

(written at Benares, March 6, 1947).

Dear Mr. Rogers:

A bit of a mystery has been cleared up by a letter from Phil, mentioning your remark about the absence of my letter 3. My parents had also recently expressed curiosity about its omission, but for some reason I interpreted it as a slip-up between New York and Hanover, rather than between here and New York. Now Phil says he has forwarded you his copy, so the damage is belatedly repaired. Apologies to all hands. In the future, I will send all letters to you by registered mail, and will also keep a more accurate check on your acknowledgements.

Your letter of February 1, with its forceful criticism and detailed comments on my letter 8, reached me a few days back. Because the remarks were both pointed and strong, they were also extremely helpful to me. I recognize that my speculations were out of place; in future letters, as you suggest, I will try to stick to objective reporting and to descriptions of what I myself and the people around me are doing and thinking. In the enclosed personal note to you, I respond to your letter more fully.

I have been in Hindu India's holy city for two months now, studying ancient Indian civilization at the library and with professors of Benares Hindu University, and also trying to assimilate the varied tempos of ancient city and modern campus. The spirit of old Benares is itself a lesson in history, for scenes are always before one that were probably seen two or three millenia ago on this very site. The other morning, a thin, little old man, his soiled white shawl thrown up from his shoulders over his head, came walking around the corner of the small inn where I stay. He moved in stiff steps, easing his brittle limbs forward, and stooping over a small bowl-shaped drum whose cowhide surface he was beating in a soft rhythm which hung in my ears after he had passed. Several paces behind him followed a dozen women, their red, orange, or violet faded saris sweeping from their bare, dusty feet up over their heads. They were carrying pots for water, baskets with a little rice, garlands of flowers, and were chanting a quiet, plaintive liturgy to the muffled drumbeat, monotonous but beautiful. Like a steady wave this group of worshippers would move through this suburb's streets, oblivious in 1947 to chatting students, rushing cycles and horse-drawn carts, swaying their song into the warm spring air, passing through the crowded bazaar and narrow lanes to an ancient shaded temple, where rice and flowers would be offered. Then to the Ganges, to bathe in its sacred, muddy waters. There they would mingle with pilgrims from Nepal and Orissa, Bengal and Central India. Perhaps they would ask for a few words from an aged sadhu or sanyasi, lingering at the bathing ghats or secluded in a small monastery, before they returned through the wheat and barley fields to their village homes. This was their church. This is the spirit of old Benares.

In contrast to the unhurried, traditional habits of these worshippers, or of the peasants whom I meet daily bringing their produce to market on their heads or by slow bullock cart, is the youthful eagerness of student curiosity about things modern, and their vigorous interest in things political. A physics professor described student energy as comparable to a compressed gas "in slavery" in a globe, expanding not with a shattering explosion (as by revolution), but through countless escape holes, jetting forcefully out in all directions. It is perhaps needless to say that the immediate goal and aspiration of this liberated energy,

for 100% of the student body, is national freedom. So fervent is their desire and so engrossed their attention that many, asking me "How is the student movement in the United States?", have at first been unable to appreciate that in my country students have no universal cause to stir their spirit.

Benares Hindu University is a logical place to find nationalistic spirit. At the time of its founding, in 1917, the University was a significant advance in the growth of education designed to fit Indian needs. For some years, nationalist leaders had been establishing independent schools and colleges, whose teachers and curricula were not subject to Governmental direction as were the official provincial universities. But, because the degrees of these upstart institutions were not recognized either by the official universities or by Government, their graduates were under an unfortunate handicap; for that reason students and financial support were not forthcoming in the desired quantity. The founders of the new Hindu University, notably Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, a revered leader who died last autumn, therefore decided to establish an accredited university which, although financed entirely by private donations from sympathizers with the national movement, was chartered by Government and operated within prescribed limits. Pandit Malaviya and his colleagues were able to retain the initiative in working toward a dual goal: renewal of Indian culture and introduction of modern science and techniques. By the late twenties, Benares Hindu University was taking a lead in Indian academic circles in promoting research and study of Indian history, philosophy, languages and literatures. From the start the founders were able to emphasize technological subjects, which had been allowed in the official universities but had received a "step-motherly sort of treatment" from the authorities, as one professor described it to me. Colleges of Science, Technology (including Glass and Ceramics), Agricultural Research, Mining and Metallurgy, Pharmacy, Ayurveda (Medical), and Engineering are now operating on the Benares campus. The fact that the latter college last year received 1864 applications for an entering class of 158 indicates not only its important rank in India, but also, more strikingly, the demand for higher education in India today, particularly in technological fields. Many graduates of the Engineering College have had good records in advanced studies in foreign countries.

