

Unlike all the others enjoying the bright summer morning in their casual clothes, Sharmaji was carefully wrapped up in his woollens, a long scarf wound round his bald head like a turban, for he feared the tricky European weather. They were a group of global protestors, expertly brought from around the world, to form a picket line outside the Swiss chateau where the World Bank was holding a meeting to discuss food security in impoverished countries. The provocation for the protest was a leaked paper that a former president of Harvard University, and present advisor to the Bank, had written on the vital role of modern pesticides to increase food crops. Christians Everywhere had swiftly organized a civil response to this blatant corporate attack on the Planet itself, and Sharmaji, as was to be expected, was representing South Asia.

The Swiss Police, in their neat grey uniforms had formed a cordon, leaving twenty yards clear of the wrought-iron gates. The protestors had been very politely informed that they could stand behind the police line, raise slogans if they wished, wave placards, but on no account to surge forward, or throw anything at the delegates, however harmless, on pain of instant eviction from Switzerland. Could they throw flowers, had asked a girl from Mexico, and the police had replied without a smile that they could not. A thin jeer, which almost sounded like a cheer, rose from the group as a cavalcade of black Mercedes cars swept through the gates towards the rather plain chateau deep within its grounds. Tall green trees shimmered in the sunlight and beyond to the left farmers were busy in the fields with hoes and spades. The only sound was the hum of the cars and the rustle of the leaves. The camera men were busy with their cameras, some were taking pictures of the protestors, some of the delegates. The atmosphere was brisk, important and

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Sharmaji was enjoying being in Europe once again, his fears of violence, that had kept him anxiously awake, during the long flight from India, dissipated by the calm and authoritative assurance of the Swiss police. He had also worried about lodgings, but Christians Everywhere had thoughtfully provided him with a single room, with attached bath, TV, a coffee-maker, and a welcoming bottle of red wine. He had seen to his delight before dropping off to a well-needed sleep that even the normal pay channels showing late-night movies of a ‘certain type,’ as he put it, were freely available. His hosts were not unaware that Sharmaji, for all his earnestness, found child-like enjoyment in the comforts and freedoms of European life. SERVICE was a valuable partner, the work of which had netted one million pounds in just one week before Christmas. What had done the trick was a single poster with Sharmaji’s squat figure in the foreground, and what looked like a sea of poor sari-clad Indian women linking hands before a field of maize, carrying the slogan ‘Will You Help Him Protect Their Fields?’ And now, here he was giving a firm, non-violent Gandhian message in the very heart of opulent Europe. Who better than he?

Suddenly, Arturo Pereira from Brazil was standing in front. “Sharma, Mr. Sharma, they want someone from Asia, who knows – how we say – problemes, problems about agriculture, to tell them why we are here – pesticides, dangers to health, land, crops. Here they are,” as a media lady bustled up. Sharmaji beamed, he was in his element. What could all these young people, laughing and jostling