

Judgment day

Asaram’s rise and fall is reflective of the lives of some self-styled godmen of our times.

In sentencing Asaram Bapu to imprisonment for the rest of his natural life for the rape of a 16-year-old girl in 2013, a Special Court in Jodhpur has **reinvigorated** faith in the criminal justice system. Two aides who facilitated the crime have been sentenced to 20 years in prison. At a time when sexual offences against women and minor girls are being reported with **benumbing** regularity, a **verdict** of this sort reinforces public trust. Holding powerful and influential heads of religious institutions is not easy in the country, given the wide public support and political **patronage** they enjoy. Fortunately, neither the investigators nor the **prosecutors** in the case of the 77 year old Asumal Harpalani, who named himself Asaram, seem to have been overawed by his large following or **intimidated** by his **belligerent** supporters. High-ranking police officers received letters and phone calls threatening them and their families with **dire** consequences, and witnesses were killed or attacked in the course of the investigation and trial. Against this **back drop**, it took courage and determination for the victim and her family to seek justice. The facts are chilling. The victim’s parents, who were Asaram’s devotees, were asked to take her from the ashram’s residential school at Chhindwara to the godman’s home in Manai, near Jodhpur, **ostensibly** to **exorcise** ‘evil spirits’ that had possessed her. The parents were asked to leave, and the girl had to be alone with him. She was sexually assaulted and threatened against speaking out. Fortunately, her father managed to get a police complaint registered in New Delhi. It was later transferred to Jodhpur.

It is also a sign of the times that every time the final verdict is set to be delivered in a criminal case involving a self-styled godman, the State concerned has to be on high alert and massive police deployment is required to **quell** possible trouble by followers. After the violence and **mayhem** that **gripped** Panchkula town in the immediate aftermath of the sentencing of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh last year in a rape case, this time the police took no chances, and the judgment was delivered in **makeshift** courtroom in a prison. There is nothing more **mortifying** to the **devout** than witnessing jet-age-godmen betraying the trust of their followers. Asaram fits into the template of the self-styled godman : graduating from running a liquor business to peddling spiritual succour, leading a lavish lifestyle, expanding into business and the enjoying the patronage of the rich and powerful, and, ultimately, misusing his power to exploit his unquestioning devotees. Special Judge Madhusudan Sharma has underscored how the accused had broken the victim’s trust in him. Verdicts such as these are needed at a time when sections of society see **tainted** men as guardians of India’s age old spiritual tradition.

Words

Reinvigorated

Kind

Meaning

ven, modernize, rejuvenate, renew, renovate, restore, revitalize, revive, stimulate

Aides	abettor, adjutant, attendant, crew, crewman, deputy, helper, lieutenant
Benumb	blunt, chill, cumber, daze, numb, stun, deaden
Verdict	answer, award, conclusion, decision, decree, finding
Patronage	aegis, auspices, backing, encouragement, financing
Prosecutor	agent, analyst, auditor, detective, examiner
Overawed	affect, awe, excite, faze, inspire, sway
Intimidated	browbeaten, bullied, cowed, daunted, terrified
Belligerent	aggressive, antagonistic, bellicose, combative, contentious
Dire	acute, critical, desperate, drastic, extreme
Backdrop	scenery, scrim, décor, landscape, spectacle
Ostensibly	evidently, officially, seemingly, supposedly, externally
Exorcise	drive out, dismiss, expel, purge, purify, remove, cast out.
Quell	annihilate, conquer, crush, extinguish, overcome, put down
Mayhem	anarchy, commotion, destruction, havoc, fracas, pandemonium
Gripped	Clutch, grasp, clasp, clench
Makeshift	alternative, expedient, make-do, stopgap, substitute, temp, throwaway
Mortifying	annoy, chagrin, confound, deflate, disgrace, displease, humiliate
Devout	adoring, ardent, faithful, fervent, passionate, pious, religious
Tainted	contaminated, corrupted, dirty, infected, polluted, rotten, decayed

Unpersuasive

The Centre's arguments for its stand against elevating Justice K.M. Josephs are flawed

The Centre's objections to the **elevation** of Uttarakhand High court chief Justice K.M. Joseph to the Supreme Court are **unpersuasive** and raise **suspicion** whether his appointment is being blocked for **extraneous** reasons. Basically, there are two broad reasons **proffered** for **freezing** the appointment. First, that Justice Joseph is much too junior in the all India list of judges, with 11 Chief Justices ranked above him. Second, that there is an imbalance in the regional representation in the Supreme Court, something that his

appointment will only skew by adding another judge from Kerala. Neither of these reasons holds good. Seniority is not the sole consideration while elevating a High Court judge to the apex court. Inter se seniority is a consideration when a **puisne** judge is made a Chief Justice, but it is not **sacrosanct** in elevation to the Supreme Court. There are quite a few instances of senior judges and Chief Justices being overlooked in favour of a more deserving candidate of outstanding merit. Some of these decisions may **evoke** criticism, but there is no laid down norm under which the Supreme Court **collegium** should draw fresh talent for the highest court only in the order in which an all India seniority list of High court judges has been drawn up. That merit is and has been a factor in selection addresses the other argument, that Kerala will have two Supreme Court judges were Justice Joseph to be appointed. There was a time when Kerala had three judges in the **apex court**; also, other courts have been routinely 'over-represented'.

While it is desirable that regional imbalances and under representation are not **glaring**, this cannot be **cited** as a factor to shoot down the candidature of a person otherwise qualified and validly recommended. Not surprisingly, the Centre's decision has been accompanied by suspicions and allegations that Justice Joseph is being targeted for his 2016 judgment **quashing** the **proclamation** of President's rule in Uttarakhand. What happens from now on will depend on how the collegium reacts. In the light of its strong recommendation that Justice Joseph is "more deserving and suitable in all respects than other chief Justices and senior puisne judges", it will be no surprise if it **reiterates** the recommendation. Then the government is bound to abide by the collegium's decision. In that event, the Centre should not **prolong** the controversy further by seeking to block his elevation again. There is a strong perception, even within the judiciary, that the government is much too slow when it comes to approving judicial appointments. A conflict between the judiciary and the executive over particular appointments is not in the public interest. Besides allowing Justice Joseph's appointment to go through, efforts must be made to finalise a revised memorandum to procedure for appointments so that the case of one judge does not turn into a **flashpoint** for a sustained conflict between the two branches.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Elevation		altitude, ascent, mountain, activity, boost, eminence, levitation, platform, top, roof
Unpersuasive		flimsy, faltering, faulty, flabby, inadequate, ineffective inefficient, unconvincing
Suspicion		Conjecture, cynicism, distrust, impression, jealousy, misgiving
Extraneous		additional, immaterial, incidental, nonessential, superfluous, supplementary
Proffered		Propound, extend, gift, give, hand, pose, present, proposition
Freezing		biting, chilly, frigid, frosty, glacial, icy, numbing, polar, wintry, arctic
Sacrosanct		revered, venerated, blessed, consecrated, divine, godly

Evoke	arouse, conjure, elicit, invoke, provoke, recall, awaken, induce
Glaring	blatant, conspicuous, egregious, flagrant, noticeable, outrageous
Cited	allege, allude to, indicate, mention, name, offer, point out, present
Quash	crush, put down, quell, repress, squash, suppress, beat, extinguish
Proclamation	decree, edict, manifesto, notification, promulgation, pronouncement
Reiterates	echo, renew, repeat, restate, ditto, iterate, recap, recapitulate
Prolong	continue, delay, drag out, lengthen, perpetuate, protract
Flashpoint	