

essay

India Government And British Correspondents

by Nirad C. Chaudhuri

I know something about the suspicion against British correspondents in India both on the part of the government and the people. During my prolonged stays in England in 1968 and again from last year, I have heard continuous complaints from fellow Indians here that the British press is prejudiced against India and publishes only damaging and malicious reports about us. Two correspondents of "The Times" more especially, had particular aversion of the government of India. The BBC was the object of even more serious accusations, and Louis Malle's film was taken as the last straw on the camel's back. It was then asked to pack up.

A revolution seems, however, to have taken place since the troubles started in East Pakistan, and these correspondents are now allowed to send reports from Indian territory which would never have been tolerated before. For instance, the BBC was interdicted from working in India. Yet BBC correspondent was allowed to go to Jessore from India and sent a film and report of the massacre of non-Bengali Muslims there. The same correspondent went again to Bengal (after his clash with me on a BBCTV interview in the course of which I turned my back on him, and refused to talk to him unless he withdrew a certain word), and came back impressed by the 'terrific spirit' of the Bangladesh army, which, he told "The Times" on the strength of a major of that army, "had 1,200 men at fire bases established along this 100-mile sector." This was a reference to the old East Pakistan Rifles men who fled into Indian territory. The BBC has obviously been forgiven.

But the strangest part of the revision of the attitude is the relation between the present "Times" correspondent in New Delhi and the government. "The Times" so far back as I can remember, has been regarded in India as our enemy. It began with Sir Valentine Chirol's articles on the Swadeshi movement, and has continued through the review of Katherine Mayo's book. For the time being, however, it seems, "The Times" has been admitted to the favours of the government of India. I cannot explain this except on the most disquieting assumptions. Let me give the facts first.

On May 20, "The Times" published a

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despatch from its correspondent, Mr. Peter Hazelhurst, under the following two-column and three-line heading:

'India and Pakistan on Brink of War as Troops Move to Border'

I quote a number of passages from this long and significant despatch:

(1) "It would seem as if the slightest incident could now start a full-scale war."

(2) "The Hawks believe that India will have to resort to a military solution and move into East Bengal to restore order."

(3) "It seems as if the situation on the border is moving ineluctably towards a confrontation."

(4) "I made a surprise visit to the same post and saw at least one patrol of Sikhs from the Punjab Regiment moving into positions in the fields near the border."

(5) "Most of the troops have been billeted at the large army centre at Barrackpore, 15 miles north of Calcutta, and about 30 miles from the border."

(6) "There are also signs that a large detachment of Indian Army troops have been stationed in Agartala, on the eastern border of East Pakistan."

He went beyond reporting also to make the following prediction about the course of the war:

"With the tenuous communications between East and West Pakistan, President Yahya could not hold the might of the Indian Army in the eastern sector in the event of war. He would inevitably have to open up a front in West Pakistan and Kashmir to divert a section of

the Indian Army from Bengal.

As Mr. Hazelhurst himself gave the strength of the Indian Army in Bengal as three and a half divisions and of the Pakistan Army in East Bengal as four divisions or so, it is difficult to understand his pretentious military prognostication. We who are mere Bengalis remember that in the war of 1965 when a relatively small force could have overrun East Bengal, the government of India did not open up a second front on that side.

On the 24th May again "The Times" published another despatch from Mr. Hazelhurst under the following three-column and two-line heading:

'Calcutta prepares Air Defences As troops Dig in on Border'

I quote two passages from this despatch:

(1) "A full battery of anti-aircraft guns was moved on to the eastern perimeter of the airport yesterday morning. The gunners were seen aligning their radar sets and setting guns in an easterly direction. This would indicate that the Indian government is preparing itself for something more than a limited border conflict."

