

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

*I was horrified, last week, on reading about the attacks on Mumbai, the financial capital of India. I was further shocked to learn that the attacks had been carried out by Muslim extremists who had been trained in Pakistan. Just 10 young men did so much damage and killed, wounded and/or maimed some 400 innocent people. What causes people, especially young people with their entire lives before them, to become murderers, knowing fully well that their chances of surviving the attacks were almost zero? If their professed religion had been the *raison d'être* for their actions, then, most right-minded people, around the world, would look upon the Muslim religion and try to ponder: For what reason would a monotheistic religion, the second-largest in existence in today's world, advocate the taking of innocent lives? It is beyond comprehension. The Indian Government is said to be on a war footing, now, having hard evidence that the 10 extremists came from Pakistan where, clearly, they obtained their training and expertise in the use of firearms and advanced military tactics. If the Pakistan Government is responsible, one way or another, this is, really, an explosive situation. I choose to think that, even if the killers were trained in Pakistan, it is unlikely that the Pakistan Government knew of the plot to attack those 'soft' targets in Mumbai. Time will tell, no doubt. However, there is a far deeper side to this attack, you know. India has a very large Muslim population, but the devotees in India of the religion of Islam are very much in the minority, Hinduism, being the dominant religion of the country. It is well known that the Muslims of India feel that they have been marginalised to a very great extent. Also, it is well known that they feel that they have not been awarded an equal, or similar, status as have the devotees of Hinduism. There are about 1.15 billion people, living in India, today. Of that number, the main, organised and fully established religions are:*

- (a) 926 million people, practicing the religion of Hinduism;*
- (b) 116 million people, practicing the religion of Islam;*
- (c) 2.65 million people, being professed Christians; and,*
- (d) 2.19 million people, being followers of the Sikh religion.*

*The above data has been supplied by the Indian Government for the calendar year, ended December 31, 2001, and, although it is, obviously dated material, it, at least, gives one an indication of the huge numbers of Muslims, living in the largest democracy of the world. As is obvious on scanning the above figures, the Muslim residents of India, while they are, clearly, a religious minority in the country, can, or, are, potentially, a very powerful force that should never have been marginalised, if that is, truly, the case, and the Government of India should never have permitted them to have been marginalised, *de facto* or *de jure*.*

Now, the cat, so to speak, is out of the bag. For al-Qaeda, the multinational alliance of Islamist terrorist groups, engaged in a universal jihad against the United States of America, its allies, and friends, which was, originally, established as Al-Qaeda al Sulbah (The Solid Base) in Peshawar, Pakistan, in 1988, and

terrorist organisations of that ilk, there are more than 116 million Muslims in India, many of whom, no doubt, could be candidates for training as suicide bombers and what-have-you to be scattered and installed as 'sleepers' in any part of the world. Theoretically, India's Muslim population could well be a tinderbox to ferment international horrors, the likes of which, the world has yet to imagine. Any war between India and Pakistan could pale to insignificance if al-Qaeda et al determines to tap some of the 116 million Muslims of India in order to recruit some of them to do the bidding of the leaders of international terrorist groups. The ramifications of what is possible in India are just too horrible to envisage. But who could have believed, prior to September 11, 2001, that al-Qaeda could have attacked New York and brought down The World Trade Center, killing more than 3,000 people? But it happened. And, last week, 10 Muslim extremists attacked targets in Mumbai and stunned the world with the military precision of the attacks, which lasted for more than 50 hours. Even the Indian Government's Army was shocked at the way in which some of those 10 killers were able to outwit the elite Indian Army troops. The Government of India, over the years, has proved itself to be incompetent to a greater or lesser extent, depending on who was voted into power. India has faced, and continues to face, one problem after another, and each successive government has been unable, or unwilling, to resolve the many and complex problems of the country. The very significant over-population of the country is legend. Environmental degradation and extensive poverty is rampant. And ethnic and religious strife continues, unabated, since the death of the Hindu Indian statesman, Mahatma Gandhi, in 1948. Whereas Mahatma Gandhi advocated passive resistance and proved that it was a more powerful force than any weaponry, ever devised by man in history, al-Qaeda has chosen murder as its weapon of choice, using formerly innocent young men and women as the progenitors of their deadly escapades. Since the death by murder of Mahatma Gandhi, India has never had a leader of his depth of intellect and devotion to the country. One of his lesser-known literary efforts was simply entitled: 'My Experiments With The Truth'. It is not on the list of required reading in any school, anywhere.

My Dear Grandchild, I fear for the worst if man cannot live in harmony with his neighbour. Cultural and religious differences can be resolved, as did Mahatma Gandhi show the world. It is possible that matters, cutting through cultural and religious divides, can be traversed. All that is required, actually, is understanding, calmness, honesty, dedication, and fidelity. Is that too difficult a task for modern man?

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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