

Agra, India  
February 3, 1948

Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 18, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

In the past days, I have tried to sense the instinctive moods of Indian people with whom I have shared the shock of Mahatma Gandhi's death. Though individual reactions vary, most men are sorely troubled for the future and awed by the trials that lie ahead.

Wherever there is a radio in India - in towns, in railway stations, in restaurants on crowded city streets, in many villages throughout the land - the news was known early in the evening, hardly an hour after the shots were fired. Soon after, the voice of Nehru came to the people, marvellously strong yet deeply shaken, first in Hindustani, then in English: "Our beloved leader, Bapu as we called him, the father of the nation, is no more." In heartfelt, rushing words he paid tribute: "The light that shone in this country was no ordinary light..." Then he and the Deputy Prime Minister, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, who spoke immediately afterward, both called on the country to "stand together", to complete the work started by Mahatma Gandhi.

A Hindu businessman with whom I listened to radio details a few minutes later reflected the torn opinion of the country. "You should know one thing", he said. "Even those among us Hindus who have always looked to him for advice, who have turned to his views, were opposed to this last fast of his. We felt he was weakening us, for even this fast to protect Muslims brought no return effect from Pakistan. Mr. Jinnah did not even send a message of sympathy for the fast. Gandhi's method could not change the heart of Pakistan."

Thus one Hindu: not approving the manner of the deed yet of opinion that India will be stronger, more alert to realities, with Gandhi gone. I have heard others express this view, which I shall mention later in this letter. Most people whom I have met, however, have reacted with more grievous distress and more concerned anxiety. "With one hand, Hindusthan is destroyed", said a policecar driver the following morning, and his quiet gloom was widespread. In particular, immediate fears were expressed for the future of Muslims in India: "He alone could protect them", felt some Hindus. And from that point many instinctively feared that absence of Gandhi's restraining influence would lead to war with Pakistan.

Despite the Hindu gentleman's disagreement with Gandhi's recent stand, he impulsively decided to drive to New Delhi the next morning, to take Mahatma Gandhi's last darshan, to look on him for the last time. Though we were strangers, he asked if I would care to accompany him. Out of my desire to pay homage together with the people of India whose lives Gandhiji had so powerfully affected, I went with him to New Delhi. With us were a Sikh major and his wife, the latter so deeply moved that she had sat sleepless throughout the night. All my companions were observing fast. Yet with their grief was realism: the major's formidable pistol, strapped in a cartridge belt across his chest, was a reminder that non-violence lives as an ideal which men are still unable to apply. And he expressed relief that the alleged murderer was not a Sikh, for Hindu-Sikh clashes might have ensued had a Sikh been responsible.

News of the deaths of many mighty men has passed from village to

village along the Agra-Delhi route in centuries past. Just beyond Agra is the tomb of Akbar, the great 16th century Mughal Emperor who himself made determined efforts to cement Muslim-Hindu relations. This bit of history was in my mind, recalling the changeless in the Indian scene, as we drove through villages the morning after Gandhi's death. Here the news had come already. In two small hamlets flew black mourning flags, dusty already from the morning's extra traffic. In spite of petrol rationing, cars and lorries from Agra and more distant places were taking hundreds to this last darshan. And from the villages scores of people wished to go and asked us for a ride. Beyond one village a lone peasant stood motioning for a ride, helplessness and concern written on his face. Slow trains of bullock-carts with bulky loads of straw and grain competed with us for the road, for all work could not cease. But schools and shops were closed, and everywhere were little groups of men and boys, gathered to discuss the meaning of one man's death.

We reached New Delhi just as the slow procession came past India Gate, at the end of the city's main ceremonial drive. The crowd was of medium size here, tens of thousands rather than hundreds, and we were close enough to see the flower-strewn bier, Jawaharlal Nehru sitting low and bowed in front. To get a closer view, we drove a mile ahead and joined crowds who lined the street six or eight deep. Watching their many faces, some sad, some wondering, I knew these were the people whom Gandhi loved most dearly, the "ordinary people" who came to his prayer meetings, whose problems were on his mind to the last. College of Nursing students were sitting on the roadside, but in their midst were old, worn women, shading their children-in-arms with faded sarees. Here were not just government and commercial clerks and professional peoples; here also were hundreds of working-men from the old city, and peasants from villages near the capital. Two sturdy cultivators, dressed roughly in the heaviest cloth, jostled in front of me trying for a vantage point. Milling a bit, people had to be pushed back for the military and police escort.

