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# THE INDIAN BOY

(A Talk for the BBC by C. H. Barry, Principal of Aitchison College, Lahore)

MANY of you probably think of India as a country of heat and dust and snakes and flies, which would be about as true as it would be to say that England is mainly famous for her fogs, suet puddings, and boiled cabbage. Indian crowds are not perpetually hitting one another over the heads with brickbats and soda water bottles, however frequently riots and civil commotions may capture the headlines. Indeed, an Indian crowd, on the occasion of a great religious festival, can be just as cheerful and good-tempered, and just as easily pleased, as our own crowds here in England on Victory Day or Bank Holiday.

In the same way, Indian university students are not in the habit of walking out of examination halls, or of staging a sit-down strike, merely because they do not happen to like a particular question-paper, or disapprove of a professor, although these things do happen. But it would be only too easy to get them out of proportion, and I should like to try to focus your attention upon an aspect of Indian life in which I happen to be particularly interested. When you have watched Indian children, as I have, from the earliest stages of sitting in their patient rows in the village schools, and yelling their multiplication tables at the tops of their voices, or flying their paper kites from the roof-tops of a crowded city, and have been associated with them in their long progress to the universities, and into the life of the country, it would be unnatural not to have developed a very warm feeling of affection for them.

## "Not Bitterly Divided"

From a casual study of the Indian political situation it would be easy to form the impression that Indians are bitterly divided by religious differences, which cut across all economic and social divisions. But it has long been one of my most fundamental convictions (and you will realise that I am speaking for no one but myself) that in this sense there is not really a communal, or religious, problem at all. When I am told that Muslims are a separate nation, and cannot live amicably with Hindus, I remember the thousands of Punjab villages in which they have long lived perfectly happily side by side, and I think of the boys at Aitchison College, Lahore, among whom there are no religious differences which cannot be by-passed or absorbed in the loyalties which arise from a healthy school community.

If you were to walk round the college grounds with me, you would soon feel quite at home, for boys are very much the same whether their skins are brown or white or black. It would not be long before you learned to tell a Muslim from a Hindu, by his dress and turban; and you would be very quick to recognise a Sikh, whose religion does not allow him to cut his hair, so that he wears a straggly beard by the time he is sixteen or seventeen, and is obliged to play hockey with a ridiculous little 'bun' on the top of his head. Indeed, if your visit were on a Sunday morning, you

might think you had strayed into a girls' school by mistake, for you would find groups of Sikh boys, of all ages and sizes, drying their long hair in the sun, after the weekly wash, some of them with eyelashes which would create a sensation in Hollywood.

Of course, I do not want you to run away with the idea that there are not great differences of religious practice and belief between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. It would be merely stupid of me to suggest that, but what I do believe is that these differences need not affect the life of the people, outside their places of worship, and that they are merely used by politicians as a substitute for any genuine economic or political convictions. Many of the older boys, themselves, would be quick to resent any suggestion that they are Muslims, or Hindus, or Sikhs, before they are Indians, and would assure you that the communalism of which you hear so much, need not be such an unhealthy influence as it has become in recent years.

## Students Too Often Blamed

Equally they would deny the accusation that Indian boys are unhealthily interested in politics. They would argue that you cannot give a boy a modern education, interest him in world events, and encourage him to think for himself, and then expect him to be satisfied with all the outworn conventions, and customs of Indian society, or to be unconcerned with the welfare and fortunes of his own country.

But the exaggeration of this outlook and interest, and its direction into unprofitable channels, is the responsibility, not of the students, but rather of the press and politicians. When a riot occurs in which students have taken part, it has become a habit for political leaders to raise hands of pious horror, and to shed crocodile tears, conveniently forgetting that it is they themselves who are really to blame. Not long ago a distinguished Indian friend said to me: 'Struggling to learn the lessons of western civilisation, without destroying her own culture, Indian society has so far failed to achieve any working synthesis of both,' and it is to fill the moral and social gap created by this situation that the group of schools with which I am associated is particularly concerned.

At present there are not more than 10 or 12 of these schools, and their output is, therefore, comparatively small. For want of a better name, they are called Indian Public Schools, although we stoutly maintain that they have managed to adapt many of the virtues, without copying all the faults, of Public Schools in England. Although there are not nearly enough of these schools, they have already made a contribution to Indian life which is out of all proportion to their number. For instance, until the recent elections, one of the members of the Viceroy's Executive Council, and three members of the Punjab Cabinet were old boys of Aitchison College; many of the ruling Princes of northern India, including the well-known Maharaja of Patiala, are Aitchisonians, and the Nawab of Pataudi, who is Captain

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