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Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 18, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

In a note attached to this letter, you will find a brief statement on India Village Service, an Indian-American venture in village education and development. Recently I spent five days with the field staff of this group, in their rural working center in the Ganges-Jumna plain. In talks with village people in the area, I heard expression of individual and group attitudes that are important forces in rural north India. To a degree these attitudes, some of which I am relating here, are contradictory. In the five days I was not in a position to probe very far into their origins and strength, or into the contradiction. In a later situation I hope to study these and other attitudes at greater length.

I must begin in the realm of art and philosophy, or religion. The Ganges-Jumna plain is one of the oldest continuously settled lands of the world. As I strolled into ripening fields and on the outskirts of villages, I tried to hold myself receptive to the forces of Nature which have held people to this soil for three or four thousand years, and to the human strength and vision ~~and~~ produced and stored by many generations. Nature and life have a rich warmth here in this late quarter of the rainy season, a warmth that has recurred and endured for centuries. As the monsoon crops shoot forth, adjacent fields are made ready for the winter sowings. Moist breezes ripple the deep green leaves of the flourishing bajra, as nearby an easy plodding bullock team pulls a light plow through the soft, friable soil. The blue of the sky has a rain-washed purity. Cloud shadows fleet across marshland waters, blending with the delicate green of swaying wild rice shoots. Earth and sky seem full of living power, of grace and joy. Do the permanent residents rejoice as I did in this beauty? In my company they did not articulate direct response. But I felt that they and their forefathers had drawn deeply on the warm movement, the poise and gentleness of their countryside, for in them I found a spirit that is Indian, regardless of its religious frame. In a gleaming furnace workshop of the village, a Muslim craftsman counselled me with a Persian saying, "He who loses himself, who has no desire for self-advantage, he it is who may accomplish something of lasting value." In the evening stillness a Brahman cultivator recited a Sanskrit verse, which he explained in simpler Hindi, "He is truly rich who has wisdom, who performs rightly his life's duty, who loves all beings, and who is gifted with the power of sowing seeds of love in the hearts of others."

It is true that dacoity and violence are not absent from the life of this rural district. Jealousy and pride are also lively, as will be seen. But I cannot help finding in the ideals volunteered by these unlettered men a part reason for the fact that their village of 10,000

people, half Muslim and half Hindu, has not succumbed to the chaos and intolerance of the past years. Nearby are other villages, part or wholly Muslim, surrounded by Hindus. Socially the two groups do not mingle freely. But with forbearance and gentleness they have avoided open conflict.

Some of the India Village Service colleagues share the simplicity and poise of these village people whom they are seeking to help. I spent a day and night with one of them, Shyam Lal, in the village where he has been for two months. Shyam Lal is forty-nine years old, thin and wiry. A law graduate, he says he gave up his law practice long ago in obedience to Abraham Lincoln's guidance, "If you cannot be a lawyer and be honest, sacrifice the law but stay honest." Ruskin, Isaac Walton, Thoreau and Tolstoi have gone into Shyam Lal's makeup through his reading. A widower now, he has cut his life wants to the bone. As we sat through the midday heat in the 9 by 20 foot earthen room which he now makes his home, I realized that his manner of life meets with approval from his new village friends. Outside, men were coming in from morning plowing. The lane before our door became lined with bullocks, tethered to earthen feed troughs, munching on green bajra fodder. Men greeted us through the door. Beating a tin can, a news carrier announced at each courtyard entrance a forthcoming meeting of all cultivators to work out allotments of water from the government electric tube well. Another crier shouted his wares: country cigarettes, pan, matches, spices. In his low-slung cowhide bag, the water-carrier brought water from the well to fill our earthen pot. A teen-aged boy came to Shyam Lal for eye medicine for his aunt. Resting after their noon meals, farmers came in for a talk and to see the American guest.

As we talked of crops with a good-natured twenty-five year old farmer, I noticed on Shyam Lal's shelf a large green bottle of grass tablets, an all-vitamin preparation dispensed by American missionary groups. At the irony of this, almost the only product of modern science in the room, I had to chuckle. "Here are your crops", I said. "In the middle of farm country, you have to supplement your diet with grass tablets." He told me how listless he had been while eating only the local staple diet without greens, and how grass tablets had improved his health. "Hardly any vegetables are grown here", he explained. "Both my mind and body became fatigued and lazy from a diet of grain and pulses. I am not surprised to find lack of initiative in these men who live constantly on such inadequate foods."

