

“In the evening I was sitting at the third restaurant, the one situated at the end of the beach. I had just finished off a plate of curried vegetables with rice, the best that this beach location had to offer. I was absorbed in my diary, when a girl approached me to ask what I was writing. We introduced ourselves and she sat next to me. Sophie is a psychologist, from Lyon, France. For the last six years she has been volunteering six months per year at the psychiatric clinic of Bangalore. Every so often, as presently, she manages to take two or three days off to relax and to take short excursions. These recent four years she has been working with people suffering from schizophrenia. For the remaining six months she returns to France, where she works and saves money for the whole year. I could never imagine that such a person existed until she made her appearance.

She ordered tea and we began to chat. She has been to Greece twice... the Acropolis, the Greek islands, Greek salad and souvlaki – were a few things she mentioned having stuck in her mind. I later brought up her life’s theme, the balance between the clinic in Bangalore and her time in France, and I asked her whether she was satisfied. She sat upright in her chair, her face taking on a shriveled expression. She then revealed that she was exhausted. For the last two years she has been meaning to quit but has not managed to come to the decision.

I asked what was hindering her.

“I don’t know... It feels like a defeat to me...” she said with a blank look on her face, the cordial smile having disappeared from her features since the previous question.

“Like a defeat?” I retorted.

“Yes. It’s not exactly as it seems, you know... What I choose to do, I do primarily for myself”.

“I can imagine... It must be great source of fulfillment”.

“Oh, no, this part comes second”, she corrected me. “Through my actions I am trying to relieve my attention from my “self”, from the dedication to its care. In the past, my “self” was the only thing that I used to care about...”

“Is taking care of yourself so diabolical? Is it not an instinctual thing?” I interrupted her thus, referring to a problem that was also my own (who knew, maybe she would readily give me the satisfactory solution I was seeking).

“It is, definitely! If you don’t take care of yourself, you will be lost before all of these issues have time to torment you. But this is a reference to the level of sustenance, and yes, in this case instinct is involved, which is why one should not worry about ignoring it for danger of inexistence. I am not referring to this level - but to the one following it, where the care for one’s self, one’s desires and needs, takes over every thought; when this care becomes the driving force for every action and every dream, when it becomes a fixation and dominates everything else. “In truth, when in Greece, did you come across anyone who kept the care of one’s self to the essential level?” she said, gazing at me in anticipation of my reply. “I, for one, met no such person before arriving here and meeting with this absolute poverty.

I didn’t speak. She went on: “Some years ago, I understood – was forced to understand - that this frame of mind leads nowhere. Happiness eluded me and always

would. That was when I began to observe myself...” Pausing, she looked at me: «I have no idea why I’m telling you all this», she said, surrendering to the French rules of pronunciation and to awkwardness. I urged her to continue.

“I don't know...” she began again. “You won't hear any brilliant or rare truth from me. I only know this: No matter what you do, how much you try, you will never be truly content for yourself alone. It’s an utter impossibility. We are connected with everything around us. This is what selfishness does: it fills you with the illusion of separateness. Thus the game is lost before you even start playing it”. She stopped and eyed me in search of signs of confirmation.

I was trying to understand her.

“Take prosperity for example”, she continued. “It does not exist in an individual sense. Each and every one of us can only enjoy his deserved share from the collective pie of prosperity. Most believe otherwise; they try in vain and alienate themselves. Observe the crises – the familial, the financial, the environmental, the crises among neighboring countries, the immigration crisis... It is a joke to believe that you, alone, can prosper on your own”.

Later on she headed back to her hut and I went down to the beach to rest on the sand. Facing the sea, there I was, alone in the company of my unfolding dreams. For as long as Sophie sat with me I had a sense of a certain vitality and sensibility, lending their density to the very air surrounding me. I could almost see and hear a power that was sensational, unnatural by human standards, joining and swirling around a strange and subtle sensitivity, in an explosive mix, rampant and uncontrollable, ready to wash away human suffering, in a flash...

Meeting with Sophie, hearing of the path that she had chosen, this was all just the incentive, the spark that opened the Gate of Dreams. Every time that Gate is opened anew, personal measure is lost; and each time it shuts again, that measure re-appears.

But it is not the same any more.

Excerpt from Chapter 8: “The followers of the sun”

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