(2) "At least three regiments from northern India, the Punjab Regiment, the Rajputs, and the Maratha Light Infantry, are in the vanguard on the Jessore front. Recoiless anti-tank guns, mounted on Jeeps have moved up to within 50 yards of the border, and Sikhs and Rajputs were seen within hundred yards of the frontier constructing fortifications and dugouts along the

disused railway line connecting India and East Bengal."

Some very strange and significant points are to be noted in connection with these reports:

First, a foreign correspondent is playing up the idea of an inevitable and general war between Pakistan as imminent.

Secondly, he is allowed to observe the report details of troop movements, deployment, armaments, and defensive works, even to identify units of the army.

Thirdly, he predicts the results.

Let me assert this categorically: that no country in the world if it means business ever allows anyone, not to speak of foreign correspondents, to observe and report military dispositions in this manner. Even the idea of a war is not allowed to be played up. The suspicion is unavoidable that "The Times" correspondent is doing all this with the tacit consent if not at the instance of India government. On any other supposition it is incomprehensible.

Next, the idea of a war between India and Pakistan over the happenings in East Bengal is not only very unsound and improbable, but also dangerous. I will say this without any fear of being falsified by events that there is no likelihood of a war between Pakistan and India, unless both the people of India and with them the government of India go completely mad. To make no bones about its consequences, it will mean the end of independence for both countries. Much as I distrust the government of

India I credit with this amount of common sense.

Indeed, the foreign correspondents themselves have begun to play down the idea. There is another scatter-brained foreign correspondent in India who fastens upon anything that in her opinion will make a good story. She is Clare Hollingworth, and even she has been playing down the idea of a war between the two countries. In one of her latest despatches, published in the "Daily Telegraph" of May 27, she writes:

"There is no sign of any military preparations being made on the Bengal frontier for either offensive or defensive action involving Pakistan."

"The Indian General Staff is in a relaxed mood despite the problems. The Chief of the Air Force is about to leave for Paris, and the Army Chief of Staff is proposing to go on leave."

"It is clear that the top brass in New Delhi does not envisage a major outbreak of hostilities."

All this flatly contradicts Mr. Hazelhurst, and Clare Hollingworth seems to be quite at home in the defence headquarters, as Mr. Hazelhurst is perhaps in the External Affairs Ministry.

Even Mr. Hazelhurst has become aware that he has probably overplayed, his hand, and he tried to beat a retreat as discreetly and face-savingly as he could in a despatch published in his paper on the 28th May. Here is the passage:

"Reports that monsoon rains will flood East Bengal within the next seven days have lessened the chances of Indo-Pakistan conflict for the time being.

But it is increasingly obvious that India might be forced into a war when the sun shines again if her economy and social peace continue to be threatened by the huge influx of refugees from East Pakistan.

"For the present the world can be grateful for the forbearance and wisdom of the Nehru family."

This is capital, for we know what the wisdom of Nehru himself did for us and the world (if the world was at all affected) in a war with China. So long we Indians have made a virtue of necessity, now the job has been passed on to our British friends.

But the really important question to put is why Mr. Peter Hazelhurst is being given opportunities to collect information and write as he is doing?

I can only say that knowingly or unknowingly, he is playing the part of a publicity agent for the government of India in order to serve certain ends of our foreign policy.

The government of India has found that no amount of threats on its part will make the Pakistan government change its policy in East Bengal, and also that all its diplomatic notes will not make foreign governments put any kind of pressure in order to compel the Pakistan government to come to terms with the Muslims of East Bengal. Yet the government of India feels that it has an obligation to those people, and should give an appearance of doing something for them. Therefore, it seems to me that it is presenting the bogey of a war between India and Pakistan, with all its possibilities of involvement of the great powers and a world war, to frighten these powers into forcing Pakistan to make concession to the Muslims of East Bengal. Of course, this is a very naive maneuver. But there is hardly any other open to the government of India, with the exception of actual war, which certainly will not be risked. Mr. Hazelhurst's despatches, with all their unreliability as reporting and mischievousness as propaganda, fall within the framework of such a policy. Whether it is due to Mr. Hazelhurst's personal commitment to India or to promptings from the government of India, I cannot say. But whatever the inspiration, the writing itself is highly irresponsible.

