram kaben mansha to usiki raahse hai
Tum Ishq kabo wo prem kaben ,matlab to usiki raah se hai
Wab jogi ho tum salik ho maksood dile aagah se hai

FAIZ AHMAD FAIZ

Many eminent Urdu poets of that time wrote verses for the Nation and some of them such as Faiz, Sardar Jafri were also arrested and spent time in jail. It is learnt that though vernacular press was active and poems and stories in various Indian languages were proscribed the maximum number of writers who were proscribed were in Urdu language and press. Below are a few verses from Faiz’s Nazam titled ‘Tasalli’ which was also banned, The lines give hope during the distressing times:
Chand roz aur meri jaan fakat chand hi roz
Zulm ki chhano mein dum lena pe majboor bein hum
Aur kuch der sitam seblein, tadap lein rolein
Apne azdaad ki miras se maa-jur bein hum
Jism par kaid bein jazbaat pe zanjiren bein

The above songs of freedom reflect the feelings of the society and the poets during that glorious period when we were so good and benign energies flowed in our veins. The role of writers, poets, journalists was tremendous in keeping the people together and achieving the onerous task. Himanshu Dhuliya is an Indian Navy veteran, author and pod-caster.

PERSPECTIVE

IN THE END, IT’S ALL ABOUT THE ECONOMY

The road map for 2026 was already in place before the year was ushered in. The first challenge of the new year is always the Union Budget and this year it shall be presented on a Sunday since the established budget presentation date of 1st February falls on the weekend. This also underscores another message from the Modi Government - there are no holidays or time offs. Apart from that, the more

important messaging will be in the budget statement itself as the government has to revive the economy stalled by Trump Tariffs, lack of enthusiasm from foreign investors and jobless growth. The needs of the salaried class were taken into account in the last budget but a lot more needs to be done. Will the government address these? Will it increase taxes or try to increase spending by putting

more money in the hands of the people? And where will it get the funds for the slew of welfare schemes?

The other challenge is political as there are some crucial state elections slated for 2026 including West Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The BJP is in power in only one but fancies its chances of making some sort of a power play in West Bengal where current CM Mamata Bannerji

is holding on to her bastion. But after Orissa and Bihar the BJP is hoping for a win in this state and has been working hard for it. Will Mamata Bannerji hold on to her citadel for her popularity remains. Another high profile fight is to be expected in Assam where the BJP’s Himanta Biswa Sarma is being challenged by Gaurav Gogoi of the Congress. Also, to make things a bit more

exciting Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has been given charge of this state. Expect a lot of face offs between the two with some very catch soundbites. Both these states promise to be media delight in terms of headlines and personalities. As for Kerala - the Congress is hopeful of wresting this state from the Left but this is also another state where the BJP is making

its presence felt. Will Rajeev Chandrasekhar do to Kerala what Amit Shah has done to West Bengal ie edge out the Left and emerge as the single most dominant Opposition party. As for the other southern state of Tamil Nadu the BJP is riding piggy back on its alliance partner the AIADMK. However here it is the Congress that needs to be watched. While the party still cannot make it on its

own, it seems to be flirting with two rival camps - the DMK and actor turned politician Vijay. Will the Congress break with its most steadfast ally or is this just posturing for better seats?

And then of course there is the US President Donald Trump to keep the global pot boiling. There really is no predicting as to what he will do next but India has to take some hard decisions on its geopolitical positions.

Reaching out to China will have its blowback but the USA is hardly proving to be a reliable ally?

And so, in a nutshell, smart economics & a tactical foreign policy remain the biggest challenges for the Modi Govt in 2026. For the Congress - and the rest of the opposition - the challenge is to make its presence felt in domestic politics.

PRIYA SAHGAL