FRIENDS OF GANDHI

Correspondence of Mahatma Gandhi with Esther Færing (Menon), Anne Marie Petersen and Ellen Hørup

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Gandhi-Informations-Zentrum, Berlin
The Danish Peace Academy, Copenhagen
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

ESTHER FAERING (MENON)\(^1\)

Biographical note

Correspondence with Gandhi\(^2\)

Gandhi to Miss Faering, January 11, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, January 15, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 20, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 31, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, April 15, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, April 17, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, May 2, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, May 13, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, May 19, 1917
Miss Faering to Gandhi, May 20, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, May 26, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, June 9, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, June 11, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, June 17, 1917
Miss Faering to Gandhi, June 22, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, June 30, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, July 1, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, July 8, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, July 14, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, August 3, 1917

\(^1\) Miss Esther Faering married E. Kuhni Menon in 1921.
\(^2\) Including her letters to associates of Gandhi and Gandhi’s letters to her daughters, Nan and Tangai.
Gandhi to Miss Faering, August 12, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, September 5, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, September 6, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, October 4, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, December 12, 1917
Gandhi to Miss Faering, January 13, 1918
Gandhi to Miss Faering, April 2, 1918
Gandhi to Miss Faering, April 8, 1918
Gandhi to Miss Faering, May 11, 1918
Gandhi to Miss Faering, June 30, 1918
Gandhi to Miss Faering, July 9, 1918
Gandhi to Miss Faering, July 22, 1918
Gandhi to Miss Faering, undated, 1918
Gandhi to Miss Faering, January 25, 1919
Miss Faering to Mahadev Desai, March 24, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering, April 1, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering, April 10, 1919
Miss Faering to Mahadev Desai and Gandhi, April 23-24, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering, April 29, 1919
Miss Faering to Mahadev Desai, May 4, 1919
Miss Faering to Gandhi, May 22, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering, May 28, 1919
Miss Faering to Gandhi, June 10, 1919
Miss Faering to Gandhi, June 20, 1919
Miss Faering to Gandhi, June 25 and 30, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering, June 27, 1919

3 Mahadev (or Mahadeo) Haribhai Desai, secretary to Gandhi
Gandhi to Miss Faering, August 24, 1919
Miss Faering to Gandhi, August 25, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering [after August 25, 1919]
Miss Faering to Gandhi, September 15, 1919
Miss Faering to Gandhi, September 21, 1919
Miss Faering to Gandhi, September 27, 1919
Miss Faering to Gandhi, September 29, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering (telegram), October 4, 1919
Miss Faering to Gandhi, October 10, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering, October 23, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering, October 24, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering, October 27, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering, October 28, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering, October 31, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering [after November 4, 1919]
Gandhi to Miss Faering, December 4, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering, December 7, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering, December 14, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Faering [on or after January 16, 1920]
Miss Faering to Gandhi, January 20, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, January 24, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, January 25, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, January 26, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, January 29, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, January 30, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, February 1, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, February 1, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, February 4, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, February 5, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, February 8, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, February 10, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, February 12, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, February 15, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, February 22, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 3, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 14, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 16, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 17, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 18, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 19, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 21, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 22, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 25, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 30, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, April 15, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, May 2, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, May 9, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, May 16, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, May 21, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, June 25, 1920
Gandhi to Miss Faering, September 2, 1920
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, September 4, 1921
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon (telegram), January 11, 1922

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Miss Faering married Mr. Kuhni Menon in 1921.
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, February 5, 1922
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, March 8, 1922
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, March 17, 1922
Mrs. Menon to Gandhi (telegram), January 16, 1924
Mrs. Menon to Devadas Gandhi⁵, January 21, 1924
Mrs. Menon to Gandhi, September 30, 1924
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, October 5, 1925
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, December 11, 1925
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, February 10, 1926
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, April 30, 1926
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, June 23, 1926
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, July 16, 1926
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, August 8, 1926
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, August 20, 1926
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, September 17, 1926
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, October 27, 1926
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, before March 26, 1927
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, February 18, 1928
Mrs. Menon to Gandhi, March 21, 1928
Mrs. Menon to Gandhi, May 20, 1928
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, June 22, 1928
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, October 12, 1928
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, January 25, 1929
Mrs. Menon to Gandhi, June 18, 1929
Mrs. Menon to Gandhi, undated [1929]
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, June 7, 1931
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, January 21, 1932