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book review

A Hymn of Love

by Minou Moshiri

THERE is no doubt about it. None whatsoever. Raana Haider, whose husband is the present and distinguished Ambassador of Bangladesh to Iran, is in love! The object of her love? Well, none other than the splendour that is Paris. Can you blame her?

Paris is probably the only real improvement upon Nature that Man has ever achieved. Everything about it is right. The boulevards and avenues are just the right width, the buildings are just the right size, the river is placed just right, and is just wide enough; the colours, the forms, sounds and smells are right. Every street in Paris has something at the end of it: it may be a statue or a monumental building, or only a tree. However, it is there to look at; and facing it, be it a mile away, is something to balance it. Paris is the only city in the world that has enough trees, flowers and places to sit down and contemplate Life.

However, Paris' supreme quality, one that is wholly its own, is that it is the loveliest thing that Man ever built. Here is proof that when men have a common dream, they make it come true. For generations, the French have been thinking: "Here shall be a city that, as nearly as we can make it so, shall be wholly beautiful." And they have done it.

Raana Haider is a sociologist and *Parisian Portraits* published in English in January 2000 by The University Press Limited (UPL) Dhaka, Bangladesh, is not her first book. Her last, *A Perspective in Development: Gender Focus* was published by UPL in 1995 and a second edition appeared in January 2000. The American University in Cairo Press also published the same book under the title *Gender and Development* in 1996.

Parisian Portraits is a veritable hymn of love dedicated to the City of Lights. This well-researched, lively and fun-to-read book covers the multi-faceted aspects of this most beautiful of all cities. In this book, Raana Haider traces the city's history from its first settlers, the Parisii, a Celtic tribe of hunters, farmers and boatmen in 300 BC to the present day. Beside its history, she delves into its culture, architecture, museums, language, gastronomy, social

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structure, art and auctions, high fashion and perfumes, and even the national character with its sense of superiority and egotism. Her tale is seasoned with entertaining quotations and anecdotes which greatly add to its charm. To give you a taste, she quotes Gustave Flaubert who maintains that the French are "the first people of the universe", or Victor Hugo who claims "France, France without you the world would be alone". I particularly enjoyed Mark Twain's quotation with regard to the language, "In Paris, they simply stared at me when I spoke to them in French; I never did succeed in making those idiots understand their own language." As to the French gastronomy, well, it is considered such an art that believe it or not, an Academy of Gastronomy was set up in 1928 with forty seats patterned on the prestigious French Academy; each seat bearing, if you please, the symbolic title of an immortal gourmet, among them Epicurus....

Equally entertaining are the chapters on the Crazy Years of Paris in the 20's or even the 50's when we renew acquaintance with the rich, the chic and the famous, including such distinguished expatriates as James Joyce (who wrote *Ulysses* there), Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein and her famous literary salon where such men of letters met. In the 50's at the Left Bank cafes of Paris frequented by Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Andre Gide, Andre Breton, Juliette Greco and Francoise Sagan, we meet all manners of the literati dazzled by the city.

To some of us — and Raana Haider illustrates my claim par excellence — Europe means just one place: Paris.

Thither we want to go, and thither gone, there shall we sit. If you succeed in luring us elsewhere — to Florence, to Vienna, to Munich — we dutifully gaze, explore, admire and even praise. But we are thinking all the time of Paris, to which, under no matter what pretext, we shall forthwith return.

When people spoke to me of the 'excitement' of New York, I felt nonplussed. Before my first visit there, I had read and heard a great deal about it, but nothing prepared me for certain everyday phenomena — for the hellish smoke that rises through holes in the streets as if from Dante's Inferno, or even the electric shocks that stung me each time I crossed a nylon-carpeted room to open a door, switch on a light, even stroke a cat. Yet I never realised the depth of my love for Paris until I saw New York!