Why are few vegetables grown? We three talked this over. A remark from the young farmer suggested that old talents have been lost, old all-round values replaced by market values. "Ek kahawat hai, ki jo kheti bari nahin karta, wo kisan nahin. There's an old saying: he who does not grow both grain and vegetables is not a true farmer." "There you are", said Shyam Lal, "a valuable adage which no one here follows." Earlier he had roused my curiosity by telling me of a number of such agricultural sayings, still current in speech but seldom practiced. The empirical findings of generations, many of them accord with modern agricultural science. "Why have they lapsed from practice?" Shyam Lal asks, and finds plausible if incomplete answers in 19th century British plantation activities in this part of India. More relevant to his purpose, how are they to be revived? How are new techniques, more balanced agricultural practices, to be introduced or re-introduced?

Lack of adequate irrigation water, and more assured marketability of staple crops, emerged from our talk as tangible reasons for the lack of vegetables in this village. Soon a second tube well will provide much more water. But our talks revealed habits of mind which will prevent vegetable-growing, or other improved practices, from being quickly accepted. First we saw how isolation makes it difficult for the mind to grasp and master new ideas. Shyam Lal has talked to the villagers of the value of hemp as green manure, if plowed under when about two feet high. On the day of my visit the latest copy of Gaon ki Baat ("Village Talk"), a fortnightly paper for villagers published by a Congress educationist, had reached Shyam Lal. A young farmer eagerly took it up. Urdu is his mother tongue, but he glanced at Gaon ki Baat and said, "The Hindi here is easy. May I borrow it?" When he returned it after the noon hour I asked, "Have you found any new thing in the magazine?" Yes, he replied, and with accuracy of detail he related an article on green manures. Shyam Lal listened, then said, "You call this a new thing? It's what I've been saying for several days."

A bit sheepishly, this was admitted. The incident indicated that new ideas must come to the village from several directions, perhaps through different media, before they will take hold. But acceptance of the idea does not mean action. Visual demonstration may be required. And even that may not bring change. We listened to an older man, Pahelwan, who told with admiration of a farmer not many miles away, whose grain yield rose remarkably after one growth of hemp was plowed under. Shyam Lal heard this corroboration gratefully, then gently prodded Pahelwan, "You know of his success. What more demonstration is necessary? Why have you still not tried it yourself?" Pahelwan acknowledged the fairness of the question, but found no answer. Nor has he made plans to grow hemp.

As a step toward more diversified cropping, eventually more balanced diets, Shyam Lal is encouraging introduction of quick-growing potatoes. He has grown the new variety in his own village, so knows they can succeed. But the India Village Service objective is "to get the village people moving ahead on their own momentum, to help people help themselves." And so Shyam Lal wants local men to try potatoes for themselves. He will advise them where necessary. With two young farmers he talked, as he has talked before, on cost, production and marketing factors, showing them the possible gain. They seemed to agree, but still showed a barrier between conviction and action. Finally one said to Shyam Lal, "I'll try them if you will join me in partnership." Shyam Lal does not want to encourage dependence on outside financial advances (such as his own would be). He wants local men to take responsibility for initiating and managing improved practices, to stand on their own feet. He agreed only to recompense them for any loss suffered in their first trial of potatoes. But without his participation as responsible partner, they are not ready to undertake the new crop on their own.

These small instances of unwillingness to change are illustrative only. Shyam Lal ponders some of the reasons. "Is it greed? Shortsightedness? Desire to spend one rupee now rather than investing it to get a future five? In these days, farmers here do have funds ample for investment. I think our farmers lack a spirit of adventure. Geography has given us too favorable, unchallenging conditions."

Thinking of the lush growth and warmth of these plains, I agreed that passivity as well as gentleness could be a result. My own observation doesn't go much deeper. But for more fundamental causation I

value the testimony presented by the Wisers in Behind Mud Walls. They listened to village folk for five years, then wrote these words. It is the villagers speaking: "To a new-comer we may seem suspicious, obstinate, intolerant, backward - all that goes with refusal to change. We did not choose qualities for ourselves. Experience forced them upon our fathers. And the warnings of our fathers, added to our own experiences, have drilled them into us. Refusal to change is the armour with which we have learned to protect ourselves." And the Wisers add concrete instances of protection gained from refusal to change.