⁵ Devadas (or Devdas) Gandhi, fourth and youngest son of Mahatma Gandhi
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, February 28, 1932
Gandhi to Nan Menon, February 28, 1932
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, April 13, 1932
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, May 22, 1932
Gandhi to Nan and Tangai Menon, May 22, 1932
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, May 29, 1932
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, July 18, 1932
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, August 4, 1932
Gandhi to Nan Menon and others, August 24, 1932
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, September 30, 1932
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, October 4, 1932
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, November 11, 1932
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, November 25, 1932
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, January 5, 1933
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, February 10, 1933
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, February 17, 1933
Gandhi to Tangai Menon, February 23, 1933
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, February 23, 1933
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, March 2, 1933
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, March 24, 1933
Mrs. Menon to Gandhi, April 25, 1933
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, May 7, 1933
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, December 15, 1933
Gandhi to Nan and Tangai Menon, January 15, 1934
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, February 20, 1934
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, February 22, 1934
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, February 25, 1934
Gandhi to Nan Menon, February 25, 1934
Gandhi to Tangai Menon, February 25, 1934
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, March 15, 1934
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, April 1, 1934
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, June 30, 1934
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, September 6, 1934
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, September 23, 1934
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, October 14, 1934
Mrs. Menon to Gandhi, [before November 14, 1934] (extracts)
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, November 14, 1934
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, January 5, 1935
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, January 17, 1935
Gandhi to Tangai Menon, January 17, 1935
Gandhi to Nan Menon, January 17, 1935
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, February 25, 1935
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, after February 25, 1935
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, on or after April 30, 1936
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, May 14, 1936
Gandhi to Nan and Tangai Menon, May 14, 1936
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, May 18, 1936
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, June 19, 1936
Gandhi to Nan Menon, June 26, 1936
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, March 26, 1940
Gandhi to Mrs. Menon, after March 26, 1940
MISS ANNE MARIE PETERSEN

Biographical note

Correspondence with Gandhi
Miss Petersen to Gandhi, December 1, 1919
Gandhi to Miss Petersen, January 13, 1920
Miss Petersen to Gandhi, [before September 8, 1920]
Miss Petersen to Gandhi, January 29, 1924
Miss Petersen to Devdas Gandhi, January 29, 1924
Miss Petersen to Gandhi, September 23, 1924
Miss Petersen to Gandhi, September 24, 1924
Gandhi to Miss Petersen (telegram), March 5, 1925
Miss Petersen to Gandhi, June 7, 1926
Miss Petersen to Gandhi, May 4, 1928
Gandhi to Miss Petersen, May 11, 1928
Miss Petersen to Gandhi, January 15, 1929
Gandhi to Miss Petersen, January 20, 1929
Gandhi to Miss Petersen, August 16, 1931
Gandhi to Miss Petersen, January 22, 1932
Gandhi to Miss Petersen, June 4, 1932
Gandhi to Miss Petersen, March 2, 1933
Miss Petersen to Gandhi, March 14, 1933
Gandhi to Miss Petersen, March 21, 1933
Pyarelal⁶ to Miss Petersen, November 26, 1944

⁶ Gandhi’s secretary
Gandhi to Miss Petersen, August 23, 1945
Gandhi to Miss Petersen, September 5, 1945
Gandhi to Miss Petersen, October 2, 1945
Rajkumari Amrit Kaur\textsuperscript{7} to Miss Petersen, October 6, 1945
Gandhi to Miss Petersen, October 16, 1945

MRS. ELLEN HØRUP

Biographical note

Correspondence with Gandhi
  Mrs. Hørup to Gandhi, May 2, 1929
  Mrs. Hørup to Gandhi, June 6, 1931
  Mrs. Hørup to Gandhi, November 4, 1931
  Mrs. Hørup to Gandhi, February 6, 1933
  Gandhi to Mrs. Hørup, February 23, 1933
  Mrs. Hørup to Gandhi (telegram), May 8, 1933
  Gandhi to Mrs. Hørup, May 6, 1947

APPENDIX

Meeting of Mrs. Ellen Hørup and Ms. Caroline (Bokken) Lasson with Gandhi, February 1931

\textsuperscript{7} Gandhi’s associate who acted as his secretary for some time
INTRODUCTION

While doing research on Gandhi’s contacts with people outside India, I was surprised to find that he had corresponded with many men and women from Nordic countries. I had known of his letters to Miss Esther Faering (later Mrs. Menon) as Navajivan published them in 1956 under the title My Dear Child – but not of letters to or from others. I could not even find biographical information about Miss Faering except what could be derived from the letters.

I compiled the letters of Gandhi to people in Nordic countries and to people from Nordic countries in India, mostly missionaries, from the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, as well as letters to him, which were available in the Gandhi archives in Ahmedabad and the National Gandhi Museum in New Delhi. I was anxious to contact a Nordic scholar to obtain information about the correspondents and was referred to Frede Højgaard, a historian who had edited a publication of the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) on Nordic contacts with Gandhi.8 I hoped to meet him on a visit to Copenhagen but found that he had passed away at an early age.

