

# Silence with the Storm

By Rattan Mann

## CHAPTER 4

Some million or so years ago our forefathers, the apes, stepped down the trees of the ever-dwindling rain-forests of Africa and timidly ventured into the unknown and unexplored territory north, the savannah, in search of food, shelter, security, and a new existence. Soon the razor-sharp claws and fangs of the born killers, the wolves and the saber-cats, struck awe and terror in their hearts. They were trapped between the frying-pan and the fire - destruction behind and destruction ahead. They were faced with a decision for which their developing little brain was unripe and unprepared - should they push ahead or should they turn back? The rain-forest or the savannah? The first dilemma of human existence came into being. They choose the savannah. And opened the flood-gates to ever more dilemmas and contradictions.

In the decision of our forefathers, the apes, to move out of their African Garden of Eden lay the roots of deep sorrow and suffering, of fascism, communism, capitalism, and all other isms and gateways to misery, but also of glory, of idealism and humanism, science and philosophy. Riding on the wheels of dilemmas and contradictions, human history took its first shaky steps forward towards Cro-Magnon, Neanderthal, and Zericho to steal a timid glance at the cradles of human civilization and caught Adam and Eve red-handed as they ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. The struggle for existence had begun. And soon there would be no turning back from it because one gate after another was closing from behind.

As yet there was no justice, freedom, or equality - there was no place or need for them. Then somewhere in the Middle-East, around 5000 B.C., probably in the fertile valley of the Euphrates or the Tigris, man learned to enslave man. Slavery and exploitation came into being. Exploitation and slavery were the mid-wives of freedom, equality, and justice. Strangled and suffocated by the black, rolling clouds of misery and slavery peered the first transitory rain-bow of freedom and equality from the over-hung skies of Greece and Rome, only to be swallowed into the darkness again. The hide and seek between darkness and light, truth and falsehood, freedom and slavery had begun.

To every action there is a reaction, asserts Newton's third law of physics. Exploitation bred its own reactions, the reactions bred their own new actions which in turn bred still newer reactions. Actions and reactions combined to breed isms and throwing its caution to the winds, History took its first bold leap forward. The struggle changed the ape, the ape changed the struggle. The struggle for existence of our

fore-fathers, the apes, took the attire of class-and-caste-struggle of our own brothers, the Homo Sapiens. Then man and struggle changed isms and isms changed man and the nature of his struggle. Then man and struggle and isms joined forces to change history and history reacted by changing man and his struggles and his isms. In this free-for-all battle, the dialectic laws of action and reaction stole from behind and enslaved man. Man was betrayed and enslaved by the very ideals he stood for. In his battle for freedom, man became the slave of isms and dialectical laws of history. Now man did not fight man for his freedom, isms fought each other for an abstract word called "freedom". The twentieth century became a battle-ground for communism and capitalism, an abstract battle-ground between abstract ideologies in which the humble Homo Sapiens had hardly any role to play. The causality was not the man part but the wisdom part of Man the Wise. And Man was forever mutilated.

Once upon a time there was a foolish young idealist who walked into a second-hand store and bought an old rucksack without suspecting that he had been cheated into paying the price of a new one. To everybody he met on the way he said he was going far-away to strange new lands of apples and oranges, knowledge and wisdom, and as soon as his rucksack was full of them, he would return home and plant into Mother Earth the treasures he brought back. And one apple shall become a hundred apples, and one orange shall become a thousand oranges, and the barren and lifeless desert shall blossom into a garden quivering with new life. And without noticing that some smiled and others laughed, the foolish young man confidently dwindled away into a quivering speck against the horizon.

But when he reached the strange lands and stretched out the rucksack to receive the apples of knowledge and wisdom, people dropped the putrefying flesh of their ignorance and prejudices, and where he expected the oranges of love and truth, he found charred bones of contempt and discrimination. And bent under the weight of the garbage he had collected, he stood on the highway, debating with himself whether he should go ahead in a vain search for what did not exist, or turn back to concede to jeering faces that he should have known better.

The sun glared mercilessly, and the wind whistled by merrily without offering any advice. In dismay he turned his face away from the long and winding road towards the fields at his back, hoping that they had the answer to his dilemma. The fields remained silent and no life or advice stirred on them. But the foolish young man was not looking or listening hard enough. When he did, he saw a little girl stumbling over flowers, chasing butterflies. The stinking rucksack slid from his back and dropped on the ground as he too ran stumbling after the girl and the butterflies. He had caught wings. He could fly once more. He had never felt lighter or happier since ages. At last he found something he wasn't even looking for - his

meaning in his life. Nothing less, nothing more.

