

NOTE

Godmen are not Immortal

Asghar Ali Engineer writes :

SAIBABA'S death couple of days ago has brought thousands of people from India and abroad to have his last *darshan* (glimpse) and many of them were even crying that Baba's divine soul has left them forever. On the other hand rationalists are challenging his miraculous powers once again and maintaining that he was man like others and man being mortal, he also died. Many are pointing out that his own forecast that he will die at the age of 96 proved to be wrong and he died at the age of 86.

It should not be very surprising if thousands of people are flocking to his funeral but what is indeed surprising is that the Prime Minister of a secular country, along with Sonia Gandhi, also went to pay his homage. Mrs Gandhi is free to do so as she does not hold any office in Government but Shri Manmohan Singh holds the highest office and should have refrained from going there. It is not clear whether he went there in his personal capacity or as head of the Government. If he went in his personal capacity who bore his expenses and if he went as Prime Minister, according to which protocol? The Prime Minister of a secular country should not go for funeral of a divine personality.

Understanding functioning of godmen requires understanding sociological, psychological and political factors. Human behaviour is of very complex nature and all these factors play important role. The entire phenomenon cannot be explained with reference to 'blind faith' alone as rationalists tend to do. Human interests too, along with other factors, play an important part and human interests constitute an important aspect of human behaviour.

For one thing Indian society is structurally unjust and is based on exploitation of some by others. Thus the very nature of the society promotes injustices, uncertainties and feeling of insecurity. And education systems not only promote it but also justify it. The poor and exploited feels helpless and begins to believe in destiny. Those who cannot face uncertainties either tend to resort to irrational religious beliefs or even commit suicide as many peasants in the country are doing. Also, there are ways and ways of believing in religion. For some with proper understanding religion is a source of morality and ethics whereas for many others religion is a source of superstitions.

Religion, in fact, should be a great source of inspiration to fight against what is wrong and oppressive, it should create inner urge for believer to achieve what is best in human beings and fight against all that is beastly-anger, revenge, lust and greed.

Babas and godmen are required because of the unjust nature of the society. Had there been a society just and truthful people would not have needed them. These Babas make this world livable for the victims of justice and oppression in various ways. To achieve for real success, success achieved in a just way, not through fraud and cheating, is very difficult and one has to work very hard indeed. And many people do not want to work hard and look for miracles as a short cut.

A truly religious person would not look for miracles but face all trivial of life. These Babas try to win over people's hearts and minds by exploiting their weakness for miracles. And not only the victims but rich and powerful also look for such miracles and hence they too flock to such Babas. It is not easy to overcome this weakness and look for miracles. Also, many people suffer from certain diseases for which modern medicine has no easy cure and so they tend to incline towards miracles and in this category people have both weaker as well as powerful and rich sections of the society.

Earlier at least in this matter there were no classes i.e. there used to be one saint or baba to whom all will go rich or poor. But now in the country there are saints and babas who cater to poor and they also cater to the rich and powerful. The Sai was one among them. Through his miracles he would produce golden rings and Seiko watches and usually the rich would flock to him. Even powerful politicians need babas for various reasons.

Earlier people would go to these saints and babas for spiritual purposes but now rich or poor, politicians and other professional, all go to them for personal and mundane reasons. Hardly anyone goes for any spiritual development. The modern world is too complex for inner peace. Generally, and specially the rich and powerful experience lot of tension and insecurity and they need such external props which babas readily provide. □□□