

GSA-1  
Initial Difficulties

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

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Dear Dick,

Harold Ross once told A.J. Liebling that neither an editor nor a reader cares how hard it is to get a story; they only want to read it. But after two weeks (to the day) in New Delhi, my story is mostly about difficulties.

I thought I knew what I was getting into before I arrived, but the prospect of cold water is gentler than its effect on the midriff. Anyone who expects that research in India on the framing of the Indian Constitution will be some interviewing in the newspaperman's style, a bit of genteel document chasing, and much straightforward (though slightly dusty) scholarly research in libraries and archives is wrong. I've interviewed several persons and will talk to more (careful, now, 'reliable source' makes a poor footnote in a PhD thesis); I started chasing documents two days after I arrived and I'll spend most of the next four months doing it (I'm sorry, I don't know where those papers are. No, those are confidential. We don't have those papers here--Oh, yes you do, brother.); and I've been to libraries and to the National Archives. These have some interesting published materials not available in England, but they have nothing crucial.

The first person I met, who had to do with my thesis, was Ralph Retzlaff. I'd been in touch with him from Oxford. He wrote his PhD thesis (Cornell) on the Indian Constituent Assembly and the problem of Indian unity a couple years ago and has been here for over a year collecting material on the Constitution--mostly on the unity aspect--and on democratic decentralization. He has now left for the Political Science Department in Berkeley. He had a devil of a time getting material. Finally he got fairly complete copies of K.M. Munshi's and the President's papers; both sets are very valuable. With marvelous generosity, he offered me anything he has. First, I'll try for myself. He threw a healthy scare into me, gave me a lot of tips, and saved me months of work. By taking several causes up where he left off, I hope I can get more material for both of us. He had no luck with his interviews, he said. I think I can do better, mostly because I want some material in which he wasn't interested and which comes better than facts from an interview, such as thoughts on the Constitution relative to the Hindu/Indian cultural and political tradition.

I met Dr. Appadorai the same day. He was pleasant, but will be ineffective as far as I am concerned. I met Mr. Poplai and gave him Mr. Talbot's regards. Appadorai sped me through the formalities of becoming a reader in the Sapru House library. I checked their collection. It has a few books not available in Oxford, some drafts of the Constitution which I'll have microfilmed, and some publications of the time--useful but not exciting.

B.S.N. or 'Doc' Murti was the press officer for the International Control Commission in Vietnam. Nancy and I knew him well there. I hadn't been able to find him for four years but I located him here. There was an added incentive to look him up, he was a secretary to the Congress Party in Parliament from 1945 to 1950. Doc knows the back doors as well as the front doors of New Delhi and he

put me in touch, among others, with a man who showed me the Lok Sabha Secretariat's bibliography of Constitutional documents. Through him I've also met the Secretary of the Indian Law Institute, Markose. At lunch with him I met Dean Chacko of Delhi University, who is also a friend of my supervisor at Oxford.

Friday, August 12, B. Shiva Rao invited me to tea. Not only had I been corresponding with him from Oxford, thanks to Mr. Talbot, but Godfrey Jansen gave me a letter of introduction. He was very pleasant. We talked of his book of B.N. Rau's papers which was just out (fortunately I'd read most of it) and he promised to answer questions and introduce me to people. By the way, he remembers Mr. Rogers from a meeting in the States in 1934. This man can help me a lot; I'm not yet sure that he will.

The search for the Grail led me to the Hindu Mahasabha office where I met an Uncle Remus chewing betel. He was pleasant but uninformative. Since then I've found that N.C. Chatterjee, a former Mahasabha president, lives in Delhi, so I will get in touch with him. The Government seized most of the Mahasabha's documents when the party was banned after Gandhi's assassination in January 1948, but he could be helpful anyway.

I met another American here the other night who seems to be doing very well at gathering material and learning about India. His name is Stan Kochanek, a Fulbright student from Pennsylvania. Kochanek's main interests are Congress party publications, the relations between the All India Congress Party (Committee) and the Provincial Congress Committees, and the activities of the Congress Party in Parliament. He now has the Party's permission to see some special reports and minutes and is sailing before the wind. Like everyone here, he sails fearing a calm. Our interests overlap; I've given him one tip and he has offered me all his material, plus introductions to the AICC library and publications divisions and all the help I need. Maybe the only way to beat the system is to copy the rabbits against the wolves, outnumber them. He has a short project on now, in cooperation with Diwan Chand Info. Center, of preparing biographies of all the Parliament members. He has printed a comprehensive form and gets answers by calling on, or having his assistants call on, each man personally. Experience has shown that that is the only way here; Lok Sabha members often don't answer requests from their own secretariat. Some of this material I can use. Kochanek foresees a clear rise in power of the Backward Classes in Parliament, mostly because they are the only truly national social group--other than the Brahmins who are only 4% of the population.

The same day I dined with Kochanek, I met Romesh Bhandari, private secretary to Krishna Menon--again thanks to Godfrey Jansen. A pleasant young man. I have an appointment with the Defence Minister a week from today. Apart from the general interest of meeting him, I will be able to ask him about the negotiations concerning India and the Commonwealth, for he was High Commissioner in London at the time. I may also ask him for help. I want to see the files of the Home Ministry on the

Constituent Assembly, the elections of 1945 and 1946, and any material the Ministry seized from either the Mahasabha or the Communists-- proscribed a bit earlier than the Mahasabha. He also may know someone in the Law Ministry (see below).

