

"Take all you want," I said in true offering.

"But how will it stick?" He laughed again.

"Oh I suppose the miracle can always happen. In India--"

"So, you're married?" he interjected, following his own thought.

"Yes, Panditji; you see only half of me," I whispered hesitantly. "I wish you could meet my wife. She is French. I've taken her to India, you know."

"Oh yes."

"She's so Indian." I seemed to be apologetic.

"Well, my cousin is married to a Hungarian. And why not?"

I was reassured.

"Romain Rolland spoke to me about you," he said after a long silence as we were walking back to the pension. I still remember the sun was completely unaware of himself and the trees stood inordinately still. They seemed aching for a breath, a touch, an efflorescence of the *noncontingential*. Everything seeks its own death and discovery, for suchness alone is meaning.

"Oh, did he?" I mumbled from nowhere.

"Yes, and he said you knew your France well."

"I suppose it's because I recognise my India so deeply, Panditji. With Indian eyes all is meaning."

"Do you always speak like this?"

"I always speak to the tree," I answered. I did not mention the Bodhisattva.

*Yatra vetya vanaspate devanam gubhya namani
Tatra havyani gamaya*

O Tree, there where thou knowest the secret names of the gods make rich our offerings?⁷

So there was the lunch, the thickening of outside air, the hushed temper of a pension where the parents and friends of the sick stay visiting those at the sanatoria. There's always a line

⁷ *Rig Veda*, 5.5.10, translated by Sri Aurobindo.

of fear among them, of unacknowledged darkness, as if death were not an inexplicable usherance from what was to what is not; death becomes an iron-helmeted visitor, walking amidst tables, behind doors, and beyond in the gaunt countryside. But we were high up, in the nowhere which is India.

"You certainly believe in something, Panditji? In some form of Deity, in philosophy?"

"Deity, what Deity?" He twitched angrily.

"Why, Siva and Parvati, Sri Krishna!"

"Three thousand years of that and where's that got us - slavery, poverty."

"And incomparable splendour, even today."

"What, with twenty-two and a half years of life-expectancy and five pice per person per day of national income? We've had enough of Rama and Krishna. Not that I do not admire these great figures of our traditions, but there's work to be done. And not to clasp hands before idols while misery and slavery beleaguer us."

"Yes, and after that?" I asked, as if to myself, somewhat timidly.

He seemed angry, "Now, now, don't make me say this matter is matter," he said, touching the table. He was trying very hard to cut meat. Obviously the knife was in need of care or Panditji was not overdextrous with his hands.

"No, Panditji, I know you won't." I was winning the battle.

"I am not such a fool. I won't. I also have my private philosophy."

He was silent for a while. And I did not say anything. "Of course," he continued, leaving the meat to its fate, "of course there's something else. All this sun and moon and earth and galaxies, they don't hang about in some chaotic universe. You probably do not know, I studied the natural sciences at Cambridge."

"No, I did not," I said. But he did not hear me.

"There's an intelligence about the world. There's harmony. I am convinced we're linked to that harmony. Individually linked," he added with deliberation, and merged into such sorrowfulness that the earth seemed lighter with his pain.

"So God is mathematical."

"Well, perhaps. Why worry? And man is not just a..."

"Just what?..."

"A biological phenomenon."

"A creature of the 'eighteen aggregates'."

"Yes, Buddhism comes quite near it; that is, there is something which must be, and which connects and sustains."

"But that's Vedanta," I interrupted. "The Buddha was a phenomenologist. Beyond manifestation, the void."

The meat by now had become cold. So had my spinach.

"Go where you will," he said slowly, and with a deep wealth of rising sensibility, "man is not a creature of accident. Nor are his apprehensions gratuitous. Man is a whole and he belongs to — to, well let's say a universal harmony."

He lit a cigarette. The coffee had come.

"I've brought you a book," I said. "I thought you may like it?" I now produced my treasure from behind the newspapers I'd carried with me.

"Oh yes. I know the book," he remarked, after taking it from me.

"Perhaps you'd like to read it again."

"My French is not so good. I've read the book in English. My daughter is at school in Switzerland. She speaks fluent French."

"There's a saying of Confucius," I said following my own argument. "It says: 'That kingdom is well ruled where a false note will topple the throne'."

"Yes, that's true, that's very true."

"Only a Bodhisattva can rule," I murmured.

"What?" He was almost angry. Then he shook the ashes off his cigarette, and with infinite compassion added, "We've no time. History does not wait for us."

"Who made history?" I asked. "The Buddha or —"

Bimbisara.⁸ But —"

"And now," I went on, "the moderates or Mahatma Gandhi?"

"Well, well."

"Do you know Krishnamurti?" I abruptly asked.

He looked away for a moment, as if he were contemplating the birds outside on the lawn and a gash of pitch-black depth in the clouds that seemed apocalyptic.

"Yes, I do," he said in fierce affirmation. "He would like us to blossom out as flowers."⁹ He stuck his palms up and folded his fingers into bulbous shapes.

"But he and you," I broke in.

"Yes, he and I?"

"He and you can make..."

"What?"

"An Asokan Empire."

He fell into himself, his half-closed eyes looking into an edgeless nowhere. Man's cognitions are but the frontier posts of his awareness. When thought reels, you fall back into your poetry and sail an emperor of all the seas.

We came into the drawing room.

"What time is your train?" he asked.

"I think there's one in the evening," I said.

"Oh." He stood thoughtful, almost vacant for a moment.

"We'll go to the sanatorium, up the hill, for a cup of tea. We'll have tea with my wife. Meanwhile, have you anything to read?"

"This book: *Sur les Traces du Bouddha*."

"At three o'clock I'll come down," he added as he went up the staircase. Obviously he was going to work on his manuscript.

⁸ Bimbisara, King of Magadha, at the time of Buddha.

⁹ Many years later Panditji went to see Krishnamurti several times.