Different incentives and prods will be applied by government and other agencies seeking to overcome this resistance and to supplement present economic motives in creating more productive farms. Shyam Lal's is a mild but attractive method. He is persuaded that the universe is friendly, that Nature has made provision for a good life for all. To his village neighbors, therefore, he emphasizes the possibilities of their fields, tools, and selves. "Khuda sab deta, insan nahin leta. God gives all, man fails to take." Repeating this phrase as a gentle goad, he tries to stimulate them to increased productivity and health, to receptivity for new ideas, to creative initiative.

At any rate, they like Shyam Lal. A loin-cloth-clad farmer smiled shyly as he told me how helpful their new neighbor had been. When I mentioned this to Shyam Lal, I learned the next type of barrier to the advance he wants to aid. "Yes, when one gains the sympathy and affection of people they begin to learn from him. But in this village there are two opposing factions. One trusts me. The others suspect me, are unfriendly because I am friendly to their opponents. We cannot get cooperative action from the village as a whole."

To learn more examples of such group and factional blocks to village development, I had only to talk with others of Shyam Lal's colleagues, who have been working for many months in Sirsa, a village split by a long-standing rivalry. Here the phenomenon of leadership underlies the division. When the old village headman died, several years ago, one of his four sons was approved by government as his successor. Phool Singh, a man of equal economic and social status, had expected the post. Since then, he has jealously refused to work helpfully with the headman. Each man controls, through economic holds and prestige, a following of half the village. See the results for village development.

Mr. Solomon, the I.V.S. colleague who took me to Sirsa, is keen to introduce the much-recommended bore-hole latrines, for sanitation purposes. He has talked separately with individuals, of both factions, who seemed interested and ready to put forward the small cost of bringing a bore from the nearby town. But as we walked about the village learning their views, we found some of these men holding back. The cost was not a major deterrent, but they were fearful of exposing themselves by working on a project jointly with members of the other party. These men were not leaders, nor did they share the full bitterness of the leaders' rivalry. But one said, referring to his leader, "Phool Singh may not like us to go ahead with the others. And you know he is a big man." A big man - meaning the speaker is dependent on Phool Singh for one or more of the following or similar needs: money advance at sowing time, grazing or wood-cutting concessions, advice and aid in court disputes, sparetime employment, respected family reputation or caste standing. I have not studied the sanctions and benefits of village leadership in detail at first hand, but here I saw its hold: "You know he is a big man." Phool Singh had undoubtedly let his

followers know that he did not favor their participation in the sanitation project with individuals of his rival's party.

This split holds back a more important project in Sirsa. Mr. Solomon has stimulated so much lively interest for education that Sirsa's residents are generally agreed on the need for a school. They have enough money, it is calculated, to build and finance their own school, with the usual government help. There are two hitches: Will the headman have undue control in the project? Is the school to be built in Phool Singh's section of the village or the headman's? Partly in rivalry, each side has advanced small tentative money commitments. Neither side will make the generous move which might break down jealousy and pride, which would allow them to go forward on the school in full cooperation. The project is standing still.

The two girl I.V.S. colleagues have felt the force of this bitterness in their contacts with Sirsa's young women. The I.V.S. girls, though college graduates, have made friends easily, attracting the young village women by their open manner and neat dress, winning their interest by demonstrating simple bamboo knitting needles and instructing them in sewing and crocheting, insuring their enthusiasm by singing new songs and playing games. But when they suggest that all the young women of Sirsa meet for lessons or games, those of each side refuse to enter the lanes or yards of their opponents. Can a neutral place be found? The colleagues hope so, but for the present the womenfolk of Sirsa will not meet and work together. The present generation of young women did nothing to create the enmity, but are swept by parental attitudes into its prejudice and rancor.