Yesterday I talked with S.N. Mukerjee, presently Secretary of the Rajya Sabha and onetime drafting officer for the Constitution. He has large, bat-ears and pleasant eyes. Mr. Mukerjee talked to me, with little prompting, for over an hour. He was very interesting about the drafting process, his relations with B.N. Rau and Dr. Ambedkar. We have agreed to further meetings and I think he'd like to be helpful. There is a snag, however, in the person of P.N. Krishnamani, now an under secretary of the Rajya Sabha and once the superintendent of the Constituent Assembly. He works under Mukerjee but seems to influence him. An acquisitive soul, Krishnamani's memory stops short of where certain papers are. Retzlaff also found him a barrier.

This morning I met one of India's most reasonable, lucid men, Dr. H.N. Kunzru. We talked for over an hour at his home before I left so that he could attend to personal business. I expect to talk with him several more times. He talked this morning, other than occasional mention of people whom I should see, of the Federal structure in the Constitution and the powers the Center has over the States. This was also one of his main interests in the Constituent Assembly.

Meetings with other notables are pending. I am to telephone Mino Masani tomorrow to arrange a meeting and I am having lunch with Penderel Moon on Wednesday. I have letters out to the President, through Retzlaff's channels, to K.M. Munshi, with whom I'd corresponded from Oxford, to T.T. Krishnamachari in Madras, and to General Secretary of the AICC, Sadiq Ali about the use of the party's facilities. Professor Morris-Jones has been in Delhi and will return early next month. We have arranged a meeting about 8 September. He's the author, you remember, of a book on Parliament in India and was a member of Mountbatten's staff during the transfer of power here. I met him once at Oxford. These people can only be a beginning.

In further efforts to get organized, I've got in touch with USIS (to find a typist, get a letter of accreditation to the National Archives, and find a language teacher), with the Embassy (where I have a friend in the Political Section), with several correspondents in town (especially Welles Hangen of NBC, the only one I know well), and a variety of Indians on a social or business level. I called on Mr. Gerold at Pan American and had a brief, pleasant chat.

The language instructor, whom I have courtesy of the Cultural Affairs Officer of USIS, is an ample, Kashmiri lady named Mrs. Dar who comes to the hotel at 0930 most mornings to give me an hour lesson in Hindustani. I'm beginning with the rote, phrase method. It's fun and not too hard. When I saw the counting system, though, I almost wrote a letter to Nehru in protest. From one to one hundred, there are nearly 100 distinct words. What roots and suffixes there are do not appear logically or consistently. This is the best, if not the only, example of the 'mysterious East' I've ever run up against.

I dare not write too much about the problem of collecting documents here, for once I open the gates, could I stem the flood? The published material takes a bit of finding, but when I leave I'll have most of it. Publications from the period and a few books are a bit harder. I'm lucky here, though. Anything I can get in the line of political party propaganda, some newspapers and magazines, and some Constituent Assembly publications, is needed by either the Indian Institute or the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in Oxford. So I can buy for them what we both need and want and ship it back there for our use. The difficult task is going to be buying the Hindustan Times from the beginning of 1945 to the end of 1949 at a reasonable price. This is 'in channels' now, pray for me.

The unpublished documents of the Constituent Assembly are tough. Much has been lost or destroyed. Some are in the hands of individuals--the President and K.M. Munshi have many--and others lie hidden or forgotten in various ministries. The Law Ministry is the main repository and has never yet, to my knowledge, cooperated with anybody in their use. How to see this material is a huge, frightening problem. How to ensure seeing other papers in the possession of individuals assumes equal proportions. Why isn't it available? Secretiveness surely, a wanton display of power by little bureaucrats, sometimes a feeling that too many foreigners are working on India, let's save some material for Indians--but this doesn't always hold, as the Lok Sabha Secretariat itself can't pry some of this material out of the Law Ministry. There is the converse attitude, too. Sad as it is, a 'white man' can get more here than most Indians; this is an old story, though, from Morocco to Hong Kong. Above all our efforts, on huge, black wings, bureaucracy circles menacingly, ready to swoop and snatch away a tender microfilm or an undigested bit from the Archives's shelves.

The hunting has its pleasures, however: finding tidbits the bookshop owner swore he didn't have, buying stuff with other people's money--the Oxford libraries, finding the Communist bookshop selling bourgeois novels and capitalist criticism of the Soviets, and finding in one nonchalant pile of books volumes by Wilfred Burchett and Frank Buchman cuddled together.

All in all it's going to be a merry time. The D. Phil. at the end of the stick is a powerful incentive if there were not the desire to beat the system and learn about India. But many a donkey has never got his carrot and many a bureaucracy remained squat and immobile, unscarred before the onslaught. If anyone really wanted the advice, I don't think I'd tell them to bet on me.

Yours sincerely,

*Red Austin*

Granville Austin