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Fortunately, some time later, Christian Bartolf of the Gandhi Information Center in Berlin introduced me to Holger Terp who had written an article on “Ellen Hørup and Mohandas Gandhi” for the NIAS publication. A librarian who had retired because of poor eyesight, Mr. Terp was a conscientious objector who had been active in the peace movement. He was a co-founder of the Danish Peace Academy and has edited its website since 2000. He was a godsend to me.

He did an enormous amount of research about the correspondents of Gandhi and on Nordic interest in Gandhi and India, and traced valuable material in the Danish libraries and archives, including some correspondence of Gandhi that was not available in India.

He put up all the correspondence we collected, together with biographical information on the correspondents and available photographs, on the website of:

The Danish Peace Academy  
www.fredakademiet.dk/library/nordic/

This book contains the correspondence of Gandhi with three Danish women – Esther (Faering) Menon, Anne Marie Petersen and Ellen Hørup - who admired him as a person and supported the movement he led for the independence of India. The intimate friendship of Gandhi with these
women is a significant episode in the relations between India and Denmark.

Two of the women – Miss Petersen and Miss Faering (later Mrs. Menon) – were devout Christians who had arrived in India as missionaries. They visited Gandhi’s *ashram* at Kocharab, Ahmedabad, for three days in January 1917 to observe the school there, and were greatly impressed by Gandhi and the spirit of the *ashram*. Gandhi too developed a fondness for them. He wrote to Esther soon after they left: “You were hardly guests to us; you had become members of the family”. He invited them to visit the *ashram* whenever they could. From this encounter developed a close attachment of the two women to Gandhi, as well as their support to his campaigns for social reform and for freedom of India. They were among the few Europeans who demonstrated solidarity with the non-violent resistance of the Indian people at that early stage, despite the hostility of the Christian missions and the British authorities.

Gandhi had returned to India in January 1915 after twenty-one years in South Africa where he had led the resistance of Indian settlers against discriminatory and humiliating treatment by the white rulers. The non-violent campaign of defiance against unjust laws (*satyagraha*) which he led from 1906 to 1914, and in which many thousands of people in the small community suffered imprisonment and brutality and finally won their demands, was to become the model for
the struggle of the people of India for independence and for many other oppressed peoples around the world.

Gandhi spent the first two years after his return to India traveling around the country and getting to know India rather than in political activity. He set up an ashram at Kocharab, in Ahmedabad, in May 1915, and named it Satyagraharchram. Among the inmates were a number of children, mainly boys, who had been brought to India from his South African ashram at Phoenix near Durban. The ashram was small with only 25 inmates to start with and the living conditions were poor. It was moved in 1917 to a better site on the banks of the Sabarmati River, which the two Danish women visited.

From 1917 Gandhi began to lead non-violent campaigns in India. In 1917, he organised a national campaign against the export of Indian labour, under indenture, to work in semi-slave conditions in plantations in the Caribbean, Mauritius, South Africa and Fiji; and went to Champaran district in Bihar province to help the peasants to secure an end to ruthless exploitation in the indigo plantations. In 1918 he led a no-tax movement in the Kaira district in Gujarat in protest against the refusal by the government to suspend land revenue when the crops had failed. In the same year he guided a strike by workers in textile mills in Ahmedabad.
While these campaigns drew attention to the efficacy of mass non-violent resistance, a bigger challenge was to come soon.

In 1919, when India was expecting greater self-government, the British authorities introduced stringent repressive legislation (known as Rowlatt bills), ostensibly to deal with the revolutionary movement. Gandhi decided on a satyagraha against the Rowlatt bills and addressed protest meetings around the country.

About the same time, the British government promulgated restrictions, more severe than during wartime, on Christian missions and individual missionaries. The missions were required to sign a declaration that they would refrain from political activity and exert their influence in loyal cooperation with the colonial government. Individual missionaries were required to give various undertakings, one of which stressed the obligation of teachers to instill loyalty to the government in the minds of pupils.

The Rowlatt bills became law on March 18, 1919, and Gandhi called for a work stoppage, prayer and fasting on 9 April. While the protests were peaceful all over the country, there was some violence in Delhi and Gandhi proceeded there to restore peace. The government prohibited him from entering Delhi and the Punjab province where massive demonstrations were being held. He was arrested on April 9,
1919, when he announced defiance of the order. (This was the first of his many arrests in India). Although he was released in Bombay after two days, hundreds of thousands of people continued protests.

On April 13, 1919, troops under the command of General Reginald Dyer shot at unarmed people at a mass meeting at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar, a city in the Punjab; 379 persons were killed and 1,137 injured. This massacre was followed with the imposition of martial law, public floggings and other brutalities.

