

“A Million Protesters!” screamed the posters. “Yes, there will be a million protestors,” Sharmaji confidently assured the rural stringers of Telugu dailies, who had gathered to witness the clearing of a large maidan prior to a tent city springing up near the SERVICE Rural Centre. They photographed Sharmaji putting up colourful posters with messages in all international languages. Among the scattered English phrases, one could read: ‘Yes to Freedom! No to Aid!’ ‘India for Indians! Not for Bankers!’ ‘Develop People! Not Money!’ The largest poster showed the world’s people of all colours and wearing their varied national costumes circling the globe protectively, while Uncle Sam and his bankers toppled off. Another showed young men and women with raised clenched fists confronting a cowering group of black-coated fat men carrying a large bag marked with the \$ sign. The Global Alliance Against Banking was organizing a massive rally against the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank’s Hyderabad Conference of experts to plan financial intermediation initiatives to reduce global poverty.

The city had been chosen for the conference for several excellent reasons: it was Asia’s turn to host such a conference; the organizers wished to boost Indian morale which at that moment was at a low ebb; it was December and hence excellent weather could be forecast for this exotic city; the participants would appreciate the cooking; there would be several opportunities for banking leaders to be photographed with poor rural women; and above all since the airplanes would be full bringing home Indians for the Christmas break from America and Europe, the members of GAAB might find it just that much harder to mount a disruptive confrontation in a city whose police were not known to be soft.

GAAB had taken Hyderabad’s stringer, a well-known and personally recognized leader among NGOs was contacted to play host to the large army of angry global citizens who would be gathering from all corners of the earth to protect it and its people from Uncle Sam, his criminal bankers who were responsible for all the wars, and slavish international apparatchiks. Sharmaji had been gravely enthusiastic. He solemnly assured the GAAB flying protest committee that come what may, whatever the consequences to him later from his own virulent anti-people American-client government, he would face all as a Gandhian, and a humanist. But to make a success of it, close attention must be paid to details. When finally at the consultative meeting in Paris, as a demonstration of his personal willingness to sacrifice much for the common cause, he agreed to the sum offered, they had retired to have a well-earned dinner and to toast several times over the success of each Third World country over imperialism.

His staff had been equally enthusiastic, for Sharmaji, though always tight-fisted when it came to giving, could not possibly control all expenditures over such a vast scheme, and everyone of them could sanctimoniously put something by for the rainy day. Sharmaji was well aware of such possibilities, and was not unduly worried about losing money in dribs and drabs, as long as he had complete control over all the major contracts to be given out to make so many foreigners with different tastes and requirements comfortable and entertained under his stewardship. He spent the coming days driving hard bargains with experienced businessmen, caterers, shop-keepers and sundry suppliers. Everyone was amazed at his detailed knowledge of their own businesses, and how he was willing to spend hours at a time to save an extra rupee. Many gave in to him rather than listen to homilies on what they owed ‘good people,

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