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Dear George:

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS OF INDIA

The birth of a nation is always a painful process and certainly the case of India is no exception. It is now just a little over two years—indeed, since India attained her century old ambition to shake off the British rule and stand on her own as a nation. Everyone knew that the racial and religious problems of India were greater than those of almost any other country but it was hoped to the end that in the interest of a Great Future India these differences could be composed and a "modus vivendi" found to let the warring factions work together for the economic and political development of the new nation. But this hope proved to be vain and the bitter hatreds of Hindu and Muslim were too strong to permit such cooperation, with the result that their differences and their quarrels forced a division of India into two nations, at a time when all the strength and energy and the united efforts of the best brains were needed to make a success of the transformation of a crown colony into an independent sovereign state. Thus India became divided into two nations—really three geographical parts.

India proper now has about 320,000,000 people, mostly Hindus, covering an area of 1,250,000 square miles, while east and west Pakistan together have a population of about 80,000,000, mostly Mohammedans, covering an area of approximately 350,000 square miles (or about equal to the combined area of France, Italy, Belgium and Holland). Western Pakistan embraces practically the entire valley of the Indus river and its tributaries, while Eastern Pakistan covers the valleys of the Ganges and some smaller rivers. The two parts of Pakistan are separated by more than one thousand miles of Indian territory and there is at present no railroad service between them and the distance by sea is about three thousand miles. This best illustrates the difficulties of proper communication and business relations between the two parts of the same nation but it does not tell the full sad story from an economic standpoint. Jute, which is called the "golden fibre", grows in what is now East Pakistan but all the mills converting it into exportable form are located in what is now India. Cotton, which is another of the principal crops in that part of the world, grows principally in what is now West Pakistan, but most of the cotton mills are in Bombay and other parts of India. To add to the difficulties of trade barriers have been erected between the two nations with the inevitable result that both of the new nations are suffering greatly, but up to recent weeks the two countries did at least have the same currency—i.e. the "rupee" which had the same value in Pakistan as in India. Even that is no longer true for India followed Great Britain when it devalued the Pound and changed the value of the Rupee proportionately, whereas Pakistan refused to follow so that to all the other difficulties of trade between the two nations there is now added a difference of about 40% between their respective currencies, although both continue to be called "Rupees".

When I left India I could see little hope of an early adjustment of these differences especially as there is still a political controversy raging, which is causing great bitterness in both nations. The question which remains to be settled is the ultimate fate of the rich and important state of Kashmir, which formed the northern part of the old India and adjoins both Pakistan and the new India. Its northern borders touch the boundaries of three countries—Afghanistan, Russia, and China. Its rule, until recently, was the Maharajah of Kashmir—a Hindu, although the vast majority of the population appears to be Moslem. Pakistan is claiming that since the majority of the population is Moslem, Kashmir should properly be a part of Pakistan, and they are accused by India of having given active aid to the northern tribesmen who have been invading Kashmir province by using Pakistan territory as bases for their operations, and supposedly receiving military and other supplies, including gasoline from Pakistan sources. To this the Pakistan's reply that this is not true and that these accusations are but a part of the hostile policy which India has adopted towards Pakistan ever since the partition. Under the influence of this northern invasion and the willing cooperation of the Hindu Maharajah and other political leaders of Kashmir finally declared its accession to the Indian
Union with the inevitable result that the gospel of hatred is being preached more bitterly than ever in both countries. The controversy has now been before the Security Council of the United Nations for nearly two years but though a commission of representatives of five nations was appointed to deal with the problem, no solution is in sight. Even the conciliatory to which both sides agreed in principle seems a long way off and while nominally at peace with each other, the relations between Pakistan and the Indian Union could hardly be worse and except for the fear of strong action by United Nations would probably result in open warfare. When independence was declared, 

Mahatma Gandhi was still alive and Nehru loomed large as a leader of the Hindus and India while Jinnah was the undisputed strong leader of the Moslems and Pakistan. Unfortunately fate has removed two of these strong leaders—Jinnah by natural death and Gandhi at the hands of a fanatic, and I cannot help feeling that some of the present bitterness could have been avoided, or at least ameliorated if these strong men were still here. For all of Gandhi's preachings for passive resistance and freedom from British rule, he invariably admonished his people to be Indians first and Hindus and Mohammedans secondly, and he did all he could to heal the nation of its division. Similarly, Jinnah who was the spiritual and political leader of the Moslems, and who after the separation became the chief spokesman for Pakistan, knew the importance of practical cooperation between the two factions. I think Nehru's task would be far easier today were Jinnah still alive.

Nehru’s recent visit to the United States gave notice to the world that the relations between India and America are most cordial. There is no doubt that World War II brought the two countries much closer together than ever before and until the recent development of foreign exchange difficulties large quantities of American goods were being shipped to India. Temporarily the existing dollar shortage will greatly curtail these shipments but India needs the technical and financial assistance of the United States and ways and means will have to be found to tempt American investors into one of the essential enterprises out there. Peacetime you will be interested to know that during the past five years some six thousand Indian students have been in the various schools and colleges of the United States.

The partition of India has had a most unhappy effect on the economy of both new nations and we in the United States are adversely affected by it. Formerly the various portions of the old India were economically inter-dependent and supplemented each other’s needs quite nicely without foreign exchange difficulties or other commercial barriers. Unfortunately that is no longer true and today all sorts of artificial difficulties have been set up with the result that the economic position of both countries is deteriorating.

