

What Are You Doing on the Fifteenth of August?

A Reflection on Independence Day

Reflections Reflections The Scroll

A friend recently asked me, "What are you doing to celebrate Independence Day?" I thought for a moment, and then replied, "Nothing."

It sounds rude, but it is simple. I do not want to leave the house, because there will be a shortage of transport, and every market will be crowded by evening. So, on the fifteenth of August, I shall probably watch the flag being hoisted on television, watch a film or two, and spend time with my family.

Sixty-seven years ago, this day meant a great deal to people. It changed their lives. It made history. It probably held even more value the following year, and the memory of that day would have echoed more loudly through the following decade, and perhaps the decade after that. When one struggles for something, the fruit of that labour is savoured and treasured for ever.

What does the fifteenth of August mean for us today? I was born in an independent India, and I do not see myself as deserving this particular day off as a celebration of freedom. What do I actually do for my country? I earn money, I save it, I spend it on my family, I spend time with my friends, I travel, and I indulge in everything that pleases me and makes me happy. The closest I come to being patriotic is to vote, to comment on politics, and to listen to the news, once in a while.

One can sit and recall the struggle of our freedom fighters, and show them our respect and honour. I may not be patriotic, but I am not a hypocrite either. What do I do, for the remaining three hundred and sixty-four days of the year, to show my respect for our freedom fighters and leaders? Feigning a grateful attitude for a single day is, therefore, of little point.

It is a wonderful privilege to live in an independent, secular country. But today, let us just look at those words on their own. Let us not look at the real picture — the communal violence, the oppressed sections of society, the unemployment, the lack of resources, the corruption, the overpopulation — the list goes on. No, no. We shall not look at any of that today. When we do not fight against it on other days, then today is surely not the day to look at it either.

So, without pausing to consider what this independence really means to a generation that never fought the British for a free India, let us sit at home, write our blogs, watch television, paste a tricolour as our wallpaper and cover picture, send each other messages, and enjoy another holiday.

Happy Independence Day!

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