

Life After Papaji

He was an icon as well as an iconoclast, a traditionalist as well as a debunker.

It has been six years since Papaji died but his persona as well his image has deeply descended in the Kaul clan mythology, in spite of his sharp and pungent treatment of its members and others at times. What has unconsciously and consciously impressed people has been his uncompromisable honesty and his unassailable character.

His absence from the clan is invisibly mourned. His intelligence, his sarcasm, his upbraiding of people, and his high-pitched voice are missed. He appeared to be the tower of strength.

He came from modest economic circumstances but by the dint of his intelligence and consistency he created a niche for himself in the society.

He took a police officer's job rather than an English professor's job because the former paid more and was more secure. Why he took a master's degree in English is puzzling because he was not an artistic person. He should have studied physics, economics, or political science instead. This is among the many contradictions in his life. Basically, he had no vision of his life: he went along whatever seemed to him the reality of his life in a given period. Although his basic vision of human life as a painful experience stayed all his life.

Papaji did not have much fun in life because of his deep conservatism and parsimoniousness. On philosophical level he wondered whether joy was possible. In the earlier period of his life he was often glum and sedate. He believed life was set up by gods to punish man for some unknown sins. But later with considerable effort he incorporated some modicum of joy in his life. His brother, Babuji, called him a Devdas without a Paroo. His personality can be echoed by the following two

stanzas from Shakespeare's plays King Lear and Macbeth:

"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,
They kill us for their sport."

"Life's is but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing."

Papaji's honesty in the public life was so strong that we can use the American president Harry Truman's aphorism, "The buck stops here." He had forbidden police officers subordinate to him to enter his home because they tended to please his home people by bringing in gifts like fruits, bread, and other things. He once told me that if his son was implicated in some wrong-doing he would not hesitate to punish him. Such high character was a rarity in the Kashmir of those times.

Life was unfair to him as he deserved a much higher level of job than the best he had, like an ambassador's job. He deserved a wife who had higher intellectual acumen than she had. He complained a lot about life. Still he went on living.

Today we have no leader in the Kaul clan. It is among other aspects a loose spectrum of many young people who are unaware of Kaul clan's glory days and grand personalities. This portends a gradual dissolution of the mythology of the clan. But everything in life finally fades in the mists of time.

Life after Papaji in the clan has been a luke-warm experience, adrift in

uncertainty; like a rehearsal of life, instead of the life itself.

With all his flaws Papaji was a bulwark of moral strength. He stood by his principles most of the time, in spite of the harm which it incurred many times.

I had a special relationship with Papaji. I often differed with him on philosophical matters. We exchanged about a hundred letters. One day I wish to publish them as they are about serious philosophical subjects. Papaji's daughter Veena told me that after his death they found out that the only letters he had saved were those written by me.

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