

The Fire, The Zeal

We have celebrated the sixty-third Independence Day with usual fanfare. As usual we did not care to remember the heroes who laid down their lives for the cause of freedom. As usual we reiterated our high-minded pledges of raising the poor and the ignorant, without feeling an iota of real urge to do so. Perhaps we shall be branded 'too negative' for such comments outright!

We as a nation do not understand the value of Independence. We did not pay enough price for it. At the hours of count down, we faltered. It was thrust upon us by the India Independence Act passed by the British Parliament. The loyalty of the Indian soldiers and officers was at an all time low, after the supreme sacrifice of the Azad Hind Fauj came to be widely known. The very foundation on which the empire stood was crumbling, the ghost of the martyrs cast a shadow, as it were, on the empire. And the Second World War ruined the British. They knew the game was over. Before leaving this country they wanted to permanently weaken it, to cut it into eternally squabbling parts. The thirst for power goaded our old, tired, negotiating leaders to accept the partition of Mother India. So, on the 14th and 15th of August 1947 two 'Independent Dominions' were born within the British Commonwealth. The major portion of the partitioned country, which came to be known as 'India', invited the last British Viceroy to become its first Governor General!! After all, he successfully routed the last vestiges of our only organized national struggle for freedom!

Never mind, we were proud of the loot. We wrote an enormous book, the Constitution of India, which is the biggest one of its kind in the world, and which is full of noble objectives and directives. The prescribed system of governance was blindly copied from the West, mainly England. Actually we never understood the nationality of India. The commoners and their leaders alike, we were enamoured of anything British. This has now changed from Britain to the US.

Swami Vivekananda deeply felt the pang of subjugation under foreign rule. He roused the sense of national self-esteem and asked the youths to be heroes, to love the motherland, to make sacrifices for 'the only god that is awake', and to work for the downtrodden masses wholeheartedly. Netaji Subhas particularly imbibed that spirit.

That is the spirit we need to revive today. But the unfolding history of free India failed to rouse true nationalism. Education and health remained low priority items. Morality found no place in the scheme of things. Corruption was first tolerated and then accepted as a necessary evil. Netaji became a non-entity. But the files related to him must remain in secrecy for eternity. He died in a plane crash, which never happened according to the last enquiry commission. Swamiji is taken only as a spiritual leader. He could not have anything to do with matters of national and political significance. But people are slowly coming to know the truth. The youths must now choose their heroes. Because, that way you choose your ideal. In the long run that will determine the course of action for the future.

The global recession may be over for now, or so the top economist of the IMF thinks. But global hunger is far from being over. In our country, it is increasing in many States. India is home to 230 millions of malnourished people. Prolonged starvation leads to many serious health complications, often causing death. The officialdom would not call it starvation death. But do we, the common people, the youths of the country, not see the plain truth? India now ranks 65th among 84 countries in the Global Hunger Index ranking. The State of Food Insecurity in Rural India report 2009 of World Food Programme and MS Swaminathan

Research Foundation depicts a picture of grave crisis – with an increasing number of undernourished people, decline of purchasing power of the rural poor, food price rise, and increasing unemployment. It says, ‘By far the greatest contribution to the number of undernourished people in South Asia has come from changes in the state of food and nutrition insecurity in India.’ A leading financial newspaper reports, ‘Critics say high growth rates are confined to some service and industrial sectors, such as its IT outsourcing and telecommunications. The rural economy, meanwhile, is only growing at about 2 per cent. They say the feeding schemes are often preyed upon by corrupt politicians and bureaucrats and never reach the rural poor.’ While we celebrated the Independence Day, half of India reeled under severe drought. Who feels for those who suffer the most?

How long will this be allowed to go on? How long? Scarce food, scarce drinking water, no hygienic toilet, no medical treatment, and a little, low quality primary education – are the millions destined to live with this in free India, even while our country is on a high growth trajectory? Are we independent? Do we know the meaning and significance of the word?

Young men of India, turn around once more. Take the whole responsibility on your shoulders. Mind that there is hardly anybody else to feel and exert themselves to the utmost. So, any slack on your part will be damning. ‘Have fire and spread all over’, as Swami Vivekananda would say. It is the uncompromising, missionary zeal of the youths that alone can build a bright future for those who never had an opportunity to see the happier side of life. Build your life, catch the right spirit, acquire the fire and the zeal, and work. We shall surely succeed.