

Compromis

Baba Hedonesh Anandam is a self styled guru who has amassed quite a bit of following lately. His popularity with the educated classes, especially the young and well heeled, is in the 'babasphere', so to speak, unprecedented. A great part of the enigma perhaps owes to Hedonesh's having *'been there, done that and hung up his boots'*. Hedonesh, you see, had it all: the wife, the job, the house, the car, the club and the holiday. And not unlike the Buddha, Hedonesh, in an act of unthinkable renunciation walked away from it all without so much as a second thought. The life he abandoned, more or less epitomized the aspirational standard that drove the 'rat race'. And all because on a particular night of weekend revelry, having ingested some psilocybin mushrooms, he saw the 'light' – that event is now embedded in the popular imagination as the 'Night of the Light'. And ever since, he claims to live but to show others the 'light'.

In furtherance of the said endeavour he has written and self-published an e-book which, essentially, proposes that in order to attain to what he calls the 'true life' one has to repeatedly experience altered states of consciousness induced by naturally occurring hallucinogens such as psilocybin mushrooms. In due course one will see the 'light' and from then on will begin a life of pure delight. The book also interrogates the very foundations of the majority religion, subjecting its scripture, mythology and iconography to a trenchant critique. Also, in line with the prevalent trend in academia, he employs (un)wholesomely Freudian psychoanalytic techniques to expiscate mystical meaning. Much to the chagrin of the religiously minded it is a quite rip roaring success in the academic community. In summation this is what Hedonesh has to say about the majority religion: "Is sex a euphemism for god? Or is god a euphemism for sex? Or both!"

Incidentally, around this time an empirical study conducted under the aegis of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Baltimore, USA claims that "studies have shown that the classic hallucinogen psilocybin occasions personally spiritually significant mystical experiences that predict long-term changes in behaviours, attitudes and values." The study claims to "assess the effect of psilocybin on changes in five broad domains of personality –Neuroticism, Extroversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness." Along with "participant claims of hallucinogen-occasioned increases in aesthetic appreciation, imagination, and creativity", the researchers found "significant increases in Openness following a high-dose psilocybin session". To truly get the import of the study one needs to understand that core personality traits are construed as mostly fixed after age 30. And up until the said research it was thought nearly impossible to experimentally create conditions (significant life events, such as a divorce for instance) that may alter adult personality dramatically. More particularly, no study had till then "prospectively demonstrated personality change in healthy adults after an experimentally manipulated discrete event". The study concludes that mystical experiences during psilocybin sessions would lead to enduring increases in Openness. The construct of Openness encompasses aesthetic appreciation and sensitivity, imagination and fantasy, and broad minded tolerance of others' viewpoints and values. Psychometric studies have revealed that the aforementioned qualities that involve Openness are statistically related. In a nutshell an increase in Openness suggests a corresponding increase in creativity, intelligence and knowledge.

The very fortuitous publication of the aforementioned independent study is appropriated by Hedonesh. He touts the same as scientific vindication of his belief; which, given the facts, it willy-nilly is. The middle classes lap it up to the point where 'renunciation' and 'mushrooming' is the new signifier of educated upward mobility. Hedonesh announces the establishment of the newest religion of the world: 'Anandam'.

Hedonesh's acolytes establish a commune for him in the hills. Given that most his followers are rich, it goes without saying the commune lacks for nothing. It is a self sufficient, state of the art facility traversing thousands of acres; quite a bit of which are psilocybin mushroom plantations. Since so much of their belief is hinged around the experiences induced by the mushrooms, Hedonesh's followers regard them as sacred. Indeed, a man is conscripted, so to speak, only after he has undergone formal initiation rites that amongst other things involve ingesting mushrooms under Hedonesh's supervision. After the establishment of the commune Hedonesh's popularity soars, transcending borders and religious, cultural and linguistic divides, to prop him, as a famous tabloid writer put it, "a phenomenon without precedent in new age spirituality. Hedonesh's irresistibility combines the physical appeal of a Hollywood star with the mind of an Oxford don".

Initially the Government pays no heed, perhaps considering him as just another 'baba' with no real political reckoning; spouting, as is their wont, some psycho-religious babble that appeals, as always, to only the feeble minded. But when captains of industry, senior bureaucrats, IT professionals and the like start quitting their jobs to join Hedonesh and his merry band in the hills, the government, to say the least, is alarmed. Soon enough, the government realizes the need to plug the brain drain.

To begin with, Hedonesh's book which used to be freely available for download from his official website is blocked by recourse to section 69A of the IT Act, 2000. He is, then, arrested for allegedly violating section 66A of the IT Act, 2000 and sections 153(A) and 295(A) of the Penal Code (PC). His application for bail is rejected on grounds of him being an imminent threat to public order. Further, under Section 3 (a) of the NDPS Act, 1985, psilocybin mushrooms are now designated a psychotropic substance. Immediately following such notification the Government sends in a contingent of the Central Agricultural Force (CAF) to the commune to search, seize and destroy the offending substance. The CAF contingent faces resistance from the Anandis – as Hedonesh's followers now call themselves – who refuse to let them enter the commune premises without a warrant. The CAF force their way in and the resulting melee leaves two Anandis dead. The Anandis at the premises are arrested and the mushroom fields burnt. The arrested Anandis are charged under sections 25A and 27 of the NDPS, Act, 1985. Bail applications of the arrestees are summarily rejected. After his followers are charged under section 27, Hedonesh is slapped with an additional charge under section 29 of the same act.

In light of all of the above you are to identify, as far as possible, questions of constitutionality and file, under relevant law, proceedings on behalf of Hedonesh and his followers at the Supreme Court. You are also to defend the governmental action in response to such filing.