In the summer of 1969 that foolish young man - who happened to be me - boarded a Lufthansa plane bound for Frankfurt. A frightening loneliness gripped him at the takeoff. India, thank you for giving me birth, feeding me, and calling me your son. But I want a little more. I want to smile. I want to find a meaning in life because, without a meaning, life is nothing. Life is not just earning a livelihood. So, from here our ways part. I am on my own, homeless, country less, motherless. Thanks for everything, anyway.

A worn-out face of an Indian mother was whispering not to him but to herself,

"But I knew all the time that one day you will come back. I told this to everybody every day. How many times I have secretly looked at the door, and even the distant horizon, hoping to see you coming towards me - that is a secret I will carry to my grave."

Papa, Bimla, Usha, and Ravindra stood at the airport waving farewell to the empty darkness that had swallowed him out of their sight. A cruel and hostile night had denied him a parting wave from the distant plane.

And then the space sucked him into its grip and held him fixed and motionless in its vast jaws of vacuum, littered with cool, golden stars untouched by the Indian summer below. Nothing moved except a drumming buzz, and occasionally, a hostess floating by like a ghost among the sleeping dead. The future was utterly blank. The past was indeed a thing of the past. And suspended between the two worlds of the future and the past, he sat in mid-air, trying to figure out all possible answers to all potential questions that the immigration authorities at Frankfurt may ask to trap him.

The next morning the plane landed on a new continent and transformed that foolish young man living in a dream-world into me once more so that I could grapple with new realities in new surroundings.

The first question, "Your passport please." was fair enough. But I was focused on what was to follow - the grilling, the interrogation about money, motive, and mission. But nothing followed. The gatekeeper at the Gateway to Freedom let me pass through without further ado. What a surprise! What a wonderful beginning to a new life!

So I stole ahead like a thief, trying my best not to betray any signs of nervousness or excitement or confusion. But the heaviest stone had already fallen off my chest because the biggest hurdle was behind me.

So I was utterly unprepared for the next shock: My suitcase was not in the luggage. I hadn't the courage to go back to the same officer from whose jaws I had escaped purely by once-in-a-lifetime luck. Timidly I turned to a fellow-traveller for help who directed me to the lost property section.

Name? Description of the suitcase? Contents? Then my heart missed a beat. The man asked the most dreaded question of all.

"How long do you intend to stay in Germany?"

That was the trap I had been preparing for the whole night in the air. So in those few momentous seconds I had to give the "correct" answer, I dumped all my wisdom, innocence, and politeness into my voice and blurted out,

"Sir, I am not sure, sir. But I believe, sir, two weeks, sir. Perhaps only one week, sir. I am on my way to London to meet my uncle, sir. He is a rich man, sir. He is waiting for me since weeks, sir. I am in great hurry to leave Germany, sir. I just want to see Frankfurt before I leave, sir."

But all those "sirs" were unnecessary. All the man wanted to know was whether I would be in Germany long enough to be contacted if the suitcase was found. It turned out that the man had nothing to do with spying on anyone's motive or mission. What a wonderful world would it be if all immigration officers were like him. And how great are rich uncles. They come in handy whenever you need them - even if they don't exist!

When I came out of the luggage office, a sad and lonely suitcase was lying there, waiting for me. I had thrown myself into a ten-minute hell for no reason. What a fool I was!

So I picked up the suitcase and hurried out of the airport without informing the luggage office that I had found it. I was eager to get on the streets and mingle with the crowd because a crowd is always a haven for people who have some- thing to hide. And I had a lot to hide. I had to hide that I had no money and no rich uncle in London, that I was not on my way to England, that I wanted to live in Germany.

But I knew nobody in Germany. I knew Germany only through its thinkers, philosophers, and scientists, most of whom were dead. But some were still living. One of them was professor Heisenberg at Max Planck Institute in Munich. From India I had written a few letters to Heisenberg about my youthful, and perhaps a little immature, fascination with unified field theories of elementary particles. That was all. Beyond this I did not know Heisenberg at all. But now I thought that this "intellectual-bond" was a sufficient ground to go to Munich and meet Heisenberg.

