

(Written at Aligarh , April 10, 1947).

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Professor Habib has loaned me a typescript copy of a thesis by one of the junior members of the History Staff, on "The Early Indo-Muslim Mystics". I must read this and return it promptly, and then get ahead with other studies which seem to be continually interrupted, so I won't be very longwinded in this letter.

You may remember Phil Talbot's characterization of Professor Mohammad Habib as "a real gentleman". It fits. On my arrival at Aligarh, he introduced me to the History Department saying, "You're Talbot's successor here and you're cordially welcome". Then, as no lodging was immediately available, he took me into his own family for several days. Now I have moved across the road into one room of a former Tennis Clubhouse, where I take my meals with three young faculty members, but I frequently wander back to the Habib home for a chat or a meal. It is a most attractive house, with well-chosen paintings, carpets, and furniture of Persian or Indian design. A photograph of Mahatma Gandhi on the hall wall shows where sympathies lie: Professor Habib is a pacifist, a lifelong Nationalist Muslim who regrets the separatist demands of the Muslim League and the present bitterness and deteriorating tactics of Indian politics. Mrs. Habib, easy-going and pleasant, has an alert knowledge of political events and discusses them with a light sarcastic humor that delights me. (I have laughed more often in the Habib home than during my previous six months in India, for people generally take politics and problems so seriously that laughter is out of place). She is one of the small minority of staff wives who do not observe purdah. Irfan, the fifteen-year old son, is small and gentle, very bright and earnestly devoted to his studies: he will be a leading student of the humanities, I feel sure. Kamal, nineteen, is the Muslim League member of the family: the devotee of Pakistan. In good humor, table conversation usually consists of arguments between him and his mother, with side remarks from the rest of us.

Professor Habib is not in good health and is extremely overworked, having the strain of extra administrative responsibilities in a university which is suffering from bad administrative disruption and lack of self-discipline among many of its students. Nevertheless, he has spent many hours talking to me, on Islam, Persian and Indian history, Muslim India, European history and philosophy, the Bible, the Quran, and so on. His learning naturally overwhelms me, and I have to answer many of his questions, "I don't know". Therefore I try to remain the questioner, for his human approach to history and his own insights are both refreshing and stimulating.

I had been in Aligarh hardly a day when Professor Habib told me, "I can tell you about the Muslim past, Morse, but I'm out of tune with the present generation. You must spend your time with the students, to learn the maturity and immaturity of their thoughts". And so he took me to his class in Politics, introduced me to History students, and put me in the hands of a Commerce student to show me around. With these beginnings I felt well taken care of.

The vast majority of the Muslim University students, as well as

of the faculty, are staunch Muslim Leaguers. Pakistan is far and away the most important topic in their conversation. They strongly feel that "Pakistan has not been understood by Americans and others, because the Muslim League propaganda abroad has not been as effective as that of the 'Hindu' Congress". I have had no occasion to ask, "Why Pakistan?", for their reasons appear voluntarily. Let me cite or summarize some statements, of young and old.

The senior member of the Philosophy Department, in a long and careful discussion, told me of the wide religious, cultural, and social contrasts between Muslims and Hindus. The Secretary of the Student Union (a campus body of great prestige and considerable power - it occasionally feels that it, rather than the administration, should run the university) emphasized the same factor: "The Hindu culture is entirely different from ours. We are separate nations". Two junior members of the History Staff struck a different note: "The Hindus want to dominate us, and hope to cement their control started by the Interim Government headed by a caste Hindu (Nehru)". From another elected officer of the Union, who spent several months in 1945 and 1946 actively campaigning for the Muslim League throughout the northern provinces: "We would be crushed under a democratic system when the Hindus have a numerical superiority of 3 to 1 ". A candidate for the Master of Arts degree in History: "The Hindus already have economic supremacy which will be tightened fast if they are allowed to back it with political control. Furthermore, they look on Muslims almost as untouchables: they won't marry us, eat with us, or even accept gifts from us". A Science student: "Hindus regard India as their homeland and seek to wipe us out. They are taught from childhood to hate Muslims, and are preparing to fight". A Commerce student: "We are slaves of British Imperialism and Hindu Imperialism". A junior member of the English Department: " Hindus and Muslims are not only different: they hate each other. I admit I hate Hindus. I can't justify my hate on rational grounds, but I despise them and the sight of a Hindu fills me with loathing. I know they must hate me in the same way. Trying to think the thing through logically I can find no reason for this, but the hate is there".

My problem in this environment is manifold. For one thing, I must try to judge, in individuals and groups, whether these arguments and sentiments are deep convictions or merely superficial moods generated by the intensity of current politics. I must judge their staying power. Secondly, I must look for clarity of thought on "What is Pakistan?", and "How will it solve the current problems?" In the long run, especially during my study of modern Indian history, I'll be examining the validity of charges and counter-charges between Hindus and Muslims. The problem is complex and serious, and I have many questions to ask students and faculty before I'll begin to see rays of light.

I've just talked with an Indian Christian from Kashmir, where the Muslim population is about 85 %, who deplors the idea of a separate Muslim state. The Indian Christian from Travancore with whom I talk frequently is sure, on the basis of his several years' residence in the north, that a separate Muslim state is essential. So it goes.

I'll close this and get on with work and talk. Thank you very much for your helpful letter of March 19. There is much to reflect on !

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