When the authorities did not take appropriate measures to make amends for this terror in the Punjab and to end repression all over the country, Gandhi and the Indian National Congress decided to mobilise the nation for resistance. They supported the protests by the Muslim community against Britain’s betrayal of promises concerning the treatment of Turkey and the Caliphate at the end of the World War. Gandhi launched a “non-cooperation movement” in 1920, which in its first stage involved boycott of courts and schools, the establishment of national schools and the return of decorations and titles to the government. The next stage was the burning of foreign cloth, as imports of cloth had led to the unemployment of millions of people in India and caused enormous poverty, and promotion of *khadi* (handspun and hand-woven cloth). This movement was perhaps the
most widespread non-violent resistance until that time.

While Gandhi was preoccupied with these struggles, he found time for the two Danish women he had come to know. Between 1917 and 1920 he wrote more letters to Miss Faering than to his own children. (Miss Petersen was away in Denmark from 1917 to 1919).

The Danish Missionary Society (DMS) prohibited Miss Faering from visiting Gandhi’s ashram where she was longing to go and asked her to cease all correspondence with Gandhi and any others who were in any way connected with any political work. She resigned from the DMS and defied their demand that she leave for Denmark “as I belong to India more than ever before”.

Miss Petersen, who returned from Denmark two weeks later, stood by her younger colleague. She too resigned from the DMS in 1920 when it rejected equality for Danish and Indian missionaries.

At that time, Gandhi was little known outside India, South Africa and Britain. British authorities launched massive propaganda to denigrate him and censored news about the atrocities by the regime and the mass non-violent resistance led by Gandhi. But he was known in Denmark, though perhaps to a few, because of these two women. The first article on
Gandhi by Miss Faering appeared in Denmark as early as 1917.\textsuperscript{9}

Contact with the Danish missionaries accounted for Gandhi’s admiration for Denmark. He wished to visit Denmark, but that did not prove possible. He told Miss Petersen in 1919: “I would like to go to Denmark. It is one of the countries in the world we can learn most from. India is a large farming country; we need to learn from Denmark agriculturally, we need good public education, and we need unions, loan banks and cooperative societies as in Denmark”.\textsuperscript{10}

By far the greater part of the correspondence in this book is between Esther Faering and Gandhi. Almost all the letters of Gandhi are in his handwriting, as are his letters to Miss Petersen and Mrs. Hørup. Many of the letters are short lessons in his philosophy, religion and ethics, perhaps owing to the frequent and sometimes child-like questions she posed to him. He wrote to her about satyagraha, about the “constructive programme” he advocated as an essential supplement to national resistance, as well on his understanding of the scriptures. His letters are intimate, loving, and tender.

\textsuperscript{9} Esther Faering, “Et besøg i en indisk Ashrama” in Dansk Missions-Blad, 1917, pp. 771-72.
\textsuperscript{10} Anne Marie Petersen, Danmarks Verdensmission, 1919, page 64.
Miss Faering felt a deep attachment to Gandhi and the Indian people, but she could do little as she suffered from ill health from 1920.

Miss Petersen (“sister Maria” for Gandhi), who was older and had strong opinions on many matters, had a different equation with Gandhi. Her correspondence was more of an exchange of views on the course of India’s struggle for independence and the “constructive programme”. Gandhi published her thoughtful letter in 1920 to underline that the Indian movement was not anti-Christian or anti-European. He quoted another letter by her in the late 1920s, to confirm his view that the time was not ripe for a visit by him to Europe.

Miss Petersen set up a national girls’ school in 1921 as her contribution to the Indian struggle despite opposition by the DMS and intimidation by the British authorities. She offered to take part in the Civil Disobedience movement in 1930 and provided a home for the families of volunteers who were imprisoned. She met Gandhi on many occasions and took an active part in the constructive programme.

The third woman, Mrs. Ellen Hørup, was not religious. A radical anti-fascist journalist, she became interested in Gandhi in the late 1920s – perhaps after having read about him from Esther (Faering) Menon - and visited him in India in 1929 and 1930. She was very active in promoting understanding and solidarity in
Europe for India’s struggle for independence. She not only set up an organisation in Denmark to support the struggle but also established an International Committee for India in Geneva. She spent more than two years in Geneva and organised three international conferences.

The three women revered Gandhi. For Esther Faering, he was her “living ideal, the incarnation of God in man”. To Miss Petersen, he was “the great saint” and “beloved leader”. To Mrs. Hørup, he gave “what I have been seeking all my life”.