But the problem was to reach Munich in the first place. The thirty-two marks I was allowed to carry were not sufficient to buy a train-ticket to Munich. I tried to argue and negotiate with the man at the ticket-counter but without success. The man waved me off with a smile, and without listening to my arguments, turned to the next customer. But other people in the queue saw my plight and some came forward to help me with their advice. One by-stander proposed a hitch-hike, but I could not summon the

courage to undertake something I had never tried before even on the familiar ground of my own country. Then a kind gentleman took me to an office from where I could go with somebody driving to Munich and share the benzin costs. That way it cost only twenty-five marks - something I could afford.

In Munich prof. Heisenberg's secretary was utterly flabbergasted when she saw a stranger standing before her and demanding a meeting with Heisenberg. At first she did not know what to say or do. She got even more perplexed when she heard that with seven marks in his pocket he wanted to start a new life in Germany. She remained silent and still for a long time as if all life had suddenly been sniffed out of her. After a long silence she said she will try to talk to some people and asked me to come after a few days.

As I was leaving the institute, I bumped into Heisenberg coming from outside. So I did manage a few minutes meeting with Heisenberg.

Heisenberg told me that I was most welcome to attend lectures or seminars at the institute and use the library without any problem. But beyond this he can't do much for me because Max Planck is a research institute, not a university for students. If I wanted more, I should contact the student office at the university. And Heisenberg wrote down an address. It was Leopoldstrasse 15.

So something was achieved after all!

As evening fell, I started searching for a place to sleep. But it was impossible to get a room in seven marks that were still left in my pocket. A kind, old professor of Geology saw my plight and took me to a hotel and paid twenty-marks on my behalf so that I did not have to sleep on the street.

When the stomach is full, it is hard to imagine that a man can start starving in just two days. But mine was not. So as I sat on the edge of the bed in the hotel-room, utterly exhausted, trying to bring order into the chaotic new world that had suddenly broken loose upon me, I began to feel the pangs of hunger for the first time in my life. Suddenly I remembered the sweets mamma had given to me as a parting token of love. They were hard and dry by now, but never before had they tasted so sweet and delicious.

After eating the sweets, I lay on bed without bothering to change clothes, and tried to sleep instead of thinking of the next day or the next meal.

So ended the first day of a new life. It was a very interesting day indeed, but it was not what I meant by a surprise around every corner.

Next day I was on the street again and feeling hungry. So I unpacked my new leather shoes from my suitcase and set out to sell them. But the problem was where. I couldn't ask just anybody on the street if he wanted to buy a new pair of shoes from a stranger. So I decided to go to Leopoldstrasse 15 to collect some information as Heisenberg had suggested. This could include information about where to sell shoes.

Leopoldstrasse 15 was the only landmark in an unknown desert of loneliness, confusion, and chaos. I wished I were at home, sweet home.

It was Saturday. I did not know that on Saturday all offices are closed in Germany. There was nobody at Leopoldstrasse 15 except an old porter. In broken English, and at times through signs, the porter explained that everything was closed because it was Saturday. But at least the porter could tell me where I could sell my shoes. So I asked for the porter's advice.

When the porter heard that I was a penniless, starving new-comer to Germany with no place to stay, he became downright helpful. In broken English, he asked many questions and tried his best to come up with some solution.

As we sat discussing my present and future in Germany, there came a shabbily dressed boy in an army jacket. The porter spoke with the new-comer for some time in German. The latter said something in English about a room, and then switched into German again.

I thought I had misunderstood. How could I be so lucky as to get a room without money. I held my breath and waited.

But then the stranger turned to me and introduced himself in clear English.

"I am Detlef and I am studying to be a teacher. We have been talking about your plight. You are lucky that I came because I can help you with a room. My own room is very small and there is no place for another person in it. But I have some friends. They have rented a large flat because it is much cheaper to live that way. They will be happy to help you till you can afford to rent a room on your own."

And as I thanked the porter and began to leave with Detlef, the porter thrust a loaf of bread and a packet of cheese into my palm, saying,

"Last year my son was in USA, and like you he had to sell some of his belongings for food."