The jute trade which in the past furnished 35% of all of India’s exports and more than 66% of her hard currency export revenue, is at a virtual standstill. India, which until now was the world’s greatest exporter of jute, has suddenly become the greatest importer from across her borders in Pakistan. Because of the exchange difficulties, she must pay 144% of the previous price in Indian rupees, not counting the excise tax which Pakistan has put on the export of jute. Since 70% of the jute used is represented by raw jute it is costly to import and since manufacturing costs have risen due to higher wages, the industry is hard put to produce fabrics at a cost that will enable it to retain its foreign markets and compete with cotton and paper substitutes.

The Indian cotton textile mills are in the same position since they must now buy their raw cotton at the much higher Pakistan rupee rate and with higher labor costs and overhead find it increasingly difficult to have Indian products compete successfully in the world’s markets. Tea, next to jute, India’s largest foreign exchange earner, is also confronted with new excise duties on exports, sales taxes, and manifold government controls, and consequently is having great difficulty in maintaining its competitive position in foreign markets.

While I have had no time to check the correctness of the statement, I was told by reliable sources that most, if not all, of the wheat which India is now asking for in the United States could be obtained from Pakistan, but India does not want to pay the extra 44% necessary to meet the presently existing difference in the rate between the Indian and the Pakistan rupee.

Meantime, the general index of commodity prices continues to rise, forcing the government to meet these inflationary tendencies by more and more drastic controls which in turn are having a disturbing effect on business and industry. This is the more serious because India’s industrial development is still in its infancy and needs nothing so much as new—and preferably foreign—capital, which is hardly encouraged to come in under the present disturbed conditions.
All of these comments on the economic problems of India apply with equal force to Pakistan, which is even less developed economically and industrially and therefore even more vulnerable than the rest of old India.

Perhaps the most difficult of all their mutual problems is the uncontrolled migration of over seven million people, which started when the Hindu and Moslem riots in the Punjab developed into local and regional massacres. Both of the relatively inexperienced governments found themselves suddenly confronted with the necessity of coping with the problem of sheltering, feeding and rehautilating millions of human beings who for generations had lived alongside of each other and were imbedded in the social structure of their country. The inflamed fanaticism against which Gandhi had struggled all his life brought much bitterness, internal strife and turmoil which still shoulders under the present peaceful surface. I fear that until the Kashmir dispute is finally settled these internal disputes will continue to poison relations between the two countries that no really friendly understanding can be reached between them.

When you add to the task of absorbing this mass migration area of the other problems that came with partition, you will understand how deep is the crisis and how heavy is the burden these two governments are carrying. Lands producing raw materials have been separated from the districts which had the facilities to manufacture them; commercial centers were separated from their natural hinterland; railroads were separated from their coal supply; transport systems were cut in two and the natural distribution of food supplies and other goods and services was stopped by new and insurmountable barriers.

If in spite of all this I can still express some optimism over the ultimate economic fate of India, it is because I believe that some how a solution will be found to remedy the present impossible situation and that an understanding will be reached that will permit both India and Pakistan to prosper. India's resources are great, her manpower is tremendous, and only a determination to cooperate is needed to succeed.

In finally summarizing my impressions of India I must say that I became intensely interested in the great problems of this ageless land and in the varied pattern of the daily life of its people. I met many people of great culture and profound learning, who helped me greatly to better understand the modern aspects of this fascinating country. Nevertheless, I left India with a deep sense of sadness. I suffered from the misery and despair I saw written in the faces of the poverty stricken masses, I passed in the streets of Calcutta, I asked my friends in that city how they could be so apparently happy and content among such depressing surroundings. Their answer was that they got so used to it that they no longer noticed the filthy novels of the refugees nor the sad condition of the miserably poor, and that I too would soon get over my western sentimentality and forget the woes of the masses if I stayed there long enough.

Another thing that depressed me so much was the unfortunate disunity of the country which manifests itself in so many ways and which will for a long time stand in the way of the true progress of India. At present there is the impression that either the caste system, which for centuries has divided India proper, nor the religious hatred and prejudice that forced the geographical division, are wearing out or even becoming less intense. It is true that one of the cardinal doctrines of Hinduism is "non-hate" and one of the Moslem's principal preachings is the "brotherhood of man" but I could find little evidence that either of these beautiful philosophies are being practiced and one side seems as uncompromising as the other. Christianity on the other hand has not made as much progress in India as had been hoped and appears to be handicapped by the fact that to the average Indian it is synonymous with British rule and looked upon as the expression of a materialistic civilization under which, according to their idea, the rich grow richer and the poor poorer.

There is little evidence of that repose and serenity preached so consistently by Gandhi and his followers and I can see no hope for the realization of that glorious future they predicted for India once the British rule was ended, at least not unless and until internal solidarity can somehow be accomplished and Hindus and Mohammedans stop their quarrels and work together in peace and harmony. "Aid even then their century old aspirations and dreams of becoming a great nation and influence in world affairs can only be fulfilled if better educational facilities and greater sanitation can be brought about. Universal franchise and a really democratic form of government can hardly function properly where eight out of nine adults are illiterate and where disease and starvation prevail.
Thus far the plans for the great educational expansion, the sanitary improve­ments and the relief of the indescribable human misery are still largely on paper but there can be no doubt that profound social changes are in the making and that both Nehru and the Pakistan leaders are making earnest efforts to deal with these complex problems facing their countries today, and that they are sincerely trying to provide for their people a better life than they had under alien rule.

Cordially yours,

R. S. Hecht