As the bier came before us, and stopped, a sudden hush came to the street. There were no tears here, no cries, though hundreds of women, finely clad and coarsely clad, were standing among us. Earlier we had heard the muffled cheers, "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai", "Victory to Mahatma Gandhi". Here throats seemed full, as eyes were drawn in sad last glimpses to the calm, rested face that would no more joke and preach to these people. Gropingly, arms tossed tiny flower clusters toward the bier. His friends sat there, the leaders of the nation, Congress colleagues whom Gandhi had guided toward freedom during almost thirty years of work and sacrifice. With obvious effort Jawaharlal Nehru lifted his head to look at his people. Afterward they spoke among themselves about his trembling, troubled face: "Jawaharlal looked angry", said one; others thought it was rather pain and loneliness and concern for the tremendous burden of the future; they remembered Nehru's words the previous evening: "We will not see him again as we have seen him for these many years. We will not run to him for advice and seek solace from him, and that is a terrible blow, not to me only, but to millions and millions in this country." The bier moved slowly on; men and women, still unwilling to accept this blow, stood for a moment, then tiredly turned away, hushed and stricken.

We stayed only another hour in New Delhi, a city stunned and subdued by shock. Then we drove quickly back to Agra, meeting in the early dusk more special lorryloads of people coming from far places. They would be too late in Delhi to see Gandhiji's face, but would sit in homage at his burning pyre.

The next morning, a Muslim tailor with whom I had talked on several occasions came to me. From a brief talk about Gandhi's goodness and his work for peace, he entered into a lengthy discourse in Urdu on the Oneness of God. Though He may have many prophets, God is only One, he told me, and added explanation of his conviction. It was the spontaneous, straightforward talk of a pious man; I could understand most of his meaning even though words and phrases were unfamiliar in part. Though he would not group the Mahatma with Mohammad, Christ, and the Hebrew prophets, he did seem to associate Gandhi, goodness, and God.

In the afternoon, he took me to meetings in the city held in observance of Gandhi's death. On a narrow Muslim ceremonial ground closed in by houses and walls of the Muslim quarter in Agra, four or five thousand men crowded to listen to a broadcast explaining Gandhi's life and teachings. These were mostly Muslims, though some Hindus were among them. In the late afternoon, a larger meeting was organized by local Congress workers on a broad field in the lee of Akbar's red fort. Perhaps eight thousand people of all communities gathered here and heard ten minute talks by Congressmen and by non-party representatives of Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians. Few in the audience were well educated - they were like the Delhi crowd of the previous day: craftsmen, cobblers, petty clerks and shopkeepers, peasants, street sweepers. Speakers appealed to ignorance and sentiment as well as to reason and conscience, but the gathering was a bit amused, rather than impressed, by two young speakers whose oratory was overdone. Most repeatedly stressed in speeches was Gandhi's message that Muslims and Hindus must mix together and live peacefully; and as I sat listening among the people I knew that they were really anxious to avoid further strife. Some speakers emphasized Gandhiji's accomplishment of freedom for India. Others reinforced the prestige of his teachings by repeating to these illiterate people the messages of world leaders in condolence and respect for Gandhi. One Congressman recalled a moment's memories of Mahatma Gandhi, Bapu's personal advice to him. Most touching was a woman, deeply hurt by Gandhiji's death, who said firmly, through tears, "We will carry on his ahimsa. We will spread peace through love, as he taught us." In sympathy and accord, the audience sighed assent.

Many such meetings have been held in different wards of Agra in recent days. Even as I type this letter a horse-drawn tonga is passing in the street, flying a black flag, and carrying khadi-wearing Congressmen who are announcing through a loudspeaker other meetings of mourning this evening. Through such meetings, and even in their daily business and casual street encounters, I believe many Hindus and Muslims are trying to rebuild mutual confidence. The attempt will be vigorously encouraged throughout the country in coming days, as shaken local leaders gather Hindus and Muslims and repeat Mahatma Gandhi's last message: "Come together among yourselves, and live peacefully like brothers." Simple, harmless people will try to follow this guidance.

But 'trying', it is necessary to emphasize, will not easily yield early or lasting success, in the present atmosphere. Though the heavy shock of Gandhi's assassination seems to have put many advocates of conflict on the defensive for the moment, it is far too early to say that it has permanently altered their outlook, or that the deep forces building toward greater conflict have been affected fundamentally. Millions of Indian hearts were struck with anguish at Mahatma Gandhi's death, but the assassination reflected opinion which spreads far beyond the school of violent plotters directly responsible. Only a few would conceive such a deed; much larger numbers will condone it privately; hundreds of

thousands, a million, I have no doubt, look upon Mahatma Gandhi's death as removal of an obstacle who blocked the growth of needed strength and firmness in the arm and policy of the Indian Dominion and its Hindu-Sikh component.

