

SONGS OF LIBERTY

JUSTICE

AN UNFLINCHING
LOOK AT THE
KNIVES THAT
THREATEN
DEMOCRACY
WORLDWIDE

FREEDOM

WORLD
DEMOCRACY
DAY

FROM CUBA TO
AFGHANISTAN

THE
TEENAGE
LENS

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BACKGROUND ART BY
@THALES MOLINA

EDITOR'S NOTE

Songs of Liberty is a collection of four poems and one essay which encompass the globe. From Cuba to Afghanistan— we have left no stone unturned.

For the occasion of the International Day of Democracy we at The Teenage Lens, wanted to utilize our platform so as to advocate for the pillars of democracy.

Free speech is one such essential pillar; and so is equal representation. Both of these are things that we lack in today's political structures. As the voters of tomorrow, we teenagers are deprived of our voices when it comes to shaping public policy. Labels like 'too young', or 'too immature' are thrown carelessly, and we are forced to live in shielded bubbles throughout our youth. These bubbles inevitably evolve into those of indifference and we inevitably become irresponsible adults.

Although 52 percent of the world's population is aged under 30, only 2.6 per cent of the world's MPs comprise this same age group.

Songs of Liberty is one such stepping stone in this process of representation. It allows young people to look unflinchingly at the knives that threaten democracy, through art and writing.

Democracy, at the end of the day, is a delicate flower which requires several pre conditions to thrive. Amidst today's times of conservative regimes; crackdowns on journalists; and then selective outrage—democracy is something that is truly difficult to preserve.

But this collection is a testimony to the fact that it does, in fact, exist. This collection stands for the fact that it is the inherent nature of every individual to speak up.

This simple action, speaking up, is what I consider the foundation of democracy.

This is The Teenage Lens's first collection of writing, but there will be many more to come (in which we can include a more diverse range of writers!). Whatever we produce now or in the future marks the simple fact that young people have a voice. Teenagers can write. The voters of tomorrow cannot be silenced.

Best,
Srina Bose
Editor & Founder at The Teenage Lens

A HOME, NOT A COLONY

(This poem is an ode to Cuban Freedom Fighter and Writer- Jose Marti)

BY SRINA BOSE



with my face to the sun, I lie,
my wounds bleed my rebellion,
and in the late hours of the day,
I wait,
for my Cuba,
to become
a home,
not a colony.

you surround me,
my broken bones,
and my tattered pages.
you sit on your despotic throne,
and make the Cuba of my heart,
a colony,
not a home.

for when to speak is to sin,
and to write is to die,
your chains find themselves on every
part of me,
except my voice.

you rule over the graves,
of the liberties you have killed,
but you are unaware,
that like a phoenix,
even while I count my last breaths,
I will rise from the ash,
and return to my cuba.

I will return,
to a home,
not a colony.

you can put me behind bars,
and take away my quill,
but with the blood I bleed,
the walls of the prison,
shall be a witness,
to my poetry!

I will lie with my face to the sun,
and I will die with my face to the sun,
and I will ask you,
how long will you stay?
how long will you stay?

how long will it take,
for my existence,
to become a revolution?
and for your throne,
to be expelled in the darkness?

how long will you claw your way,
through my mother's skin?

how long will you stay?

years have passed,
and you have moved on.

you have left my home for another,
history has left my mother for
another,
and the present burns in a different
fire.

my Cubans have persevered,
and so have I.
through history, time, and space,
like a phoenix,
I have risen.
I have returned to a home not a
colony,
but there are others,
torn apart from theirs.

I see ukraine and russia,
their blood shed,
staining innocent lives.
I look at israel and palestine,
terror groups and ruthless politics,
I think of taliban and afghanistan,
how,
injustice claws its way,
through women, children and religion.

I think of the light we enjoy,
That doesn't reach them.

though these are not my homes,
and their blood, not my blood,
but when I die,
with my face to the sun,
I die not just for cuba,
I die for all these places in the world.
that fight the same fight we have
fought.
I die for the places,
where liberty has been reduced to
just a seven lettered word,

expelled from dictionaries,
hidden from vocabulary,
I die for the places where,
democracy exists in a history chapter.