They had differences with Gandhi. Miss Faering, as a devout Christian, could not agree with Gandhi that all religions are equally true, or, to quote him, that “truth is the same in all religions though through refraction it appears for the time being variegated even as light does through a prism”\textsuperscript{11}. Miss Petersen was anxious that India should be converted to Christianity. She wrote to a friend in 1921:

“I can only live in the hope that India as a people will become Christian, be born again and be able to play its role in the history of the world as a liberated nation...”\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} Letter to Miss Esther Faering, December 7, 1919
\textsuperscript{12} Letter to Marius Olsen, quoted in Bent Smidt Hansen, \textit{Dependency and Identity}, page 181
Gandhi did not try to convert them to his faith and the differences did not affect their respect for each other. He wrote to Esther (then Mrs. Menon) on September 17, 1926:

“...in spite of most devout attention to every word ascribed to Jesus in the New Testament and in spite of my having read in a humble spirit all about Jesus, I have really not seen any fundamental distinction between him and the other great teachers. That you see a vast difference between Jesus and the other teachers I can understand, explain and appreciate. That is the teaching you have imbibed from childhood... But this is not a matter for argument. It is a matter for each one’s deep and sacred conviction. I have no desire whatsoever to dislodge you from the exclusive homage you pay to Jesus. But I would like you to understand and appreciate the other inclusive position.”

Mrs. Hørup too became critical of Gandhi’s views on several subjects, but that did not diminish her admiration for Gandhi.

Gandhi was open-minded. He paid attention to the views of the three women, and invited discussion. After answering a question by Miss Faering on non-violence, he wrote: “Do please

13 Letter to Mrs. Esther (Faering) Menon, September 17, 1926
write and fight every inch of the ground that to you may appear untenable. That will enable me to find the way”.  

Almost all the letters by Gandhi in this book, as well as annotations to them, are from the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. We have added additional information obtained from our researches. The dates are as indicated in the *Collected Works*.

Unfortunately, only a fraction of the letters to Gandhi has been preserved. We are grateful to Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalya at *Harijan Ashram*, Ahmedabad, and to the National Gandhi Museum in New Delhi, for providing copies of letters to Gandhi.  

A few words or passages in these letters could not be transcribed.

We would invite readers who desire further information on Gandhi and the Nordic countries to refer to the website of:

The Danish Peace Academy  
www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/nordic/

I wish to express my great appreciation to Holger Terp for his collaboration and to

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14 Letter to Miss Esther Faering, June 30, 1918  
15 The letters from the archive at the *Harijan Ashram* have a number with the suffix SN.
Christian Bartolf for his constant encouragement in the preparation of this book.

E. S. Reddy
New York
January 2006
Biographical Note

Miss Esther Faering (born in Copenhagen, June 22, 1889) arrived in India in 1915 as a teacher on the staff of the Danish Missionary Society (DMS) in the Madras Presidency.\textsuperscript{16} She shared a flat with Miss Anne Marie Petersen for some time and developed a close friendship with her.

\textsuperscript{16} After independence of India, Madras Presidency was divided into linguistic states. The Danish Missionary Society had operated in what is now “Tamil Nadu”.

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ESTHER FAERING (MENON), 1889-1962
Miss Petersen was entrusted by the DMS with the preparation of plans to establish a high school for girls and was authorised to visit a number of educational institutions in India. She took Miss Faering on the tour. The two women arrived at Gandhi’s ashram at Kocharab, Ahmedabad, on January 6, 1917, and spent three days there. They developed great admiration for Gandhi, his ashram and its ideals. Miss Faering, in particular, developed a strong attachment to Gandhi.

After returning to her position as teacher in a girls’ boarding school at Tirukoilur, Miss Faering tried to live as an inmate of the ashram, wearing khadi and becoming a vegetarian. She wrote frequently to Gandhi, followed his activities and began to identify herself with India and its struggle for freedom. Gandhi treated her as a daughter and wrote often, replying to her letters and keeping her informed of his work. This was a period when Gandhi led a successful satyagraha (passive resistance) of peasants against rapacious indigo planters at Champaran in the Bihar province.

Miss Faering came under severe pressure from the DMS and the British authorities because of her attachment to Gandhi. She had to face these pressures alone, as Miss Petersen was away in Denmark from 1917 to 1919 to canvass support for the girls’ school.
The Board of the DMS disapproved of her frequent correspondence with Gandhi, and prohibited her from visiting Gandhi’s ashram during Christmas 1917. She was very disappointed, but Gandhi advised her to be patient and obey the terms of her contract with the Mission.

The missionary authorities became more restrictive in 1918 and tried to persuade her to stop all correspondence with Gandhi. They again prohibited her from going to the ashram. At the suggestion of C.F. Andrews,\textsuperscript{17} she went to Santiniketan, the school established by Rabindranath Tagore in Bengal, and taught English.

In 1919 Gandhi was engaged in organising national mass resistance against repression by the British authorities. Miss Faering not only refused to dissociate from Gandhi but identified herself even more with Gandhi and India.