A step toward nationhood was made in the founders' purpose of taking students from all over India, rather than from one province or region only. Muslims were naturally welcomed, but the emphasis in study was on Hindu culture; under today's political conditions only a minute fraction of the students are Muslims. Founders, faculty, and students have worked always for independence; to them a united India has always been the goal; but among them, I find, the emphasis on the glories of ancient Hindu civilization has strengthened or created groups of people who are crusaders for Hinduism by temperament and sometimes rather militant in language. I begin to glimpse some of the roots which have grown into Muslim fears in recent years.

I have been hearing about the role of the university during the August 1942 uprising, which seems still fresh in people's minds here. The picture I have of this revolt is as follows. After the top Congress leaders were arrested in Bombay during the night of August 8th, local and faculty leaders were taken up in the widespread arrests that swept the country on the 9th and 10th. The people here, bewildered, frightened, and angered by the unexplained arrest of their revered leaders in Bombay,

broke out spontaneously in a confused effort at disruption of Government. Many students joined townspeople in arousing villagers, picketing officials' homes, defying and disarming police, and destroying rail and electric lines. For some days these eastern districts of the United Provinces were almost cut off from the rest of India; Government officials were nearly powerless until British troop reinforcements arrived. But the uprising as a whole was unorganized; the participators did not have the clear immediate objectives, the sustained force and the clear plan of action necessary to successful revolt. Some of them now say they didn't know how far to go with aggressive action; even when Government was disrupted partially they had nothing to take its place. And when troops came in or when Government quickly regained police strength, further opposition was useless. The uprising died away, after some lives had been lost and after one or two district officials had taken severe repressive measures. In light of the world setting, extinction of such an uprising was inevitable. But chagrin over its failure and anger at the lives lost still seem to rankle in some minds. Among some Benares students at least, the event has grown to vastly exaggerated proportions. Apparently both students and staff members of the University joined in electing a 'Dictator' to direct their activities, and established a pass system to prevent Criminal Investigation Department officials and soldiers from entering the University grounds. Memories of this condition have grown into such legends as the following: one student told me he himself had supervised the capture and detention of some thirty police officers; a history research student said that the University was an independent stronghold for ten days, until lorry loads of Tommies succeeded in breaking down the walls and driving in; another student, who had not been here at the time but apparently believes the story, told me that several hundred Benares Hindu University students sacrificed their lives.

Vague legends of this type aid accurate memories of bitter disappointment in creating a student attitude which is receptive to such exhortations as, "Prepare yourselves for the struggle; get your plans ready". These injunctions were frequently stressed at the United Provinces Students' Congress session held here in late January, and at other meetings, by leaders of the then Congress Socialist Party and the Forward Bloc (followers of the late Subhas Chandra Bose whose Indian National Army joined the Japs in campaigning against the British). This emphasis on Imperialism as the foremost barrier to progress - which was the message of the Congress Socialist Party and the Forward Bloc throughout the nation - was a buildup that carried through in Benares for several days after Mr. Attlee's announcement of February 20th. The immediate reaction to that announcement of a large majority of the students to whom I talked, of the clerk in the post office, and of many older people, was expressed by a professor giving his own belief: "After nearly two hundred years of cunning and broken pledges, the sincerity and intentions of the British can not be trusted". My Hindi tutor, a school teacher and small landlord, told me that peasants in his village would undoubtedly take the same skeptical view. When I suggested to Dinesh Dwivedi, a student leader and one of my closest friends, that not all the members of the English family could have motives harmful to India, he was not convinced. Imperialism transcends party lines, it is believed. Dinesh had just been in a group of students with Arbinda Bose, nephew of Subhas Bose and present President of the All India Students' Congress. On rational grounds the group had begun to feel, as had other thoughtful students with whom I talked, that the question of British sincerity was perhaps no longer important, because Britain's domestic difficulties and post-war weakness might have forced her to take the withdrawal step in spite of her desires to retain the Empire. But the group could not fully believe that this desideratum had come to pass, and their conclusion was: "We must prepare to drive them out. They won't go voluntarily".

Of course this distrust was not universal on the campus, but it appeared to predominate. In contrast to this youthful attitude, statements to the press by Gandhi and Nehru, among others, reveal that the Congress leaders have fully accepted the good intentions of the British and the realities of the task before India. I have the feeling that when students also relax their obsession about Imperialistic rule, as they have begun to do very slightly during the last few days, they will be in a more useful frame of mind, for then the major problems - the internal conflict in India and the constructive work to be accomplished - will stand before them with a sharpness that has been unattainable while their thoughts and energy have been directed along the line that all evils flow from the outsiders.