I die for the places where,
war has become,
the background music to an ordinary
morning,
and children,
more accustomed,
to the sound of air raids,
than the flipping open of a book.

though these homes aren't mine,
these fights still are.

though my body is long dead,
my legacy isn't,
these fights aren't.

so as I rise,
from the ashes,
of the brothers, sisters and mothers
before me,
I lie with my face to the sun,
and pray,
for a home,
not a colony.

WHITE WINGED DOVE

BY SRINA BOSE



From the depths of earth's veins,
Littered with the remains of war,
Rises the white-winged dove,
Floating through crumbling nations,
Fluttering over burning skies,
Clutching onto humanity's breaths,
It cries—
The name of peace,
And waits,
For us to hear.

From the cracks within,
The blood-stained spear,
Rises the white-winged dove,
Aching for the day,
'War' becomes a word,

Not of vocabulary,
But of history,
And *her* name:
The name of peace,
The word,
Which fills its absence.

From the cemeteries of battle:
Leaving widowed wives,
And orphaned children,
Holding fragments of memories,
And tear-stained cheeks,
Rises the white-winged dove,
Mourning with them,
Mourning for them—

For what this world lost,
The day it picked its first weapon.

This is the story of peace.
Breaths waiting to be let out,
Harmonies waiting to be sung,
And a thousand unfinished lives,
Waiting to be lived.

This is the story of war:
A poem left unsaid,
And an orchestra suppressed.
This is the story of the white-winged
dove:
Her eulogy,
And how she sobs along with Earth,
As a refrain in the battle-front;
Waiting,
To spread her wings once again,
And waiting,
To taste life once again.

THIS IS NOT A POLITICAL POEM

(This poem was written in 2021, during the sudden Taliban occupation of Afghanistan)

BY SRINA BOSE



I am warning you,
This is not a political poem.
This is an empty page,
Of the silences of the potent.
These are the words a pen bleeds out,
With the last bits of its ink.

This is not a political poem,
But it is the desperation of the Afghan
men,
Clawing their way onto an airplane.
This is their *greed* for safety,
And their wish for a homeland,
With a "home" in it.

This is not a political poem,
I repeat—
This is a tragedy.

This is an attempt of revival,
Not of soldiers, wars and blood,
But the voice within our throats.

This is not a political poem,
For I don't shape a revolution as I
write,
I don't hold a flag as I write.
But I think I hold the images of women,
Passing their babies over barbed
fences.

I think I hold all the news articles I
have read this week,
And I think I hold privilege as I write
this.

This is not a political poem,
For these words are not trophies I
want to preserve,
But they are words that act like
weapons. .

This is not a political poem,
I repeat,
For there is no synonym for this
suffering.
There is no rhyme to the blood.
And there is no rhythm to my
privilege.

This is not a political poem,
I tell you.

This is a war cry.

BIRDS OF FREEDOM

(This poem was written for the occasion of 75th year of India's independence)

BY SRINA BOSE



the bird of freedom rejoices today,
it is her night,
for seventy five years have passed
since the darkness of those two
hundred.
since lathi marches,
and taped mouths.
since handcuffed fighters
and silenced writers.

seventy five years have passed,
and finally
today our bird,
can take a breath.

although she has lost her feathers
and bones
and time
and soul,
but still,
she has flown.
still
in these seventy five years,
the bird of freedom has grown.

the blood of our fighters
has painted the soil we call home
the voices of our ancestors
hug the skies we look over.

the preamble of our constitution
is printed on every single text book
we own

when we flip open the pages
we are reminded of the rights we have
won
the liberty we have earned
the freedom we deserve.

the cages have been unlocked
the bird of freedom is able to fly
and leave behind the mortuary of
what
these two hundred years left behind.

yet
she is unmoving.
burning.

she says,
I burn for the writers jailed
for having voices different from
what the rulers wish to hear.

she says,
I burn for the poor
the poor
that lie on footpaths
leaving traces of our failure
as reminders
that chains need not be of iron
they can be of homelessness;
of mothers cradling toddlers under
the moonlight

of fathers pulling rikshaws
under the delhi sun
of children selling flags
at andheria mor,
“it’s independence day”, they say
and she thinks,
this,
is no independence.

the bird of freedom cannot fly
anymore.

you may yell the national anthem
you may lynch the anti-nationals
you may bring lathis to the elections
or caste to the playground,
but these methods don’t conceal the
ash that stains
our flags,
our nation,
our very being.