In the flat where Detlef took me lived a bunch of students, all bubbling with youthful enthusiasm and raw dreams of a brave new world without war, hunger, starvation, or national boundaries. They were Angelica, Christina, and Helmut. And they greeted me with open arms as if one of their family had been away on a holiday and had just returned with a box full of gifts for them. But the box that my skull had become was full of nothing but problems. So they all gathered round me to hear my story and assured me that it will have a happy end. For the first time in life I did not feel uncomfortable among strangers.

"Don't worry, there will be a way out. We will help you till you can stand on your own. Nobody will starve in Germany." Helmut said, and others nodded because he was speaking for all of them.

And they showed me where I could sleep so long as I had no job or money - a corner in the kitchen

where a mattress could be laid in the night.

And immediately I flung himself upon the thin, soft velvet of hope, wrapped in feathery, silky peace, warding off the bitter cold of uncertainty and doubt, and fell asleep for a moment to see how I would feel in that kitchen-corner in the coming days.

"We are sorry! We are many people here and some would return on Monday from visits to their parents. So we have nothing better to offer you than this corner. But feel at home. And eat anything anytime you like without asking." Angelica said in an apologetic tone.

We were hardly through with the introductions when the phone rang. It was their neighbor Christa who wanted to invite me for coffee.

"Somebody told us Detlef has brought a very intelligent Indian. We were very eager to meet you." Christa said, introducing herself and a few of her friends visiting her that day.

So the dream of a new life, that oasis of illusions in a desert of harsh realities, seemed to be within grasp. Dreams are worth striving for, even if later they turn out to be nothing but illusions and mirages, because of the superstructure of sublime beauty the mind and the heart are capable of creating upon the foundations of ugly realities. Broken dreams are not a sign of failure. They are a tribute to the heights the mind and the heart can rise above their surroundings.

The first week in Germany flew by in running from shop to shop in search for a second-hand book for learning German, or studying in the library of the Max Planck Institute without fear of some crazy peon spoiling the fun, or taking long walks in the English Garden with Detlef or Helmut. Detlef and Helmut had become my constant companions and interpreters.

Then one day Helmut said,

"Rattan, I will ask my friends if they know of a job for you in the black market because you don't have a work permit. But as you go to the library of the Max Planck Institute every day, try to ask somebody there too. Sometimes they know better."

So the next day I asked the librarian, Mr. Bauer. And Mr. Bauer did know exactly where I might try.

"Go to frau Strube who is the head of the section for measuring the scattering of protons and neutrons with computerized machines. She often needs people for the task." Bauer said in perfect English as he had stayed in USA for some time.

Frau Strube did have something for me. But she had to talk to prof. Gottstein before giving the final answer.

Next morning she told me that prof. Gottstein wanted to see me.

I still remembered my last meetings with professors Auluck, Majumdar and Das Gupta. So full of apprehension and unease, I knocked at Gottstein's door.

But a pleasant surprise waited me there. Gottstein stood up with a broad smile, gave a warm handshake, and took me aside to a round table where we sat and had a frank and pleasant discussion for about twenty minutes. Then he called Dr. Castell and introduced him to me in case I needed some help in my private and independent studies.

"You can never really like a German professor. They are too stiff and formal to be likable." someone at Oslo University told me years later.

There is definitely a ring of truth in it, as I was to find out later myself, but Gottstein is among the exceptions. He has the ability to talk to people without creating tension or mistrust - even to bums like me who have no innate conception of practical realities.

So, in the evening, I made no effort to conceal my excitement as I ran to Helmut, almost screaming, "I have a job, Helmut, I have a job."

"You are a man of luck, Rattan. Even the chance meeting with Detlef was a great piece of luck. It does not happen every day. Things could have turned out to be much different if you had met the wrong people." he replied. His English was far from perfect. It was fun listening to him, because the mistakes he made really amused me.

And for once I felt as if the whole of Cosmos was suddenly united with only one purpose - to prevent my extinction.

The next day Helmut and I knocked at the door of the Immigration Office with a letter of appointment for a part-time job at Max Planck Institute. But the immigration officer was no Gottstein. He rudely turned us out and ordered us to wait outside. Helmut was furious because he was not used to such a treatment. He had an argument with the officer and forced him to apologize.

"I am very disturbed by the way he treated us. But he did not know that I am a German. He mistook me for a foreigner. But they shouldn't be treating foreigners like this either!" Helmut explained in English as we waited in the corridor.

