

1

A man, often referred to as 'M', was patiently waiting backstage until the announcer would finish his introduction speech. Most people did not know what M actually stood for.

The name, if not qualification of M surfaced in the past as acknowledgement of a phenomenon that was part man, part insight – an unusual insight that had changed the prospects for human society.

Not being referred to by his real name did not bother M. On the contrary, 'My name should not be in the way of my message.'

People from nearly every corner of the earth had come to Cape Town for an assembly that M would address as keynote speaker.

Eight years after the second global economic crisis in a hundred years had erased \$50 trillion in wealth, the Southern African states showed to have been remarkably resilient. While the USA and Europe had been struggling to establish a regulatory system that would help their economies add real value again, the Southern African states had managed to sustain growth in various ways.

Continued investment by the Chinese and the rebuilding of bankrupt Zimbabwe - after a long-overdue end to the reign of Robert Mugabe - had coincided with the emergence of a varied and more balanced political landscape in which several parties kept each other honest and on their toes. The level of public services had gradually improved for all segments of society, corruption had largely been contained, and business was booming.

Under the successor of President Jacob Zuma, South Africa acquired a sense of identity that functioned as a platform for a new cycle of societal development. South Africa was now recognized not just as ideal location for international sporting events but also as favorite venue for global cultural happenings, such as the one that brought M to Cape Town.

The remarkable fit of the nation's leader had been attributed to the input of M during the preselection of presidential candidates by the main parties. Other than that his insight might have guided the process, M denied any such direct influence. It was no secret, though, that these two

personalities knew each other.

Located beneath the Table Mountain on the shores of the Atlantic ocean, Cape Town offered an illustrious setting, a vibrant cultural agenda, an exquisite cuisine and outstanding wines. The Cape Town - International Conference Center or the CT-ICC, as it was signposted, hosted the assembly and provided ample room for its more than a thousand participants.

In the solitude of his backstage position, M dwelled on the meaning of the occasion and his lecture. They were proof of his foresight coming true once more.

Ten years ago, when he published the first book of his trilogy, nobody would have believed that today's meeting might ever be organized.

It dawned on him that his life had been a one-track life, a life that had doggedly edged forward in the face of public and academic denial, a life of holding back until holding back was no longer an option.

Intriguingly, when his mysterious persistence finally brought him to the surreal shores of public embrace, society did not surrender but opened up almost with a sigh of relief.

He stared off into the distance and whispered to himself, 'Even events early in my life contributed to the awareness that our world can be traced back to the conduct of people and particles in their specific environments.'

With the benefit of such hindsight, his early memories seemed to turn into milestones.

The fifth born in a family of seven and too young to participate in the life of his elder brothers and sisters, he had become an observer and a wonderer.

One day, as a three-year-old with fair hair that had never been cut, he had vanished out of his mother's sight to be found at a railway station in a city nearby.

He remembered his deep sense of surrounding when he managed to mingle with the traveling crowd unnoticed and when he saw the window scene moving from his hard-found seat.

At the age of ten, when the world entered the space age, his view of the world broadened each rocket launch.

Three years later, he first questioned his parents about the religious rituals upheld within the family, particularly by his father.

During the pre-Easter fasting that year, he complained, 'Mom, other than that refraining from eating does not really change us, such rituals distract us from our search for the true motive of human conduct.'

During puberty, the inevitably rising hormone levels had temporarily overwhelmed the observer inside him. The differences between his views and those of his father became more articulated. They peaked some years later when he flourished as an eager student of physics.

The sincerity of his father's zealous reliance on religion as an emotional framework of reference not only kept their exchanges civilized but also prevented him from blindly denying his father's beliefs or, for that matter, anybody's beliefs.

'As a form of organization, religion responds to a human need,' is what he maintained throughout his life.

'Even so, the answer to the fallible premises of today's religions is not in the creation of another religion. Rather than to blame religion, we should find the means to rise above it.'

This message, he thought, would be at the heart of his speech today. Indeed, the remarkable insight that he once had the privilege of unveiling explained matters of both science and religion.

Quite unexpectedly, a person entered the backstage area. Recovering from his self-imposed trance, it took M instants to bring back this face from the past.

'Oh, hi! How are you?' he whispered. 'Thank you, I am fine,' was the answer whispered in return. Just then, the announcer finished his introduction. It was time to walk on stage.

One stride before M would step in the limelight, he stopped and looked back, an expression of puzzlement on his face, his posture frozen for an instant. Then, he slowly turned around, searched for his speech notes, and headed for the speaker's stand in a statesman-like fashion.

When he was halfway, the impossible happened. The conference hall lights switched off abruptly leaving an audience too baffled to react.

As M was knocked down, his time was brutally cut short. The last thing he heard was a muffled gunshot but that realization failed to reach him.