



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I was very disappointed to learn that Ms Sonia Gandhi had not the courage to take up the position of Prime Minister of India. If she had taken up the job, offered to her on a platter, so to speak, then, there would have been one more woman in the world, in an ultimate position of power: I, running Hongkong; Queen Elizabeth II, running Great Britain and Northern Island; Helen Clark, running New Zealand; Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, running The Philippines; Sonia Gandhi, running India, and Juliette John Paul II, running The Vatican. Talk about people-power, then, you must talk about woman-power! I was not disappointed in Ms Sonia Gandhi's choice of Manmohan Singh as the person to take over the reins of the Government of India, however. He is the first Sikh Prime Minister of India, you know. I suppose it is time for Sikhs to have their turn at bat, to use a cricket term. I like the towel that he wears on his head, too. Very convenient, I would think, if one were caught short. Mr Manmohan Singh has the right credentials, too, having been educated in Oxford, England. He, probably, played in the Blue Team, by the looks of his physique. He is a bit long in the tooth for my liking, though, being seventy one years old. Hopefully, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will not forget with which hand to eat his chapati: Not the right hand, I would hope. Of course, I fully appreciate that it is the woman, standing behind the man, who pulls his strings ... and things. Talking about food and table manners, the last time that I visited Buckingham Palace and took tea with Queen Elizabeth, I was delighted with the way that she entertained me. The cucumber finger sandwiches and the watercress sandwiches were very nice, too. If Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is invited to tea with Queen Elizabeth, I suppose that curry puffs will be served instead of finger sandwiches. I suppose, also, that you know that Mrs Indira Gandhi, the mother-in-law of Sonia Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister of India between 1966 and 1977, and, again, between 1980 and 1984, was assassinated by an adherent of Sikhism, one of her personal bodyguards, in fact. The assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi followed the fighting in Amritsar on June 6, 1984, when the Indian Government, in an effort to check terrorism, instigated by Sikhs militants, who were demanding greater autonomy for The Punjab, sent troops to occupy the Golden Temple, claiming that terrorists had been using it as their headquarters. Six hundred Sikhs and Indian soldiers were killed in that confrontation. Sikhism, founded in northern India by Nanak (1469-1539), the first saintly guru, a mystic, who believed that God transcends religious distinctions and, being a combination of elements of Hinduism and Islam, it has a wide following on the Indian Continent. Every Sikh carries a dagger, you know. Sikhism is not as widely practised as Confucianism, of course, but it is on the correct wavelength. I would hope that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh would follow the path of Mahatma (Sanskrit for 'the Great Soul') Gandhi's campaign of non-violent, civil resistance. You will recall, My Dear Grandchild, that Mahatma Gandhi was that skinny little Indian, of the merchant caste, who only wore a loincloth to cover up his little privates. He did not like the British rule of India and led the country to independence in 1947. He, too, studied in England. As a London-trained lawyer, and, later, as a political activist, he effectively fought discrimination with his principles of truth, non-violence, and courage. He, too, was invited to take tea with Queen Elizabeth, you know. It seems that, when one is invited to take tea with Queen Elizabeth, it means that one has arrived. I note that President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has never been invited to go to Buckingham Palace.

Getting back to Sikhism, have you realised that religion, over the centuries, has been the main excuse for insurrection and indiscriminate killing. In Iraq, today, one sees one schism of the Muslim faith, fighting for superiority over the other schism: Shi'ite versus Sunni. These two schisms are not even ganging up against the American occupation of the country, but prefer to fight among themselves, first, in spite of both adherents of the Muslim faith, disliking the US Government's control of the country. According to the latest reports, about one hundred thousand Iraqis have been killed by their own kind. Wonderful is it not? During the past eight months or so, there have been one Muslim cleric after another, who, openly, have defied the Americans and have been urging their armed fighters to kill as many Americans as possible and to take the American women soldiers as their sex slaves, as soon as they can catch them. I wonder in which sura of the Q'ran does it advocate such acts? Less than two years ago, in the State of Gujarat, mobs murdered Muslims after the word went out that Muslims had been responsible for the deaths of quite a number of Hindus on a train.

Yes, religion can be, and has been, an excuse for all kinds of horrible acts, perpetrated by man against man. Man is the only animal on this planet, who kills for the joy of killing, you know. I, sincerely, hope that Mr Manmohan Singh is cut from a different kind of cloth.

I must go, now, because I still have to organise the clearing up of the living room after the celebrations to mark Buddha's birthday.

Love you,

The Chief Lady of Hongkong

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