

Modi, marketers ... everyone's flogging the freedom line

Jingoistic slogans on Independence Day show how politicians and ad copy writers have fallen into an 'idea trap'

CHITRA NARAYANAN

New Delhi, August 15

From the ramparts of the Red Fort, we have come to expect a new slogan every time Prime Minister Modi gets up there to deliver his Independence Day address to the nation. This year, too, in his third such address, the Prime Minister, who is fast earning the sobriquet Slogan Murugan came up with a great catchphrase.

After 'Swachh Bharat' in 2014, and 'Start-up India, Stand up India' in 2015, this time around it is 'swarajya se Su-rajya'. In other words, from self-governance to good governance.

And those looking for hidden messages can even find a pun in the Suraj-ya, since the Prime Minister kept referring to solar power.

Will the sun shine on Independent India as it steps into its 70th year? A story of misses at the Rio Olympics despite Dipa Karmakar's braveheart vault may not augur well in the sporting field, while there's a conflicting picture on growth in the economic arena.

Full-on freedom pitch

Yet, marketers and politicians have wasted no time making hay on jingoistic campaigns celebrating freedom and a new tomorrow.

There's Uttar Pradesh celebrating I-Day with a high-decibel campaign on *Umeedon ka Pradesh*, while almost all the nationalised banks have issued print ads saluting or cheering the nation. A subdued Air India has some freedom offers too.



For long the preserve of the public sector and Doordarshan (remember the evocative *Mile Sur Mera Tumhara*), and later the Public Service Broadcasting Trust, the freedom card has now been totally usurped by the private sector.

From online and offline retailers celebrating mega "freedom sales" to advertising campaigns from as diverse a set as two-wheeler giants to cement firms, the Independence Day pitch has seen campaigns that range from the sublime to the ri-

diculous. From a Hero riding towards an India of tomorrow with its musical *ragon mein raftar* campaign to the Aditya Birla group's White Cement brand telling us about "walls deserving freedom from flaking" to ICICI exhorting you to free yourself from yearly renewals, everyone's fallen into the freedom trap.

There is opportunism galore on display.

E-wallet company Paytm has a rather smart campaign on a cashless India freeing the country from corruption.

There is even an unlikely addition to the I-Day chorus from bathroom fittings firm Jaquar, though its Made in India Swadeshi pitch is a beautifully crafted, eminently watchable television commercial in sharp contrast to the brash Patanjali pitch of "Get India Economic Freedom".

Even the neighbourhood

restaurant that slips a flyer inside the newspaper is not free from the temptation to tell you that "freedom means more choices".

No freedom from clichés

Corny lines and clichés dominate most ad campaigns cluttering both print and TV screens.

Even Prime Minister Modi had oft-heard lines such as 'Freedom from Poverty' running through his speech, though there were some catchy phrases, including 'Reform, Transform and Perform' and 'Sammati and Sah-mati' as well.

This year, the Prime Minister crowdsourced what he had to say in his speech, reaching out to the masses to suggest subjects. Perhaps our marketers could take a leaf out of his book and crowdsource some thoughts on Independence. Maybe then, we will hear a freedom pitch that resonates.