**The joy of freedom**

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani

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National Freedom Day is celebrated every year on February 1 across the US to commemorate the remarkable achievement of Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the US, who signed the historic 13th amendment to the US constitution, outlawing slavery on February 1, 1865.

For the last many decades, the month of February has been dedicated to Black History, also known as African-American History Month. Former US President Gerald Ford recognized the month in 1976 during the official celebrations of the US Bicentennial, aiming to acknowledge people and events in the history of the Black community at the state level.

America used to be an undiscovered land just five centuries ago. After its discovery by European explorer Christopher Columbus, large numbers of people abducted from the African continent in a cruel manner were sold in American markets as slaves. The American civil war was a terrible and horrific armed conflict fought on American soil from 1861 to 1865, in which over 600,000 soldiers and a large number of civilians lost their lives. The root cause was the dispute over the legitimization of slavery in different states.

Abraham Lincoln, after the end of the civil war, emerged as a victorious national leader and played a pivotal role in protecting poor black slaves by convincing all states to prohibit slavery. He also moved Congress for the 13th amendment which declared slavery illegal and illegitimate across the US. The date of this historical achievement was February 1, 1865. Later on, the right to American citizenship was also provided to formerly enslaved people through the 14th amendment.

National Freedom Day was originally the idea of a former slave named Richard Wright. He founded the National Freedom Day Association to build consensus among all segments of society for a national day when freedom for all Americans could be celebrated. In this regard, he suggested marking February 1 every year to observe the signing of the 13th amendment. Just a year after his demise in 1947, both houses of the US Congress passed a bill to mark National Freedom Day on the proposed date.

In my view, the ideology of Abraham Lincoln played a significant role in transforming the US into a superpower. History tells us that when the black community in America was given equal social rights, the US succeeded in overcoming all challenges to move forward towards peace, prosperity and development. The community is currently playing a proactive role in all fields of life, including scientific research, space missions, technological innovations, fashion and entertainment, and, most importantly, politics.

Due to its societal harmony, the Western bloc led by the United States also emerged as a ray of hope for the protection of human rights, democracy, personal freedom and interfaith harmony at the international level.

Black History Month conveys the message that peace and prosperity is directly linked with equal civic rights for every citizen. This is also a historical fact that all those societies where discrimination is promoted, eventually move towards anarchy, unrest and destruction.

Although human slavery does not officially exist today, some forces continue to humiliate each other internationally. Nowadays, the focus is on enslaving entire countries and tactics are being used to achieve economic, ethnic, and regional dominance. Due to this, the biggest threat to world peace is injustice, bias and unfairness.

Being a patriotic Pakistani, I believe that in order to transform our beloved country into a modern, peaceful and prosperous state, we have to do away with all kinds of discrimination in our society and follow the vision of Quaid-e-Azam in letter and spirit by providing equal opportunities to every Pakistani, including those from minority communities, on merit.

The writer is a former member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

He tweets/posts @RVankwani