

The Silent God

Soon after the 1985 elections, in fact, barely two days after he had been sworn in as the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, Arjun Singh received a terse message from the Congress(I) leadership in Delhi. He had to resign immediately and take over as Governor of Punjab. Perturbed over the turn of events, Arjun Singh rushed to Ujjain before leaving for Delhi and Chandigarh. He had an urgent duty to perform: he had to meet the Mauni Baba in Ujjain. Mr Singh went to the ashram of the *baba* to seek his blessings before he sat on the gubernatorial chair in Chandigarh. According to reports, it was only after the Mauni Baba gave Arjun Singh the green signal that he went to Chandigarh.

It was not the first time that the Mauni Baba has directed Arjun Singh's career. In fact, Mr Singh has taken the advice of the godman before taking any major decision. The dark-complexioned, middle-aged Mauni Baba (so named because he does not speak to anyone; whenever he wishes to communicate, he writes on a slate usually used by school-going children), is not a very old name for the people of Madhya Pradesh. For a decade he has been closely associated with important businessmen and politicians of the state. And, during Arjun Singh's reign as chief minister, Mauni Baba held sway over the politics of the state. The Baba rose from humble beginnings. It is said he was first sighted under a banyan tree on the bank of the river Kshipra in Ujjain. One day, a local businessman gave him a piece of land near Mangalnath, Ujjain.

Today, the ashram sits on a vast green tract of land with a temple and an old house on it. The ashram is visited by rich and poor alike, but according to sources, those who meet the Baba are mostly well-to-do businessmen and politicians. Very few, however, live on the ashram premises. One who does is a former Indian Airlines airhostess. It is generally believed that Arjun Singh took her help for an introduction to Rajiv Gandhi when he was the general secretary of the party.

Almost everyone who visits the ashram have questions for the Baba. The Baba, on his part, does not disappoint anyone. Take, for example, the case of a politician who asked the godman when he would

become an MLA. The Baba whipped out his piece of chalk and wrote on his slate: "Tum chanao jaroor jitogey (You will definitely win the election)." For another the Baba wrote: "Tum mantri teen mahiney mein ban jaogey... (You will become a minister in three months)." For each questioner, the Baba has a few words of advice: "Arjun Singh sey miltey raho (Maintain your contacts with Arjun Singh)." And when Arjun Singh meets the Baba, he is advised to give posts to those who had earlier come to him for advice.

In crises, Arjun Singh has always turned to the Mauni Baba. In November last year, when the party high command asked Mr Singh to contest the Lok Sabha election from South Delhi, he was apprehensive about the outcome. The Mauni Baba, however, assured him that he would be successful because he would "tie the voters with *tantra*." During the campaign, the Baba camped with 30 other *tantriks* and *pujaris* and a day before the polls, disclose insiders, when the Baba performed a special *puja*, Arjun Singh's wife Saroj Singh



Mauni Baba with Arjun Singh and his wife

was present. Soon after his success in the elections, Arjun Singh decided to shift from the Punjab government's guest house in Kaparthala House to another address. Who should he turn to but Mauni Baba who advised him to choose house number five on Tuglaq Road. Mr Singh had to wait for nearly four months for the house in which the *grihapravesk puja* was performed by none other than the Baba himself.

Of late, however, the Baba seems to have lost his touch. *Tantrik* experts say it is not the Baba's fault. "*Tantra*," they add, "is a two-edged weapon" and often *tantrik pujas*, like the one which was performed by Mauni Baba on Mahashivratri day to bring his devotee—Arjun Singh—out of the malign influences of his enemies, boomeranged. The "*shatru-nasak puja*" was conducted in near-total darkness. Was that the reason for the massive four-hour power cut throughout the state on that day? Arjun Singh had come all the way from Delhi to Indore in a small chartered plane of the Delhi Flying Club. For the record he had to visit Indore to attend a function of his party and as soon as that was over, Mr Singh rushed to Mauni Baba's ashram (around 50 km away from Indore) for the *puja*. The *puja* went off without a hitch but the malefic influences continue to dog the ex-chief minister of Madhya Pradesh. Will Mauni Baba's blessings silence the critics of Arjun Singh? Only time can tell.

Alok Mehta



Mauni Baba: tantrik rites to ward off evil