When our turn came, the officer was more polite but not more helpful than before. After a cursory glance at the appointment-letter, he said it was of no use. I had no right to stay in Germany and I had to leave - job-offer or no job-offer. Helmut talked to him a long time in German, but to no avail. The officer was adamant because he said he had the law on his side. We walked away bitterly disappointed.

When Frau Strube heard of the incident, she said she will talk to the immigration office and find out

what the matter was. After shaking the bureaucracy with a dozen phone calls, Frau Strube brought things under control. She reformulated the letter of appointment and said that this time it would work.

But it worked and did not work at the same time. The officer gave me a work-permit for three months and told me to leave Germany after three months under all circumstances. All I had won was a respite for three months.

From that day on, a new sentence was added to my existential vocabulary: " Stay and work permit controlled by an abstract bureaucracy with a huge collective brain which knew everything but no heart to feel anything".

I discovered that being turned down by immigration office was as bad as being turned out by class teachers. I had jumped out of the frying pan into the fire.

Some years later I learned from the police-chief of Marburg that the Munich immigration authorities were seriously considering the possibility of deporting me from Germany. But for some reason they refrained. May be, Frau Strube and Helmut's insistence on my behalf helped.

With a job came the ability to rent a room of my own. But with a new room came a new problem. The land-lady objected to my long hair and beard. She said every day the floor was littered with hundreds of black hair from my head and beard. It looked as if she had nothing else to do except hunt the house in search for long black hair from me. And she could not understand why a man should take a bath every day.

"I am renting rooms to foreigners since the last eleven years, but nobody bathed everyday like you." she said, as she demanded thirty marks extra for allowing a bath every day.

To keep my peace with her I paid the thirty marks. But it did not help me for too long. One day her son became so furious at finding the bathroom wet and damp that he asked me to pack up my things and get lost before he gave me a blue eye.

So once more I was without a roof over my head. But fortunately Helmut was still at my side. Again we ran from pillar to post till we found a kind lady who ran a private hostel.

"I don't have an empty room at present. But you are in big trouble because winter is approaching. You can't sleep on the street. I have an idea. I have a store-room. I can move some of the things out of it to make a place for a mattress. You can sleep there till somebody moves out. I am sorry but this is the best I can offer at present." she said.

Fortunately somebody moved out suddenly that very same day and so no extra arrangements were necessary. But her kind gesture and her name were imprinted on my memory for ever. She was miss Ross with her hostel at Friedrichstrasse.

Then came that historic day when the first man landed on the moon. Max Planck Institute gave everybody a day off to watch the event. And everybody in Germany who had a TV was glued to it. But neither Detlef nor I had a TV, so we roamed in the English Garden. My mind was not in the garden. It was on the moon with the astronauts. I wished I had a TV.

To synchronize the walk with what was going on in my mind, and to pull Detlef from the earth to the moon with me I asked him about what he thought of this world-shaking event.

Quietly, as if my excitement meant nothing to him, he replied,

"It will be much better if instead of going to the moon, we try to make this earth a better place to live."

His words struck me like lightening. Nobody had spoken to me like this before. It was the first blow to the Brahminist philosophy I was brought up in - a philosophy which glorifies the achievements of only a few individuals chosen among themselves, by themselves, and for themselves, while the rest of mankind counts for nothing. In the India I was brought up in everybody just echoes and emulate the rich and the famous without ever questioning them or asserting their own personality or individuality. Cloning is not such a novel idea after all.

The Brahmins of America had gone wild over an event which may have been a great step for Mankind, but was a very small step indeed, or even no step at all, for Man. What a tragedy that in modern times even Man and his inseparable buddy Mankind have parted ways and are rushing in opposite directions. One has already reached Mars, while his twin is still sifting through garbage to eke out a living.

Never again did I get excited about any scientific discovery without thinking of what Detlef said on the day Mankind walked on the moon.

Another conversation a few years later again made a deep impression on me. A young boy told me, "I like Elvis Presley very much, but I will never buy his records. He and other singers like him make millions by singing about the poor while nothing changes for the poor themselves."

I forgot his name, well, simply because he never told me his name!

And then, once and for all, I solved the apparently unsolvable mystery of life and death, at least for myself, if not for others.

