



**Ashley Ramphal**

**High School: 2nd place  
winner**



## **IndiaFEST 2010– Essay Contest**

To conquer and be conquered; that is the way of the world. Every empire has had its rise to the heavens and above, and its heavy fall to Earth. It is the way of the world, the nature of this planet. Everything has its time in the spotlight, the backstage and the audience. It's a system of rotation that we cannot begin to estimate the age of. The great nation of India is not to be excluded from this fate.

At many points in time, India's different empires had given many gifts the planet, gifts that helped to construct our modern world. But as every empire is wont to do, India fell down to Earth, into the center of England's vision. For a long while, the subcontinent was under British hold, and for many of its citizens, it was a excruciatingly painful experience. But not a nation to be tied down, India rose up and rebelled against Britain. They fought hard and they fought well, winning their independence on August 15th, 1947.

India is extremely diverse. Its citizens are followers of many different religions, speakers of many different languages, members of various castes, workers of many different jobs. When we gained independence, we had almost no supporters. In the world's eye, a country like ours could not overcome such vast differences; we would simply destroy ourselves. But the willpower of people is something worth marveling, and the desire to prove people wrong is overwhelming. India paved its own path into becoming one of the most respected countries in the world, one of the world's leading nations.

This August will mark the 63rd year of independence from Great Britain, and India has a lot to celebrate. In 62 years, we have come astonishingly far. Aside from gaining political freedom, Indians have gained global recognition for their intelligence in a range of different fields, as well as their vibrant culture. We are one of the world's superpowers. Our country creates various technologies that benefit the world. Are those not achievements worthy of celebration? In terms of making our culture and nation known, we have done well, we have done beautifully.

But there are some things that have not been called to worldwide attention, things that, in my opinion, should hold a place far above recognition of intelligence and culture. With a population of over one billion that grows every minute, poverty, illiteracy and many other

problems plague the streets of India. The nation is a subcontinent of its own, but it cannot contain all of its people. Even in the richest, most tourist-attracting cities like Delhi and Mumbai, we have people who are so malnourished that it pains our eyes. The site of their ribs and skin, nothing more, are so frightening that it makes our own bodies begin to ache. People live in darkness, and drink and bathe in unfiltered water that causes a plethora of illnesses. Unemployment levels are rising quickly, which is even more of a problem in a country so populated than it would be in one like America or England. Why is India so great in its surface (dare I say superficial) skills, but not in its internal matters? One can relate it to their body. No matter how beautiful the outside, the inside will not flourish and come to its full potential unless taken care of.

There are other matters at hand as well, ones that don't necessarily have to do with India's poverty. The year now is 2010. We are a decade into the new millennium, and yet we still have arranged marriages. Before any misunderstandings arise, arranged marriages in themselves aren't bad. But in some of India's most rural places, things are still being done as if it were 50 years ago. Again I dare say they've become worse. Not much thought and attention is directed to the treatment of the girls of arranged marriages, but if the public only knew. Children no bigger than twelve are married off for money. It's terribly sad, because these marriages are the only means of survival to both families involved. What happens after-wards though, is beyond shocking. In many of these cases, the bride is worth nothing more than the size of her dowry. Once that's been spent, she's deemed useless and kicked out of the house in shame. In extreme cases, she's murdered by the groom's family, burned and/or beaten to death. And the public turns a blind eye. They don't wonder when the same son marries again a month later. The other day I happened to hear a joke about such treatment, and I thought to myself that although this is an apparent problem in India, nothing helpful is being done. On the contrary, comedians use it in their stand-up acts, and the audiences laugh.

India after sixty years of independence. We have come far, but without taking many steps. In one hand, we hold some of the brightest minds in the world, a superpower of this planet; in the other, an overpopulated place riddled with problems like any other third world country. How can we be such polar opposites of ourselves? There has been some effort to change and help our nations. Movies have been made, in hope that they would be watched and understood, articles have been written, news reports have been given, but for the most part we have failed at changing the mindset of our people.

In an ideal world, the talented children of India would immediately be put to work in solving these problems of ours. We would use our skills to create jobs for people, set up charities for the poor wandering souls, make loving homes to take in those poor brides that have been cast aside. But unfortunately, the world isn't as perfect as we'd like it to be, and Indians have not been too dedicated to these problems.

In sixty two years we have set up a space for ourselves amongst the elite nations of this planet Earth. We have gained respect of our former conquerors, and now sit side by side them. We've done brilliantly in making ourselves known, and picking up our country when it was cast aside. But we have yet to solve the deeper problems of our country, the

ones that hit home because that's precisely where they're located: at home. We have won our independence, and now it is time to overcome our obstacles, to solve our problems. It will not be so easy to accomplish, but we can do it. After all, we have had our time in the audience and backstage, but now we're ready to take the spotlight.