She wrote to Mahadev Desai, secretary to Gandhi, on March 24, 1919:

> “When I came to India, I felt at once at home; and here I have found my living ideal, the incarnation of God in man. So next to the great experience when Christ

\textsuperscript{17} Charles Freer Andrews (1871-1940), a British churchman who taught at Santiniketan, was a friend and close associate of Gandhi and poet Rabindranath Tagore.
became a living reality in my life, I have no other event for which I am so happy and thankful as the day when I first met Bapu; here I found the divine love shining forth clearer than the brightest star; and truth and humanity I found in him as nowhere else, and so I bow down in deepest reverence, love and admiration for true greatness. Bapu became for me the manifestation of the love of God and His aim with regard to man, so he came into my life as the living ideal, for which I have been seeking for years”.

Gandhi, too, developed a great attachment to Miss Faering and showed great concern for her welfare. Even when he was being taken from Delhi to Bombay\(^\text{18}\) under arrest, he wrote a letter to reassure her.

Miss Faering came under suspicion by the authorities and was concerned that she would be deported. She wrote to Mahadev Desai on May 4, 1919:

“"The C.I.D.\(^\text{19}\) has inquired in Tirukoilur if I had anything to do with the Sg.\(^\text{20}\) and if I was the one who brought those school-

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\(^{18}\) Now “Mumbai”
\(^{19}\) Central Intelligence Department of the Police
\(^{20}\) Satyagraha?
girls in Villupuram St.\textsuperscript{21} For me they can do as they like, only as I said often before, I should rather stay several years in prison than leave India; I do not know how I should live outside India without having my heart completely here”.

In June 1919, under pressure from the British authorities, the head of the DMS in India asked her to cease all correspondence with all who were in any way connected with any political work. In the same month, she met E. Kuhni Menon, a Hindu medical student from Kerala, and they were soon engaged to be married. That created general opposition in the Mission and she submitted her resignation on August 6, 1919. The Mission asked her to leave for Denmark but she refused “as I belong to India today more than ever before”.

Gandhi wrote to the Governors of Bombay and Madras requesting them to allow her to live in his \textit{ashram} and assured them that he had not the slightest desire to avail himself of her services in the political field.\textsuperscript{22} He wrote to the Governor of Bombay:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{21} Station
\textsuperscript{22} Ahmedabad, the site of the \textit{ashram}, was then within the Bombay Presidency. After independence the Presidency was divided into linguistic states and Ahmedabad is now in Gujarat state.
\end{flushright}
“... I believe she is attached to me like a child to its father, simply because, in her opinion, I represent in action the ideals she would fain enforce in her own life and is ever trying to. She loves India as her own motherland and I know it would be a terrible wrench to her if she is ever banished from India, as she dreads she might... I believe her to be as truthful and straight a person as is to be found anywhere. She ever lives in the fear of God and does her best to live a Christian life”.

He requested his friend, C.F. Andrews, to go immediately to Madras and do what he could to prevent her banishment. He wrote to Andrews on August 22:

“I do want you to agree with me that it is just as important to do our best to protect Miss Faering from harm as it is for me to resist the Rowlatt Act with my life and for you to be at Santiniketan”.

Miss Faering received permission to travel to the Bombay Presidency and arrived at the ashram in October. But Gandhi had to leave the ashram soon after her arrival on a tour of the Punjab because of the grave political situation in that province. From there he had to go to Delhi to

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23 SN6843; Collected Works, Volume 16, pages 57-58
24 Now “Chennai”
bring about peace. Gandhi and Miss Faering corresponded frequently, but could not meet.

Miss Faering went to Madras to spend Christmas 1919 with Miss Petersen who had returned from Denmark. When she returned to the ashram in January, Gandhi had to leave again on a tour.

Miss Faering’s health deteriorated and she left for Madras in February 1920 to recuperate. In the same month, she announced her betrothal to Kuhni Menon, possibly in the hope that it would facilitate permission for her to stay in India. His family was opposed to the marriage and there was a storm of criticism from the DMS. She was in great anguish and Gandhi wrote her a series of letters to console her.

She left for Denmark at the suggestion of her father in May 1920, after a visit to Gandhi. Mr. Menon, now a doctor, visited Gandhi and went to Denmark in 1921. They married in Denmark, returned in December 1921, and began to assist Miss Petersen at Seva Mandir (the national girls’ school and ashram) she established in Porto Novo (Parangipetinai). As Dr. Menon was unable to find a job, Miss Petersen engaged him to supervise the construction of the school. Dr. Menon decided to adopt the Christian religion and was baptised on June 6, 1924. He was then employed by the Porto Novo Mission as a medical missionary and provided with a small dispensary in Chidambaram, near Porto Novo.
The Menons had two daughters – Nan and Tangai – born in 1923 and 1926.

The climate of India began to affect the health of Miss Faering and her children. All three contracted malaria and Miss Faering also suffered from rheumatism. The family moved to Kotagiri, a hill station in the Nilgiris where the DMS had its summer colony: Dr. Menon helped poor patients and could not earn enough to support the family.

