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April 21, 1971

Dear Mr. Rakshit,

I was very glad to receive your interesting letter of April 14 and I am glad you wrote to me.

I appreciate the strength of feeling which animated you though I must confess I find it difficult to understand why there should have been any anguish on your part simply because I described Mrs. Gandhi as "the heroine of the drama". Of course, I could have described her as Mrs. Gandhi or the Prime Minister as suggested by you in your letter but, since I have so described her in the article at least twenty times, both the reader and I could get bored of reading the same name or description. If therefore I somewhat facetiously described her in the manner I did, I did so in order to evoke a faint smile on the face of the reader. There is nothing objectionable or offensive about calling anyone a heroine; it would be different if I called him or her a villain. Don't you think a little sense of humour and a concession to a figure of speech is called for when reading an article?

The extreme touchiness by you about how we should describe the Prime Minister of the country is not a very good thing in a democracy. Nobody in England minds what Harold Wilson or Ted Heath or Mr. Macmillan is called nor in America does any one mind what Lyndon Johnson or Nixon is called. I fear a slight touch of the cult of personality literally begins to get into our thinking when we start being so touchy about our own Nehrus.

Mind you, I say all this while agreeing with your main proposition that one should not use undignified language. My point is that there is nothing undignified in the phrase I used. I hope this explanation will help to remove the bad taste that has remained so needlessly in your mouth.

Anyway, I am very glad that you wrote to me and my letter will show you that not only have I not resented your doing so, but I have actually enjoyed this exchange of views between us.

Yours truly,

(M. R. Masani)

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MMH:ri