

**India - Gujarat: Untold Story of Hindukaran (Proselysation)
of Adivasi's (Tribals) in Dangs
A report**

Citizen's Inquiry Committee

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Executive Summary

A people's investigation was undertaken regarding plans to organise what is being described as a massive Shabri Kumbh in the tribal district of Dangs in Gujarat, on Feb 11-13, 2006. Organisations affiliated to the Sangh with the open support of the BJP state government are strenuously mobilising around 5 lakh adivasis and Hindutva activists to attend this gathering, in a remote and socially and environmentally highly sensitive and vulnerable forested region.

Two fact finding committees was formed to visit the district, and meet the local people, activists, VHP workers, district authorities and other concerned persons. The first committee comprised Irfan Engineer (Director Center for Study of Society and Secularism, Mumbai), Suresh Khairnar (Convener Dharma Nirpeksh Nagrik Manch, Nagpur), Digant Oza, (Editor Jalseva and a social activist, Ahmedabad) and Ram Puniyani, Secretary (All India Secular Forum). The second team comprised Harsh Mander (Anhad), Uttambhai Parmar, Rohit Prajapati (PUCL, Vadodara) Prasad Chacko (ActionAid Gujarat), Lakshmanbhai(Aman Samudaya, Gujarat) and Shabnam Hashmi (Anhad). Both teams visited Ahva, Subir, Unai, Saputara and talked to the local people and activists. The latter team also met local district officials and leaders of the RSS. The two teams visited the district consecutively between 10 and 21 Dec, 2005.

For last several years, the Sangh and its front organizations like the Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad and the Hindu Jagaran Manch have been targeting the tribal belt of India, which includes Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Orissa and Gujarat. The efforts of the Sangh organisations is to see that adivasis lose their identity, culture and traditions of worshiping nature without being part of any mainstream religion, by asserting that they are Hindus.

A major focus of their efforts is in Dangs, a predominantly adivasi area with sparse population and rich forest cover. It is the smallest district of Gujarat, with a population of 1,86,000. 92% residents of the district are tribal. The Bhils, Kokanis, Warlis are the major tribal groupings. Dangs is one of the two districts in the country having more than 90% rich forest-cover. With very small and uneconomic holdings, the majority of the cultivators barely manage to survive for few months of the year on the crops harvested. The agricultural labourers find some employment only during the agricultural season. Large numbers migrate in semi-bonded conditions to Surat district to work as cane-cutters in the sugar co-operatives. The political economy of Dangs presents a typical case of utter neglect, dispossession and non-development.

Against this background, the State, in close collaboration with Sangh organisations, is engaged in a systematic campaign to divide the Dangi adivasis on religious communal lines and pit them against each other. The BJP and RSS led outfits are spreading their tentacles into every nook and corner of Dangs on the ostensible plea of countering the proselytisation activities of the Christian missionaries and saving the 'Hindu' adivasis. There is no doubt, that this campaign has twin objectives. First is the suppression of the basic religious rights of the adivasis practising Christianity and thereby also curbing the rights of the Christian missionaries to carry on their activities. Second, is diverting the growing consciousness of the Dangi adivasis about their traditional rights and self-rule onto communal and anti-tribal and anti-people issues.

The total Christian population of Dangs today is less than 8,000 (around 5%), although a range of both Catholic and Protestant missionaries have established their missions in the district over a period of more than a hundred years. The population of Christians in Gujarat as a whole are even less, a mere 0.5%. Still the 'threat' of Christian conversion has been made into a strong and emotive propaganda plank by the Sangh in tribal areas, along with the more generalized manufacture of hatred against Muslims.

In Dangs, following the ascendancy of the BJP to the state government in Gujarat in 1995 and in the centre in 1996, anti- Christian propaganda was raised rapidly to boiling point. These efforts became far more organized from 1997, especially after the arrival in the district of Swami Aseemanand, a VHP functionary from West Bengal who initiated vicious anti-Christian propaganda and started projecting the work of Christian missions as a threat to both Hinduism and the national security. He has been visiting village after village, doing propaganda against Christian missionaries and Islamic Jehadis. He has also been propagating so-called re-conversion, *ghar-vapasi* (or homecoming) to Hinduism amongst the adivasis.