The day I could gaze at the sun and the moon, the firs and the pines, and everything else around me for hours without getting tired, I was alive, and the day I could not, I was dead. One glance at the universe around me every morning I came out to start the day, and I knew instantly, by the sheer depth of my feelings, if I lived or not. And when I was dead I was sad, and asked myself why I couldn't be alive even

when I was living.

But the mystery of Truth still baffled me, and I dug into the abstractions of mathematics and physics in the belief that it was hiding there. Science in itself held no attraction for me. It was the metaphysics hidden in science that I was after - if it was hidden there at all. And I knew one day I would answer the question whether mathematics is metaphysics, this way or that, and again just for myself. Russel knew already that mathematics was not metaphysics. But his conclusions were of no use to me because they were not my conclusions reached through my own thinking. That is the difference between a parrot and a thinker. Both may say exactly the same thing, but the one says it without thinking or knowing and the other says it after examining each and every aspect of it.

And three months flew by, not in learning new customs and etiquettes, but in learning new ways of thinking. And my stay-permit ran out. But the people in power couldn't care less about what I was learning or thinking.

One day Castell took me to the tennis lawn and came to the point at once, "Well, your staying-permit is about to run out... well... you see... well... the point is we are not really interested in your problems, because they are your problems, and you have to take care of them yourself. Others want me to tell you that we are sorry, but we are in no way obliged to help you with your stay-permit anymore. This is the message I have been asked to convey."

We talked about the problem for about fifteen minutes. In the end it was agreed that as winter was approaching, it would be nice if the institute could give a letter for the immigration police, asking for a six-month extension to the stay-permit. That would bring me to spring-time, and after that I would get lost.

Castell promised to talk to others and do whatever he could. And within a few days I got the required letter for the police. But the police, with its typical insensitive, reduced the six-month period to three months, and slapped me with an ultimatum to leave Germany by January of 1970.

In the evening, Helmut and I celebrated the "victory" with beer. Logically there was nothing to celebrate. But to dreamy and youthful eyes, hunting for a surprise around every corner, three months is an eternity, especially when counted in terms of minutes and seconds. That is how my life flew by in youth. The past was nothing, the future was always an eternity of life, dreams, quest for knowledge, and there was no thought of tomorrow in between. A loser's life or is it?

After a few days, Castell came to me again and gave me some private advice.

"Write to Abdus Salam at the International Center of Theoretical Physics at Trieste. This institute in Italy is especially meant for people from the third world, and it is they who should help you."

Salam replied within a few days. His reply was as brief as Castell's advice. After paying his regards to Gottstein, and after thanking him for helping me, he said that he had a very good friend at Marburg, prof. Doebner, and he shall be very glad and thankful if Doebner could do something.

"What can Doebner do?" Castell said a little skeptically after reading Salam's letter.

This was about the last time I was to see Castell. After Heisenberg retired as the director, there was a power-struggle at Max Planck Institute for Physics in which Castell was thrown out because of his disagreements with others. There were various rumors about who these others were, and what the disagreements were, but as a complete outsider, I did not even have an indirect involvement with anything.

Then autumn came and filled my mind with its changing hues and falling leaves, floating in the chilly, misty air like so many tiny messengers of Beauty and Truth bombarding the earth with their secrets.

And then came winter with its howling winds laced with snow and filled my mind with fear. I bolted the door and the windows of my room to ward off the sickness and the cold, and hardly ventured out of my sealed habitat. But to no avail. Sickness crept in, pinned me down, and tied me to my bed. But it turned out that the problem was not the cold but the vitamins. The doctor said that I had vitamin-deficiency and gave me a vitamin shot.

I had heard the word "vitamin" many times from Bimla, but never bothered to listen to her. I thought she just wanted to show-off her knowledge of biology and make fun of me because I was poor in it. But now I took heed because there was no "conspiracy" to make me look like a fool. Christa even explained the cause of it. I had been eating tinned fish and bread most of the time because they were cheap and required no cooking. But tinned food has no vitamins. What I needed was lemon, Christa told me. So when I returned to my room, I lifted my hand and took the first oath of my life: Never to drink tea without lemon in it.

One day, as I felt better, I got up, took a long hot shower, and without drying my hair or wearing a cap, went out in the snow to inform the doctor that I was OK now. Within hours I became very sick, though I could not understand why. This time I could not get up from the bed for a fortnight. Again it was Christa who explained the cause and showed me a way out.