I look at this bird.
and she,
is not her true self.
for freedom
was never this silent.

I tell her,
dear bird,
although you are old and wise
seventy-five years have passed
and yet, you weep for the folly of just
a few.
for all that we have lost
there is so much we have gained in
return too.

the common man is the one
who has come to stitch
the wounds of this nation.

be it the farmer,
just as he tills his field
under the scorching sun
he sits in dharna
behind police barricades
till he gets back what is rightfully his,
the fruit of his labour
the victory of democracy.

or,
be it a tribal woman,
born amidst fading culture,
and a lunch of chapatti with salt
this same woman,
is now the president of our nation.

no child is barred from her school
no man deprived of his work
and every day,
We are closer to attaining
an *atmanirbhar bharat*.

dear bird,
your wings are still scratched
from the 200 years of chains
but remember
you can still fly
remember
you have already flown.

and then, I see her
the bird of freedom
slowly fluttering her wings
her eyes shine with hope.
and I am sure,
she will fulfil her destiny.

she takes off towards the tricolored
sunrise
and I know
my poetry shall soon become
the wind beneath her wings
the wind beneath the wings,
of the birds of freedom.

EVERYTHING IS POLITICAL

BY SRINA BOSE



There are certain things that accompany you wherever you go. Love, memory, and election flags during election season. Amidst the Uttarakhand elections, I had been traveling to Rishikesh. The Ganges flowed alongside BJP's lotus and Congress's omnipresent hand. Tourists huddled up together for river rafting, and jeeps traveled at full speed carrying rafts that seemed prone to topple over at any moment. And everyone collectively ignored the approaching elections. The flags were merely imposters to the beautiful vacation this was meant to be. But everything was political. Everything—stained with it, yet hardly noticed.

On social media, my sister's nineteen year old friends living in Noida post pictures of their inked index finger. Their first election. I ask her, "Who did they vote for?", and she replies "We don't talk about things like that." She has known them for a while—spent a precious year of college with them: exchanged notes, exam results, and drinks— but of course, they don't talk about things like *that*. They don't talk about politics. And that is synonymous to: they don't talk about anything at all.

She tells me she can guess who they voted for. A guy whose name ends with Bansal must have voted for BJP. And a guy from Bengal must be anti-BJP!

How sweepingly we generalize people.

On our way to Nainital in August of last year, we asked the taxi driver— "Who will you vote for in the election?"

He smiled and said, "Sahab, you know this road we drive on, it was made by congress."

That said it all. Taxi drivers who drive altos from Haldwani to Nainital, and bargain over the hundred rupees that Delhi tourists refuse to give, are ordinary people. These ordinary people care about ordinary things like the roads.

The ordinary man remembers not what was killed for them, but what was built.

The small things.

The ordinary man, running a Dhaba at Bhimtal, who has never set foot in a stadium, will not care about the construction of the largest stadium in the world in his country.

The ordinary man who lives in Delhi, and travels tens of kilometers everyday as a delivery boy, but has still never visited Qutub Minar– will not care about the building of the tallest statue in the world in his country.

The ordinary man living cheque to cheque, waiting miserably for the government to pitch in– will not care about the reconstruction of the central vista for the 75th year of independence.

In reality, the ordinary man has never truly been independent.

He finds no difference between independence day, republic day or election day. The ordinary man has nothing to lose when there is no choice.

The ordinary man does not remember his ninth standard's political science textbook– which distinguished between an MLA and an MP, and legislative assembly and state assembly. He just doesn't remember. His oblivion is the knife lined against his throat. Or perhaps the ordinary man *does* remember but the presence or absence of his knowledge doesn't make a difference in our world– a world where knowledge is the least valuable entity. Where knowledge is to be feared by the powerful. Where knowing the truth is almost equivalent to the truth never having existed.

The ordinary man runs a river rafting shop in Rishikesh, carrying families of four and a raft on his jeep, driving through Rishikesh's roads– forever accompanied by the flags of what they temporarily ignore but eventually allow to determine their future. A hand, a lotus, or their own self: their own reflection.

They don't know it. But every breath they take is political. Even their surrender.