What will mend this breach in village harmony? Perhaps in Sirsa the rift will not be able to withstand the demands of children that a school be built. Mr. Solomon has enthused them for schooling not by his own teaching, but by enlisting the aid of half a dozen literate men of the village. These literates have themselves gathered nightly classes of children and adults and have taught them the primary readers. It has been a true example of self-help toward greater personal usefulness and citizenship. Now the literates' own teaching capacity has been reached. A school, with trained teachers from outside, is the next necessary step. If the children's pleas rise loudly, perhaps the adults will finally come together to supply this need.

At present, Sirsa is not one community, but two groups. Many villages are prevented by such group differences from being healthy, progressive communities. Programs to revitalize the village find such rifts a serious flaw which needs to be healed. Development of cooperatives, on which government places great hopes, has been fouled in many cases by the unwillingness of two wings of a village, or group of villages, to work together. Local self-government, soon to be greatly increased as the panchayat act comes into operation, may run aground on such local rivalries. And opposing political parties, bringing from outside their pleas for votes and promises of action, sometimes capitalize on factionalism and add to its bitterness.

Such local rivalries, local problems and loyalties, limit the villager's attention and are barriers in the way of a larger active citizenship. There are over 100,000 villages in the United Provinces. If

development programs are to succeed they will have to pierce within the horizons of these local units and fulfill needs or provide blessings that outweigh the local resistances. Economic, political, social or religious movements can only become movements if they are the expression of a widespread pressure, awakening, or aspiration which overpowers or transcends men's day-to-day relationships. The discreteness in the countryside, the separateness of villages and groups, must have been an important factor in the past stability of rural India. As a student in a village, I must learn to detect the general, region-wide forces, if any, which outweigh my neighbors' individual worries and absorptions.

I have related experiences of love and gentleness, yet also of pride and stalemate; of conservatism and habit, yet also of eagerness for new knowledge. Where do they fit together? What are their proportions in the rural United Provinces? This weighing, this feel for village life as a whole, I have yet to realize.

Sincerely yours,

*Richard Morse*

Richard Morse

My mail address is still:

/% American Embassy  
New Delhi

## India Village Service

India Village Service, established some four years ago on the initiative of American church and mission groups, supported by institutional and individual contributions, cannot be understood without reference to the lifework and personality of its director-coordinator, Dr. William H. Wiser, and his wife, Charlotte Viall Wiser. Representatives of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, the Wisers came to India more than thirty years ago. Graduates of the University of Chicago, they gradually found that study and participation in village life was their path of contribution. Behind Mud Walls, the clearcut and highly readable book which they wrote after five years in a village in the Ganges-Jumna plain, is still a unique work on the north Indian village. It reveals the Wisers' affection for their village home as well as their keen insight into family and group relationships and village outlook. Dr. Wiser later wrote two theses at Cornell University, The Hindu Jajmani System\*\* and Social Institutions of a North India Village, while Mrs. Wiser worked on nutrition, her thesis being published as Foods of a Hindu Village of North India. Subsequently, at the Saharanpur theological seminary, they taught village pastors, and carried out further studies of the social and religious life of village Christians. Their most recent book, For All of Life, emphasizes the wide opportunities of Christian missionaries in serving the whole needs of people, educational, physical, occupational, economic, social, recreational, as well as spiritual.

In spirit and content the Wisers' studies, to a remarkable degree, are unbiased quests for truth, presented evenly and without alarm. They write and live as though truth, inspired by love, is adequate persuasion. They have faith in man, though they have known many scoundrels. Morally and educationally, as well as physically, they are great believers in the principle of "the felt need": just as the dysentery-stricken village will in due time realize the need of clean wells and apply itself to their improvement, so, the Wisers' attitude suggests, the errant will at last see his misdeeds, the slothful his laziness; and the self-achieved criticism will spur to self-remedy. I do not imply that the Wisers reject the use of guidance, prodding, discipline; only that they greatly value self-growth.

India Village Service proceeds on "a philosophy of the value of the small community". It seeks to infuse vitality into the lifestream of compact village areas, "to help villagers to help themselves". By using up-to-date methods, applied by devoted and well-qualified personnel who "will take time to seek out the individual and unhurriedly work with him", it seeks to evolve techniques of community development which will achieve results - stimulation - in three years time, after which it hopes the village will be ready to go ahead "on its own momentum". "The program ... must change standards of thinking as well as standards of living. The emphasis must be not merely to get folks to do what others do but to get them to understand themselves why they want to do differently." Each individual in the village must be reached, his needs considered, his ability for self-help and his self-confidence developed, that "each individual may ... discover his own potential power in a cooperative whole."