"Dummy, in cold countries it could be very dangerous to go out without a cap after a hot shower. You could have died. Take a cold shower and dry your hair if you want to go out immediately. But a cap is always a good idea."

And again when I returned to my room I lifted my hand and took the second oath of my life: Never

to take a shower in hot water again.

It appeared as if winter was a tougher teacher than summer and autumn. It taught me some hard facts of life, not just a new way of thinking.

And as I lay sick in bed, unable to get up and walk down to the kitchen, my stay-permit ran out and the police asked me to leave Germany. I thought I won't be able to make it. But soon I found out that I was wrong. In running from office to office, person to person, consulate to consulate, the sickness was completely forgotten, and instead of falling on the way somewhere, as I had feared, I felt stronger than before. So, in the end, winter did teach me a pleasant lesson after all: Our inner reserves of energy which come into play in times of crisis are far greater than we can ever imagine.

But my problem was not the inner energy created by God, but the outer rules and regulations created by the bureaucracy. Even with infinite reserves of energy in my soul, my external options were extremely limited.

Where could I go? Marburg? Austria? England? USA? Norway? Sweden?

Correspondence with prof. Doebner in Marburg did not bear fruits. I had hardly heard of countries like Sweden and Norway, and it never occurred to me that I could go there. I had visited Austria once, and of course, England and USA are in every Indian's blood because we keep on hearing about them every day in India. So the final list of possibilities included only Austria, England, and USA.

With USA there was a problem. It was the height of the Vietnam war, and all my friends advised me not to go there.

"Don't go to USA. Rattan. It is very easy to go to USA. these days, but there is a catch. The first thing they would do is to throw you into the army and send you to Vietnam within a few months as cheap gun-fodder. You don't want to die in Vietnam, do you?" Christa said and she was echoing the sentiments of many others.

So we came to England. Christa thought it was a good idea. Then she fell silent. After a pause she added,

"When you leave Germany I will write my address. Always keep it in your pocket. May be somebody sees it and can inform me."

But when she saw a blank stare on my face, she read my mind and her inner reserves of energy came into play and she smiled aggressively,

"Dummy, all I meant was that you may lend into a hospital. You have been so sick for so long."

So England stayed on the list as we tried to consolidate our options.

Many were sorry that I had to leave like this, sick and unprepared, in the heart of winter, and with nowhere to go. But nobody could see a way out. It was not a question of tender feelings. It was a question of dry facts and figures, of exact dates and black stamps in the passport.

Frau Strube and Dr. Buchner spent hours with me trying to figure a way out. But the person who showed the greatest concern was Dr. Castell. He made half-a-dozen attempts to reach Doebner in Marburg by trunk-call. But without success. Then he left for London.

The day my stay-permit was to expire was fast approaching. After some digging, Christa found a friend of a friend who was an Englishman. It was decided that the next day I would go to the English consulate with him and try for a visa for England. The presence of an Englishman with me could only help! But if the visa was refused, I would leave for Austria as a tourist, because tourists needed no visas for Austria. There was nothing else to do.

So I went to Max Planck institute to say good-bye to all those who had tried so hard to help me. I was shaking hands with Buchner before leaving when the telephone rang. It was Doebner who wanted to say that I could come to Marburg and he would help me in getting my stay-permit extended. Every body was so happy and relieved. What a piece of luck! What good fortune! Or was it?

It was no luck, fortune, or chance. It was the feelings and persistence of one man - Castell.

Years later I learned from somebody that Castell felt so strongly about this whole affair that while going to London, he literally went out of his way and visited Doebner in Marburg to talk about me. Neither Castell nor Doebner ever mentioned anything about this to me.

So I packed my suitcase and sat in a train bound for Marburg, gazing at the snow dashing by in the opposite direction. The mind was no longer a blank as it had been six months before in the airplane, but full of a thousand things, of the past and the future, of physics and poetry, of love and romance, and a million surprises waiting for me in Marburg. For once the past and the present were united in one loving embrace. The autumn leaves of yesterday were falling with the snow-flakes of today, and every leaf and snow-flake was laced with Christa's smiles. And lost in Christa's smiles, I forgot that I had only 250 Deutsche Marks in my pocket.

For once, feelings won over facts and figures, dates and stamps in the passport. But history has shown that the battle of individual hearts against a collective mind of bureaucracy is a losing battle.

Or is it?