

Oh, My God!

■ Dr. M. N. Buch

Some so called sage, Shobhan Sarkar, states that he has dreamt that in village Daundiya Kheda of District Unnao in U.P the then Raja of that area had buried one thousand tons of gold and that if it was excavated this treasure would be available to the nation. On this basis the Archaeological Survey of India began excavation in the village near the fort and the temple. The district administration made elaborate arrangements, national and international media descended on the village and thousands of people turned up to watch the *tamasha*, all because a self-styled *sadhu* had a dream.

Article 51 A of the Constitution reads “ It shall be the duty of every citizen of India – (h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of enquiry and reform. The fundamental duties apply to all citizens, including parliamentarians and ministers. This is because under Article 84 (a) of the Constitution only an Indian citizen is qualified for membership of Parliament and under Article 75 only a Member of Parliament can be a Minister. Charandas Mahant, who had been a minister in Madhya Pradesh and is currently Minister of State for Agriculture in the Union Cabinet, made a public statement over all the national television channels that he saw nothing wrong in the action being taken on the dream of the *sadhu* because after all India functions on the basis of, in Charandas Mahant’s words, “*tantra, mantra and yantra*”. If this is how a minister interprets the scientific temper, God help us! Charandas Mahant’s statement is an open confession of his belief in superstition and blind faith rather than in that which is scientific and rational. Incidentally, he is also the President of the Chhattisgarh Pradesh Congress, a party which touts itself as secular and committed to modernising India. What sort of message is he sending to the citizens of his parent State?

Excavation is being done by the Archaeological Survey of India. This is a very old organisation founded by Mortimer Wheeler and John Marshal. This is the organisation which excavated Indus Valley sites such as Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, Dholavira and Buddhist sites such Nalanda and Sanchi. Its reputation is such that it was chosen to restore sites in South East Asia such as Angkor Wat and Borobudur. Almost all our ancient monuments are conserved and protected thanks to ASI. Archaeology itself is a scientific discipline, defined by the Chambers Twenty-first Century Dictionary in the following words, “the excavation and subsequent study of the physical remains of earlier civilisations, especially buildings and artifacts, which now benefits from advances in scientific techniques such as carbon dating”. The job of the ASI is to rediscover our past, not hunt for gold because of someone else’s dream. Initially ASI said that it was undertaking excavations because the Geological Survey of India had suggested that Daundiya Kheda was a suitable site for this purpose. GSI denies this, thus raising a question about the credibility of two hitherto highly respected institutions. Before starting excavation certain fundamental questions should have been asked. The Raja did not rule over a huge and highly prosperous kingdom such as Mysore or Hyderabad. He was either a large jagirdar or the raja of some small state, who obviously could not have possessed such huge quantities of gold. He was a supporter of the Rani of Jhansi and in 1857 revolted against the British. Obviously he was on the run and was ultimately caught and hanged. A thousand tons cannot be lifted only by human power. In 1857 where did the Raja find the cranes which could have lifted such weights? How was the hole excavated into which so much gold could be hidden? Why did workers not themselves steal the gold and

why did the local people, who seem to be aware of the legend of some hidden treasure trove, not themselves steal it? In the world of superstition in which we live there is no room for reason and rationale and, therefore, even a scientific organisation such ASI never asks these questions. Article 25 of the Constitution gives the fundamental right to freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of a religion. Religion means a belief, worship of a deity or deities, a faith in divinity. Faith based on the logic of a religion is what the Constitution guarantees for the purpose of free enjoyment. Superstition, on the other hand, is defined as a widely held but unfounded belief. The Chambers Twenty-first Century Dictionary defines superstition as “belief in an influence that certain, (especially commonplace) objects, actions or occurrences have on events, people’s lives, etc”. A superstition cannot ever be rational because the same dictionary defines rational as “related to or based on reason or logic; able to think, form opinions, make judgements; sensible, reasonable”. A superstition does not permit of thinking because it demands blind faith and obedience. Superstition can never promote the scientific temper. What has happened in Daundiya Kheda is entirely based on superstition and it is a matter of some concern that this has permeated into even such scientific organisations as the Archaeological Survey of India.

Over a period of time India seems to be slipping into a world of blind faith, superstition, the mumbo jumbo proclaimed by sadhus, sages and seers, with politicians increasingly patronising the so called godmen who, it is felt, can perpetuate the power of a politician, but for a price. How else can we explain the influence of Asaram Bapu and the vast areas of land gifted to him by state governments of various political hues? How else does one explain Mauni Baba of Ujjain, waxing fat on the largesse showered on him by unscrupulous politicians seeking divine intervention to obtain and retain power? What worries me is that if this continues, if so called vastu shastris correlate the physical structure of a building to some unknown astrological phenomenon, can this country ever prosper? After all, Indira Gandhi who always consulted the Maihar Baba about the sari she should wear on a particular day or occasion, must have worn a sari suggested by the Baba on the day she was assassinated. If the blind faith in the Baba had really worked Indira Gandhi would be alive today. But superstition is not a substitute for loyal guards and a bullet proof vest and, therefore, Maihar Baba notwithstanding, Indira Gandhi was riddled with bullets. All I can say is, Oh, My God!