"This program seeks to be frankly Christian in its inception, operation and spirit ... but ... no pressure will be brought to bear through it upon anyone to change his religious affiliations, nor will the degree and quality of the service be affected by the religious attitudes of the

villagers." "The program is grounded in the conviction that God works through man and 'man' works effectively only when he seeks the will of God. The concept expressing this conviction may differ among individuals living in a village, but its fundamental value must be conserved and developed."

India Village Service works in cooperation with the development programs of government. The Wisers' office is in Lucknow, the provincial capital, where Dr. Wiser keeps in touch with department heads. The I.V.S. working area centers on the large market village of Marehra, on the meter gauge rail line from Kanpur to Agra. Marehra was chosen mainly because a government seed store is located there. The present government's rural cooperative development program is growing out of these seed stores, which are gradually being handed over to multi-purpose cooperative societies formed by villagers in the area served by the store. Working in and from Marehra, I.V.S. colleagues are doing what they can, in conjunction with government officers, to foster development of this multi-purpose cooperative. As further government projects become ready for implementation, it is Dr. Wiser's hope that the I.V.S. field staff will continue to be of help.

At present, the Marehra group consists of four men and two girls, all Indian, all Christian, all college graduates. They are counselled by an elderly retired directress of schools and by a lady doctor who cycles to Marehra and nearby villages from an adjoining hospital town. The doctor's emphasis is in developing a program of preventive sanitation, hygiene and nutrition, rather than on curative work. The other colleagues participate in this preventive program, aid village people in simple cures, advise on agricultural practices, cooperatives, community projects, give instruction in crafts and arts. Only Shyam Lal lives in the small village where he works - the others visit their villages regularly by cycle or horse-drawn ekka from Marehra. Soon some of them hope to move to the smaller village. Already they have the good will of the people among whom they are living and working.

Recently, Dr. Wiser has given emphasis in the I.V.S. program to the development of a syllabus for "social education" for village folk. His move is in response to "a challenge - a new urgency in adult education", an urgency which he has noted in statements by Education Ministers of the Government of India, of Bombay and the Central Provinces. "Social education" if broadly conceived should include "education for citizenship ... and education for enlightenment and living", in the words of the Central Provinces statement quoted by Dr. Wiser. The latter has drawn up a syllabus, based partly on the Central Provinces example, including these subjects: Hindi and Arithmetic, Agriculture, Handicrafts, Home Economics, Sanitation and Hygiene, General Science, Social Science. The question arises: what do villagers most urgently need to know in these fields? The challenge arises: no adequate teaching material is available for adult education to meet villagers' needs. Dr. Wiser has therefore asked each of his colleagues to begin preparation of lessons in an assigned field of the syllabus. Lessons are to be presented to the villagers, revised to accord with the villagers' response, then finally discussed and revised by the colleagues sitting jointly to criticize and suggest. The emphasis is constantly to be: does this fit the village needs and understanding? Dr. Wiser hopes that through this process teaching material will be pre-

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para that will also be of help to other educational workers.

When I visited Marehra, I felt that this preparation and joint revision of lessons was having growing pains. Perhaps the colleagues' contacts with villagers are not yet sufficiently lively to awaken full village interest and free two-way interchange between teacher and village "pupil". The colleagues themselves approach the social education project from very different backgrounds. Not having direction on the spot, they seemed to lack purpose on this project. But they are patient, creative, self-effacing persons. I believe that in varying degree there is increasing awareness among them of the need for realistic material, for originality of presentation, and for free interstimulus of ideas among themselves. The process seems part of Dr. Wisner's fostering of initiative and responsibility: "Colleagues, like villagers, are encouraged to help themselves, in planning their programme and the procedures they are to adopt."

*Richard Morse*

18 September 1948

Richard Morse

**\*\*Hindu Jajmani System:** The scheme of "service interrelationships" among members of a Hindu village community, assigning functional division of village duties and standard forms and rates of compensation; a scheme preserved by religious sanction, custom, and the benefits accruing to village members; the whole scheme being intimately related to the social prestige - caste status - of the community members.

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