The ill health of Miss Faering and the children and the inability of Dr. Menon to support the family were a serious problem during the rest of their lives and a great disappointment for Mrs. Menon. Her wish to serve India and her hope that her children would become Indian and give their best to India were not fulfilled.

Miss Petersen arranged for the Menon family to go to Denmark in 1927. Dr. Menon went from there to England to study medicine at Birmingham. Mrs. Menon and the children joined him in 1929. The Menons were associated with the Woodbrooke Settlement, a Quaker institution in Birmingham, which Gandhi visited in 1931.

While in Denmark, Mrs. Menon gave a series of three lectures on Gandhi on the Danish radio in 1928. She published a biography of Gandhi in
Danish in 1930 – *Gandhi: En Karakteristik og Fremstilling* (Gandhi: a Sketch and a Portrayal). Dr. Menon could not get his diploma in two years as he had hoped; he passed the examination in 1931. He worked in a hospital in Birmingham for two more years.

The travel of the Menons to Europe and the costs of Dr. Menon’s studies were a heavy burden on the scarce resources of the Porto Novo mission.

The Menons returned to India in February 1934. Dr. Menon looked for a job and after several months found employment at a government hospital in Tanjore (now Thanjavur). But the climate did not suit Mrs. Menon and the children and they had to move to a hill station in February 1935. They had a hard time with frequent illnesses. The long periods of separation of the children from their father were a great strain on the family. Dr. Menon earned little and had to continue to obtain funds from Danish contributions to the school in Porto Novo. He worked as a military doctor during the Second World War, and then returned to work in hospitals in South India.

Mrs. Menon was forced to return to Denmark with her children in the 1950s because of ill health. To quote Kaj Baago:

“When she died in the autumn of 1962 she was all but forgotten, although the
Porto Novo Mission Journal published a brief obituary, which described her love for India and her uprightness and courage when in her youth she became faced with the choice between the Missionary Society and the Indian National Movement. The obituary attempted to give a short account of her life, and perhaps it achieved its aim most precisely with these words: ‘Her life’s course was heroic and tragic to an extent that few have experienced.’

Navajivan Publishing House, established by Gandhi, in a book entitled “My Dear Child”, published about 130 letters from Gandhi in her possession in 1956. The collection below includes some additional letters by Gandhi from the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi and other sources, as well as letters by Miss Faering to Gandhi, mostly from the Gandhi Archives in Ahmedabad.

For further information, please see:


Correspondence with Gandhi

_Gandhi to Miss Faering, January 11, 1917_²⁵

Ahmedabad,
January 11, 1917
Dear Esther,

I was delighted to have your note from Bombay.²⁶ I assure you that we miss you both very much. You were hardly guests to us; you had become members of the family. Hope Miss Peterson is quite herself again. I redirected a batch of letters yesterday and am doing likewise today.

With regards to both of you,

Yours sincerely,
M. K. Gandhi

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²⁵ *My Dear Child*, page 3; *Collected Works*, Volume 13, page 327
²⁶ The note is not available. Miss Faering and Miss Petersen arrived at the ashram on January 6, 1917. This note must have been sent soon after they left. Bombay has now been renamed “Mumbai”.
Ahmedabad,  
January 15, 1917

Dear Esther,

I was pleased to receive your nice letter and hear that Miss Peterson had thrown off her cold entirely.

I am glad you found peace in the ashram. Yes, both of you we regard as members of the family. You will come whenever you wish to and can.

Ramdas\textsuperscript{28} is a noble boy. He is the one going to South Africa.\textsuperscript{29} I feel sure that he will give a good account of himself there. By way of preparation he has been attending a printing press here, practising at the compositor’s desk.

I have learnt enough of you to know that you will put your whole heart into your studies and soon be talking enough Tamil for your purpose.

\textsuperscript{27} My Dear Child, pages 3-4; Collected Works, Volume 13, page 329
\textsuperscript{28} Gandhi’s third son
\textsuperscript{29} Manilal Gandhi and Ramdas Gandhi, the second and third sons of Gandhi, went to South Africa early in 1917 to serve the Indian community. They helped publish Indian Opinion, a weekly founded by Gandhi in 1903.
Pray keep the rules\(^{30}\) as long as you like. There is no occasion to hurry over sending them.

With kind regards,

Yours,
M. K. Gandhi

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**Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 20, 1917\(^{31}\)**

Ahmedabad,
March 20, 1917

Dear Esther,

I have an English lady friend\(^{32}\) and her sister’s children who during the hot weather are to live at some hillside place. You are going to some such place. Could you befriend them if they went to the same station as you? Of course they will bear their own expenses. The thing wanted is good companionship. And I thought of you. If you will befriend them, will you please tell me

\(^{30}\) "Draft Constitution for the *Ashram*" containing rules drawn up for the inmates of the *ashram* in 1915. *Collected Works*, Volume 13, pages 91-98.

