

Why August 15 is significant for Japan



August-15 marks as important day for many countries post second world war. It's an Independence day for India, in Japan it is usually known as the "memorial day for the end of the war"(Shisen-kinenbi) (Reuters)

August-15 marks as important day for many countries post second world war. It's an Independence day for India, in Japan it is usually known as the "memorial day for the end of the war"(Shisen-kinenbi); the official name for the day, however, it is: "the day for mourning of war dead and praying for peace". This year Clocks 70th anniversary of Japan's War closure day.

Every year Peace lanterns are float down the Motoyasu River in Hiroshima to commemorate the dropping of the first atomic bomb on the city, Various Japanese Organizations including political members assemble at Yasukuni Shrine on Aug-15 to pay the tribute to martyrs and pray for the world-peace. Aug-15 also brings few historical controversies in limelight in Japan and its neighbours. The most controversial topic being the Yasukuni Shrine Visit.

There are some significant controversies about Yasukuni Shrine, widely recognized as Japanese Shinto shrine. It is a shrine to war dead who served the Emperor of Japan at the time of wars from 1867–1951. Ever since 1869 it has honored the souls of people that have died in the service of Japan. In Shinto religious beliefs, the souls evolve into 'kami' or 'revered spirits.'

The term is often translated as 'gods' but the word 'saints' is regarded as the most suitable word in the western religious lexicon. Therefore it is a sacred place for millions of Japanese who lost individuals fighting for their nation.

It largely consists of military men and a number of civilians who died in war-time. They include merchant seamen, and the workforce in bombed munitions factories, although not people in the general public wiped out by allied bombing in the Second World War.

This activity is solely a religious issue because of the religious separation of State Shinto and Japanese Government. The priesthood at the shrine is equipped with complete religious autonomy to decide exactly how enshrinement may take place. As a result of the enshrinement of International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) war perpetrators along with nationalist perspective on the war museum, the Yasukuni Shrine and Japanese Authorities were criticized by South Korea, China and Taiwan for being revisionist regarding the events of the Second World War.

Among the 2.4 million souls enshrined and revered in the Yasukuni Shrine are approximately 1,000 war criminals from World War II. All these were men who were convicted and executed by Allied war tribunals, and who died in jail.

This is often among the foremost problems for Japan's neighbors; that reverence continues to be paid to people who committed some of history's most horrendous crimes. The shrine wasn't a dilemma before these people were all inducted in a secret ceremony in 1978, after a particular new category of eligibility was made for the 'victims' of the international war crimes tribunals.

The major controversy about Yasukuni is the condition that fourteen 'Class A' War Criminals were interred in the shrine in 1978 to be the Showa Martyrs Memorial. These fourteen are Hideki Tojo, Heitaro Kimura, Iwane Matsui, Akira Mutou, Koki Hirota, Seishiro Itagaki, Kenji Doihara, Yoshijiro Umezu, Kuniaki Koiso, Toshio Shiratori, Kiichiro Hiranuma, Shigenori Tougo, Osami Nagano and Yosuke Matsuoka. They were considered to have died in the service of the state, therefore were chosen by the shrine's priests to have their souls incorporated into the memorial.

"Class A" War Criminals are the ones convicted by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) of being part of the conspiracy to begin and wage war. Altogether the people convicted and sentenced to the heaviest sentences were the participants of the colonial occupation of China and Korea, with the associated atrocities. Many were likewise convicted on charges attributed to atrocities committed against prisoners of war during the course of the conflict.

Since they are part of the Yasukuni Memorial, the act of a politician visiting Yasukuni Shrine and also paying tribute to the war dead is recognized by several countries as to be the same as memorializing those 14 Class A war criminals. This is specifically notable when the government officials are either cabinet ministers or the prime minister.

The Showa Emperor (Hirohito) and his successor have turned down official visits to the shrine ever since the inclusion of the fourteen. Though there were visits from Prime Ministers, the matter gained traction starting from 1985 while Prime Minister Nakasone visited the shrine.

There are more grievances against Yasukuni. It is not merely a memorial; it also includes a museum visited by thousands of Japanese school children annually. And the type of reputation that it presents concerning the Second World War is sanitized to say the least. The Yushukan War Memorial Museum managed by the Yasukuni Shrine represents Japan as the liberator of Asia, and kamikaze pilots as selfless heroes who willingly died for the country.

The museum simply does not consider the common beliefs and social pressure that drove many individuals to death. A lesser grievance is the fact that everyone who served are enshrined, including Koreans and Taiwanese who (being subjects of the Japanese empire) were conscripted to serve.

Thousands of individuals from the two nations are among those at Yasukuni. Most of their relatives have requested them to be removed, however the priests maintained that is impossible under Shinto.

The majority agrees that it is nationalistic; a few say xenophobic. It plays down that Japan began the war with China and with the United States as well as other western powers; but it does not give much consideration at all to the atrocities committed in the name of Japan. China and other countries complain that Japan always fails to acknowledge its atrocities, and also fails to educate it's the younger generation about those crimes.

In fact, hosting those souls is a point of pride for the shrine. Yasukuni is not about noble homage; it is just about scoring political issues and getting awareness of revisionist background. The important thing that Japan's contemporary reactionaries lament on concerning the war is defeat, so they remain fighting an uphill battle against Japanese public opinion to validate wartime Japan's "noble mission."

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