

19.10.63.

We go bumpy, bumpy . The familiar temple. The puja seems shortened. Mind elsewhere? Bundle back to the car and resume the drive, past villages, hungry, famished cattle, crawling bullock-carts and as the cliché goes, specimen of dumb masses of India. A bend and there is the sign board of the estate. The doors are open and the drive under ~~pigmy~~ trees touching the roof of the car is almost like a drive through a tunnel. Nearer the doors of the cottage (might as well have been carved out of a huge, single tree), one sees the couple, engraved, statuesque.

The studio. The long-awaited moment comes. The studio; books, paintings, carvings, high-ceilinged roof. One notices the portrait, tantalisingly hidden by a silk screen, like a burkah. Sit down; you here, you there. "Of course, I'll show him the portrait," he says, but we begin to talk instead. Then he moves slowly towards the portrait. I stand up in the meantime in reverence to the atmosphere. He takes hold of a walking stick or something, clears the screen this way and that. Do it quick, I might have as well said. Without haste and with care, the screen is removed, and there, there is the portrait. The white turban, long, handsome face, the chiselled nose, glistening spectacles, thin lips, the long coat, tapering fingers, the flowing dhoti, black Indian shoes, sparkling. Life oozing out; the three-dimension, heavy blue background. He may walk out of the canvas any moment! Then comes a stream of paintings, the Himalayan snow, cloud shadows, mountain tops glimmering, diamond like. Time to go, but paintings to see.

Faint music. Today is Saturday and there is puja for Muniswar. Carefully hop through the garden to the giant tree sheltering muniswar. A score of people lined up, frightened children running about like tailless rats, singing an old-fashioned, nostalgic bhajan. Stand right in front of Muniswar, guiltily, headbent, palms clasping, like undertrials before judge.

Walk back to the car, tired, happy, thankful, pleasant, a rare evening. The portrait is to go to Rashtrapati Bhavan. Posterity's treasure, timeless, ageless. Thoughts of R. His majesty, simplicity, innocence, harmony, the divine talent. He is mysterious too. What holds him here? What goads him into expression here. Will he attain fulfilment here, the land of his adoption, the land of his spirit? Must be a vision, must be a faith.

By H. Kusmaker.

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