Organized campus politics has contained more words than action at Benares. Apart from the Students' Federation, a communist organization which has a relatively small membership among the student body but which is growing because its workers are sincere and have avoided personal rivalries, most students either belong to the Students' Congress or follow its activities with interest. The Students' Congress here has two strong wings: the leftists who closely follow the program of the Congress Socialist Party (which has now been renamed the "Socialist Party" though it remains within the Congress fold: its program aims at the creation of strong labor and peasant movements not only for socialistic ends but also in the hope that a new and strong working class consciousness will transcend communal lines and thus combat the present separatist tendencies); and the self-styled "constructive" workers who accept Gandhi's methods of social reform (one of the latter, a professor, described these methods to me as follows: "Gandhiji wants to reduce class conflict instead of accentuating it, to subdue competitive individual and group spirit by emphasizing constructive work and cooperation, wherein the present "have" groups, under moral and gradual Government pressure will come to identify their own welfare with the nation's welfare"). Individually, students with whom I have talked have argued their position logically and with conviction; a few, at least, put their beliefs into practice by work in villages or among laborers. But group meetings on the campus seem to break apart. Dividing roughly on these ideological lines, but influenced more sharply by personality conflicts, sessions of the Students' Congress and of the mock "Student Parliament" have dissolved into melees of milling students shouting at their opponents, ignoring the Chair, excitedly preventing achievement of any constructive decisions.

The physics professor, talking about expanding energy, explained these personal rivalries and unruly crowd outbreaks by saying that escaping gas jets inevitably shoot too far and require adjustment to the new atmosphere. Students in Indian universities, it might also be said, are on the average one or two years younger than American students: when nearly a whole audience mobs a platform seeking autographs, as they did after visiting Russian and American scientists finished speaking to them a few weeks ago, it is only a reflection of youthful enthusiasm; it reminds me of the uncontrolled energy of an American football crowd storming the goalposts after the game ends. But the tensions are greater here, so that rivalry and mob irrationality, such as that displayed in these local, unimportant demonstrations, have burst out in more noted incidents in India in recent months. At an All India Students' Conference session in New Delhi in December, hostile elements created a disturbance which for several hours prevented the national Socialist leader, Jay Prakash Narain, from reaching the platform. Much more serious, the Muslim mob which I myself saw in October at the Malakand Fort, after they had stoned Pandit Nehru

and his companions, was largely composed of students, led by a hysterical young teacher who was wildly proclaiming, "I have just slapped Abdul Ghaffar Khan on both cheeks". In Bihar, during the serious slaughters of last October, uncontrolled Hindu student mobs were responsible for much of the destruction and violence. Such stormy incidents involve deep influences of fear, hate, or revenge. No vestige of such emotions is present in the meetings which I have attended here, but it seems to me that their indiscipline and the slight elements of personal malice are the mild origins from which such storms arise. Elder Congress leaders have been trying to curb these individual disorderly energies a bit, so that mass meetings will display self-discipline and groups will learn to organize for constructive work. Thus when the Minister for Industries and Supplies in the Interim Government, Mr. Rajagopalacharia, spoke to the student body here recently, giving a rambling, gentle, friendly discussion on modern science and India (presenting no answers but many general questions for thought), he interrupted himself to give a short sermon about self-control: "Do not laugh loudly and long when I say something funny. Chuckle quietly to yourself, keep the feeling within you. You will find it much richer as well as more accomodating to the speaker and those around you". On this analogy, he urged them to channel their vigor into restrained but steady advancement, working together.

But enough of politics and discussion of groups. Let me tell you of some of the friends who have made my stay in Benares more pleasant than the roaming I did during my first few months in India, when I left people almost as soon as I met them. Earlier in this letter I mentioned students' curiosity about things modern. The following brief descriptions of friends will incidentally indicate the variety of reactions to Western civilization found on the Benares campus.

