What does freedom mean to me?

“Freedom”, “Independence”, “Oppression”, “Struggle” etc. These terms in its raw sense are entirely foreign to me considering I was born during the final decade of 21st century. I was born in a relatively peaceful hospital, surrounded by my loved ones. All happy on the occasion. I was provided food, shelter and all the necessities. I was not bound by uncertainties of tomorrow.

Imagine being forced to part with food that you have stored for your family; watching them grow weak. Utterly helpless

Imagine your livelihood being destroyed due to goods that were forcibly thrust upon you

Imagine being forced to pay a premium for a simple thing such as salt

Imagine being shot down, cowering underneath the bodies that have piled, jumping into wells with nowhere to go; when you have gathered to celebrate a festival peacefully

Imagine the confusion when the land that you have held your own was partitioned into a foreign country. Families split into different citizens

I can go on and on about the luxuries that were held forth to me. Yet there was a time in the not so distant past when all of these were possible, a distant dream. There was a time when the moment children were born, they were labelled oppressed. When they grew up as mere vassals to the metropole. When they had to fight knowing that even though they might not experience sweet nectar of freedom, their children and their children might walk as indigenous masters. When they were not sure if they would see the twilight of their lives.

I would never be able to even comprehend about those dark times because I was born when India was on verge of a huge economical impetus courtesy the various industries. I was born when Indian education system created a literacy surge 5 times that of pre-independence era. I was born when infant mortality was decreasing, and child education was stressed upon.

A horde of strangers who lived in the past are responsible for our freedom and what we do with it. They made it possible for us to worship numerous gods, speak multiple languages, celebrate different occasions. We have largely utilised it in a constructive manner save the minor blemishes that we as humans are bound to make.

We have grown as a nation due to the efforts of those heroes who believed. Sometimes it pains me to see people quarrel based on religion, caste etc, when once we drove an empire to ground with our unity. Our differences were bought to the fore, yet we used it as our common strength.

Freedom to me occurs when the destitute street urchins urging the affluent to buy their paper flags at traffic signal get opportunities to educate themselves to reach the level of their customers.

Freedom occurs when our sisters can walk the streets of our great country without any fear.

Freedom occurs when every youngster in our country get an opportunity to earn their living without compromising their self-respect.

Freedom means I can choose the food I eat, the clothes I wear. Freedom to me means I can uphold my self-respect in the country of my birth. I am an individual contributing towards betterment of my society which in turns contributes towards betterment of my country.

Freedom to me means looking at the brighter, more optimistic outlook of my country. Freedom to me means I can live and let live.