As pointed out by Raana Haider, instead of the utterly unimaginative numbered streets of New York with their 1st, 2nd, 3rd, East, West; streets in Paris bear the names of French artists, writers, musicians, scientists, statesmen or even saints. I suppose we have to be tolerant of the New Yorkers; they simply do not have a Monet or a Manet, a Voltaire or a Victor Hugo, a Louis Pasteur or a Madame Curie.

Raana Haider touches on the 'americanization' of Paris. I dearly hope to God that the presence of fastfood outlets such as MacDonald's on the Champs-Elysees, or stores such as GAP and Virgin Megastore, or the foreign words which have penetrated the beautiful French language such as le drugstore, le weekend etc.... will be wiped out of the French capital for ever and ever.... and ever. Otherwise, I suggest the intervention of the UN forces!

There is one chapter in the book, I

could have happily done without! This is the chapter on Pamela Harriman, the late American Ambassador to France. People whose only claim to fame depends on the profusion of their husbands, their wealth, their lifestyle and internationally highly-placed connections leave me quite cold, sorry to say. On the other hand, I am very glad to say when Raana Haider reminisces about her beloved Paris in the end, she does not necessarily think of Mrs. Harriman & co., or the couturiers (and that with all due respect and unbound admiration for the unique French *du chic*). Rather, she remembers the pale cream stucco of old stone, the shadow of leaves on a sunspeck white street, contorted chimneys on grey slate roofs against a dove-blue sky. Here I cannot but wonder why this book is not illustrated with appropriate photographs, illustrations or sketches to do justice to the subject and further enhance the enjoyment of its reading.

However, up in the attic of the mind is a trunk, marked 'Paris' and it is packed to the brim with souvenirs and images — walks alone the quays, view of the Arc de Triomphe from the Tuilleries, the regiments of trees in the Bois de Boulogne, the Pont Royal, the Sacre Coeur, the Notre-Dame; all old, wise and vague in the darkness.

You do not anticipate it. You do not plan for it. It merely befalls you like love or influenza. I mean the passionate way you feel about Paris after visiting it only once. You remain dazzled for the rest of your entire life and keep repeating in your dreams, "Paris, I shall return."

And all this, Raana Haider illustrates beautifully and par excellence as she is so fond of saying. Courtesy of Iran News.

poems

Pleasant Hearth

by Maj Gen Z A Khan (Retd)

The world moves on at hightech speed
Paving way for journey by a breed
Who believes that the future is bleak
Unless one is on a winning streak.
This stokes 'nouveau riche' to gloat
Over those that can hardly keep afloat
Because of shackles of abject poverty
That put the lives of toiling mass in jeopardy.
Recovery from their ceaseless suffering seems slim
And their thatched shanties may never gleam
Unless the windfall luck braces their being
And rich and poor bind each other in a string
Of love that will ramify their attitude
To unite all to seek freedom from servitude
Only thus can we make the world worth
For those struggling for a pleasant hearth.

A Message

Helal Kabir Chowdhury

His poignant words
Before death were not
Normal, when everything in
His body was sagging, he
Beseeched God to give him
Some more days to live, then
He fell into a deep coma.

The weeping siblings were
All around him watching
The agony of a passerby
Who will soon pass on
To a new world.
A mute onlooker poured
A drop of water and
He uttered 'Allah'.

The old-man was bold
And fought mentally but
Braved mortality.

That was the end of it.
You will too pass off
One day and try to
Be bold like the
Old man I saw.

Moving

by Razia Sultana Khan

They were noisy neighbors.
We heard them all day long:
doors slamming, voices shrieking
The noise of children growing up;
The sounds of a marriage breaking down.
We felt the energy of their hope
and the darkness of their despair.
Then it happened.
The family broke. They left — where? Who knows?
I sit at my window and contemplate the house.