\(^{31}\) *My Dear Child*, pages 4-5; *Collected Works*, Volume 13, pages 357-58

\(^{32}\) Miss Cecilia Graham, sister-in-law of H.S.L. Polak, a close associate of Gandhi in South Africa. Mr. and Mrs. Polak were in India in 1917 and helped in the campaign to prohibit export of indentured labour from India.
where you would go, when you would leave, where you would stay and whether they could reside and board at the same place as you will? You will also please give me an idea of the expenses there. You have heard of Mr. Polak. The friend is his sister-in-law. While Mr. and Mrs. Polak travel on public business, they are anxious to locate their children in some hillside place where Mr. Polak’s sister-in-law could find suitable company. She is a stranger to India.

With much love from us all,

Yours sincerely,
M. K. Gandhi

The Polaks leave Ahmedabad probably on Monday. I would like you please therefore to wire to me. If you will address Gandhi, Ahmedabad, the wire will reach me.

M. K. G.
Gandhi to Miss Faering, March 31, 1917

Ahmedabad, 
March 31, 1917

Dear Esther,

I am putting you to a lot of trouble on behalf of Mrs. Polak’s sister. But you have chosen the privilege of letting me be your brother. And I have the credit for being most exacting of those who are nearest and dearest to me. Having made the choice, you must be content to suffer.

Miss Graham, that is the sister’s name, may be able at once to go to Ooty. It is necessary for her and young Polak to be on a hillside without delay. I much fear that I shall not be able to go to Madras in April. If I am able to do so at all this year, it will be after your descent from the hills.

With love to you and Miss Petersen from us all,

Yours sincerely,
M. K. Gandhi

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33 My Dear Child, page 5; Collected Works, Volume 13, page 360
34 Ootacamund (now renamed Udagamandalam), a hill station in South India. Gandhi sent Miss Graham there on April 6 with one of the inmates of the ashram.
[Gandhi went to Champaran district in Bihar on April 15, 1917, to investigate the condition of peasants being cruelly exploited by indigo planters, who were mostly British.]

Motihari,
Champaran
April 15, 1917

Dear Esther,

Your sweet letter has followed me all the way here. I am almost at the base of the Himalayas. I am studying the condition of the people working under the indigo planters. My work is most difficult. My trust is in God. We can but work and then be careful for nothing.

Pray do not worry about Miss Graham. She has been fixed up at Ooty.

You may address me as Bapu\(^{36}\) if you like. It means father. In the ashram it has become a term of endearment. I value your affection very much indeed. You may continue to use the Ahmedabad address.

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\(^{35}\) *My Dear Child*, page 6; *Collected Works*, Volume 13, page 364

\(^{36}\) *Bapu* (*bapuji, bapujeed*) means father. Members of the ashram addressed Gandhi as bapu.
With love,

Yours sincerely,
M. K. G.

Gandhi to Miss Faering, April 17, 1917

[The government served notice on Gandhi ordering him to leave the Champaran district. He defied the order and was charged before Court on 18 April. He pleaded guilty, but on April 21, the government withdrew the case and instructed its officials to assist Gandhi.

On June 10, the Bihar government appointed a committee to inquire into all disputes and appointed Gandhi as one of the members. The committee submitted a unanimous report and in November the government enacted the Champaran Agrarian Bill to remove the main grievances.

Motihari was the headquarters of Champaran district and Bettiah a town in the district.]

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37 *My Dear Child*, pages 6-7; *Collected Works*, Volume 13, page 371
Motihari,
April 17, 1917

My dear Esther,

I know you will want me to tell you that I am about to be imprisoned. I have come here to remove some labour grievances. The authorities do not want me. Hence the impending imprisonment. Do ask Mr. M. at the ashram to send you some papers, and you will know. I am absolutely joyed to think that I shall be imprisoned for the sake of conscience.

Yours
(if you want me to sign)
Bapu
Gandhi to Miss Faering, May 2, 1917

Motihari,  
Champaran,  
May 2, 1917  

Dear Esther,  

I have just received your letter from Ahmedabad. To say "I thank you" would be in your case an empty form. Your interest is much deeper. My experiences here give the greatest joy. The suffering I see around me gives me equal pain. I know that you feel for me because you would like to be in the thick of it all yourself. But your work is cut out for you. For those who are at a distance from you, you can but pray. And that you are doing with all your heart.  

I may not be able to leave this place for six months. One of these days, I shall describe to you the nature of the work I am doing here.  

Do please go to the ashram whenever you can. It is one of your homes if one may have more than one.  

You may write to me at the address given at the top.  

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38 My Dear Child, page 7; Collected Works, Volume 13, page 381