Achyut Menon is the son of the Minister for Food in the Madras cabinet, a devoted follower of Mahatma Gandhi, and a veteran of three years' jail residence. One morning he spent two hours in depriving me of the pleasures of a Ganges sunrise by unceasingly attacking the morality and standards of the West. He rejects our use of force, our doctrine of "competition", our emphasis on material welfare, our use of huge machines which "reduce men to robots". He feels our former pacifists who turned to support the War are hypocrites. He doubts the sincerity even of our philosophers who criticize Western civilization, for he says if they were in earnest they would renounce completely the life about them to set an example for what they advocate. He attacks Indians who have accepted "Western" values. His condemnation was overflowing and relentless and drowned out the intermittent replies which I offered. Lately we've stayed on the subject of India, as he describes to me the integrated nature of Gandhi's village concept, wherein religion and life are inseparable. Achyut has been Prime Minister of the Student Parliament, embroiled in electioneering and intra-party conflicts, and responsible for one or two actions which seem tainted with the less straightforward tactics known in the game of politics. But there are two sides to this dispute, and both seem sincere when I talk to them. Honest motives sometimes degenerate into dubious means: even pacifists resort to weapons when pressed!

My other Madras friend, Sathya Murti, has a delightful sincerity, a boyish but modulated eagerness to like and to learn, a flexible mind which is still capable of changing his opinions when events or his knowledge change. Unlike Achyut, he is hopeful of finding good points in the West, even apart from its marvels of science and organization. He is himself a science student, only 19, but one day he gave me a clear and effective

outline of his concept of Vedanta advaita philosophy, largely in his own words (without quoting Sanskrit as so many do to establish the sanctity of their position). He has occasionally been with "realized" mystical souls and felt the power of their love and selfless personalities; but he doesn't yet accept the whole philosophy of Vedanta, as he finds points where the entire structure seems to break down. Philosophy is the subject of his quieter moments; usually he is very much alive and full of interest in things around him.

The other evening a new, restless figure walked into my room and introduced himself: Ranjit Banerji, from Calcutta. He is a First Year Engineering student, but wanted to ask me about a scenario he has written for Hollywood. "It's especially done for Abbott and Costello...it's original and will really suit them...but I've done another better one: an adaptation of Conrad's beautiful short story, "The Warrior Soul". Have you read it?" I hadn't. "Well, I've studied some scenarios to learn what technicalities I could...To whom do I send it? Will they accept scenarios from an outsider? I'm not interested in money just now - I only want their reaction to know whether I'm on the right track - I have many more in my head". I have an acquaintance in cinema who might be able to help, so I said I'd write for his advice. Then he was off into discussions of widely separated topics. The works of C.E.M. Joad, of Bertrand Russell. Science: the predicted mutations among the descendants of the Hiroshima survivors. America: "Why is there nothing solid and true in American literature today? They seem to be writing out of hunger rather than from fullness of life or soul". What did I think of Pearl Buck's criticisms of America? (I hoped they were a little too strong). And so on. A rapid, freely ranging, brilliant, puzzled mind, trying to absorb all the new and put it in its proper place among the old of India.

Dinesh Dwivedi, at 21, is an almost unfathomable complexity of intellect and emotion. His father is a physician in the northern United Provinces; Dinesh is studying Ayurveda, ancient Indian medical lore in combination with modern medicine. He hopes to go to Bali in a few years to study their indigenous medicines, and thence to America. His curiosity about all phases of life and all regions of the world is insatiable. But he is a deep-rooted, loyal, patriotic Hindu, full of the myths, traditions and faith of the ancient Indian epics and legends. He too has spent time with Hindu saints, in the Himalayas. When wandering through a wheat field or garden, he is poetic and mystical. When talking about astrology and horoscopes he appears almost superstitious to the Western eye. He is a student of psychology and a good analyzer of character and inner thoughts. Without ever having heard of extra-sensory perception, he tells me he can talk to his best friends at a distance and feel their moods of happiness or worry. He is a leading behind-the-scenes worker in campus politics. When he talks national politics he becomes a fiery, intense, overpowering young man: his big eyes bulge further and his thin frame almost vibrates. He deeply reveres Pandit Nehru, with whom he has spent a couple of days in campaign tour, but says that Indian youth has come alive as the leaders wanted and is now ahead of its elders. As he read me in Hindi a stirring revolutionary poem (whose words I did not understand - only the spirit), I agreed that youth has come alive. Revenge and violence were preached in that poem: Dinesh said it was too strong for him: he hates force and strife, but is not non-violent: he will fight when the times demand, but would prefer to preach peace. Only 21, a campus leader, a bit eccentric as he says himself, Dinesh embodies much of the multiplicity of the Hindu civilization which makes it so hard for us to find the unity upon which we are told it is based. Strong currents and soft currents run through this man and this campus: which predominate it is hard to say.

Sincerely yours,

Richard Morse
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