By chance, my letter 21 described one strong shoot of Hindu Nationalism, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, as seen at Poona. Evidently I was close there to the extreme of extremes, the feverish environment which germinated the alleged murderer, Godse, who is said to be editor of the Poona Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation) and secretary of the Poona branch of the Hindu Mahasabha, though apparently not himself an RSSS member. Looked at from that background, this now seems the most logical of all assassinations. Strong elements of the Hindu Mahasabha always viewed Gandhi as enemy both of Hindu religion and Hindu folk. Among other things, his campaigns on behalf of the untouchables challenged both religious and social tenets of the orthodox, while his advocacy of cooperation with Muslims and now of protection for Muslims seemed to many an utter threat to the existence of Hindu civilization. Many of Mahasabha persuasion compared Gandhi, in his non-violence, to the Buddha, whose life and creed they criticize as having emasculated Hindu society and outlook at critical periods during the 1500 years of Buddhism's active existence in Hindusthan. Such a menace could hardly be removed too soon.

Since my return north I have not had as close personal contact as I had in Poona with supporters of Hindu Rashtra, but their vocal strength has been evident. New Delhi newsstands carry at least four English-language newspapers, started since June, 1947, vigorously inciting fears of the Muslim 'threat' and vigilantly critical of any governmental 'softness' toward Pakistan or Muslims in India. One weekly, The Organizer, represents the RSSS, and its publishers recently announced their intent to bring out two new dailies, in English and Hindi. Two weeks ago announcement was published widely of a new company, "Bharat Publications Ltd.", its directors including all the major office-holders in the Hindu Mahasabha, its announced purpose to bring out newspapers "mainly with the object of propagating the Cult of Hindu Nationalism". That the cult is already well advanced was indicated in late December when The Statesman's correspondent in the United Provinces reported that, judging from two recent RSSS rallies, 4,000,000 was "by no means exaggerated" as an estimate of RSSS regular membership in that province alone.

I mention these as isolated measures of a movement, Hindu Nationalism, whose complex and significant character requires continuing study. Brought into sharp and broad activity by the emergence of a Muslim Nationalism which proved strong and united enough to achieve Pakistan, Hindu Nationalism in recent months has flourished in a field made fertile by bitterness among Sikh and Hindu refugees from Pakistan, by uneasy mistrust of forty million Muslims still in India, and by fear of war with Pakistan. A huge New Delhi meeting organized by the Hindu Mahasabha in the week following Gandhi's fast was an instance of this movement's appeal. While the city's peace campaign was making good progress, Mahasabha leaders condemned Mahatma Gandhi's 'softness' toward Indian Muslims as 'suicidal', and said, "it can never create conditions for permanent peace."

One aspect of the movement has been the increasing concentration of disaffection toward Gandhi. When the bomb attempt was made against him, one militant Hindu paper wrote: "The man who threw the bomb gave vent to the feelings of millions of silent people." A Hindu citizen writing to

The Statesman said, "Mahatma Gandhi has become a dangerous embarrassment to the Dominion of India." During the fast, a bright young Hindu rejoiced to Chuck Forman that "Gandhi's day is over"; when the deed was done, a servant told me he could see no cause for grief, for "Gandhi is responsible for Hindus' weakness."

Thus men were sullen at Gandhi's recent work for peace. The killing followed.

It remains for time to tell whether the shock and manner of the deed will strike fundamentally at enough hearts in both dominions to work a change. I think it is worthwhile to quote here an old lesson from Gandhi, reported in today's Statesman by Horace Alexander, the British Society of Friends worker who has been close to Gandhi for twenty years. Mr. Alexander writes of a conversation with Gandhi fifteen years ago. "But when I asked him why, then, he sometimes abandoned reason and resorted to direct action, his answer was simple. 'Sometimes,' he said, 'you find a man's mind so warped by false assumptions or hidden prejudices that no amount of reasoning can convince. Then he requires shock treatment, something that will touch his emotions, and which may lead him to re-examine his fundamental assumptions.'"

A fast is strong shock treatment. May it not be that the brutal death of a near-saint will be even stronger? I sincerely hope so, for the poison has entered millions of Muslim and Hindu and Sikh minds and hearts whose original character must really be revolted by the venom.

Yours sincerely,

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