The religion of the Dangi adivasis is animistic, with varied gods and goddesses like animals, plants, trees and hills, the forces of nature like rain, mountain, ghosts and spirits, including tigers, cows, serpents, the moon, and gods of corn, the rains, the wind, the hills and forests. They are not Hindus, at least not subscribing to the Brahminical mainstream traditions of the faith. Therefore it is erroneous to describe the abandonment of Christian faith, to the extent that it is taking place under Hindutva influence, as 're-conversions' or home-coming to Hinduism.

Whereas Christian missionaries are working in this area from over a century, organised and violent attacks on them were mounted against them in 1998. Throughout the year 1998, there were 38 recorded cases of anti Christian violence, especially attacks on places of worship. A number of leaflets were published and the Gujarati newspapers added fuel to the fire, supporting the propaganda against the tiny Christian population of Gujarat. '*Hindu Jago, Christi Bhagao*' (Arise Hindus, throw out the Christians) represents the overall sentiment of these pamphlets. Christians were said to be foreigners who are converting the gullible tribal people. Investigations by human rights groups and reports of Communalism Combat confirmed that these were well planned attacks on Christians, which were rapidly aggravated after the BJP came to power at the state and the BJP led coalition came to power at the centre. Rather than assuaging the wounds of Christian community, Vajpayee added salt to the wounds with his characteristic masterly moral ambiguity, by calling for a national debate on conversion, thereby indirectly providing a rationale for the violence.

The VHP and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, in their attempts to convert adivasis into Hinduism, have misused the legend of Shabri and Ram. The legend is propagated that Ram had visited Dangs, which according to them is the Dandkarnya of the Ramayana. A nearby hill, Chamak Dongar (Shining Mountain) has been touted as the *exact place* where Ram met Shabri and ate the wild berries tasted by her. They have built a huge temple at this place, for which a large number of trees were cut, and laws protecting tribal land ownership as well as forests were violated.

Although the Kumbh Mela is a tradition unchanged through the millennia, organised by turns in four fixed locations of India, Nasik, Hardwar, Allahabad and Ujjain, the Sangh is organising in Dangs what is at best described as a pseudo- Kumbh, for which there is no religious sanction. The propaganda materials including very professionally prepared CDs reveal the true intent of the Kumbh. These describe Christianity as a dangerous foreign faith, and call for its destruction in the same way as Ram had killed the demon Ravana. What Ram did to Ravana needs to be repeated and foreigners thrown out. *Hindu Jago, Christi Bhagao* is their inflammatory central slogan.

The intense hate propaganda against Christians has started resulting in the intimidation of Christian community as a whole. We could see the fear writ on the face of most of the Christians we met.

The teams observed with great concern that even the pretence of distance between the state apparatus and the Sangh has been abandoned. The local administration, its functionaries, vehicles and funds, are openly being used for the advancement of the intensely divisive state agenda. The Collector justified communal mobilization as religious and cultural awakening, thus unabashedly adopting the rhetoric and idiom of the Hindutva forces.

What is important to understand is that the intended Kumbh Mela is not a religious issue. It is not a battle of Hindus against Christians. It is a political game to mislead the adivasis, and divert their anger at pauperisation and dispossession by the state and non-adivasi outsiders, by cynically creating a pseudo-mythology. It aims to alienate them from their land and culture, to Hinduise them to build a majority constituency on the basis of religion and to reap political benefits, and to create grave divisions in the name of religion, their eating habits and political affiliations among the adivasis. The issues at stake are tribal culture, tribal identity and their livelihoods, the freedom to pursue and propagate one's faith guaranteed under the Constitution, and the security of minorities.

The openly partisan support of the state government for the dangerous sectarian objectives of the Sangh needs to be combated, and the safety of minorities secured, else the tribal regions of India, already dispossessed and pauperised, will flow with the blood of sectarian hatred.

At the outskirts of Shabri Temple, there is a pillar which has a slogan in Hindi, which reads : '*Sankalap: Dharmantaran aur Jehad ke Vichar ko Vishwa se Nirmool Karenge.*' (Our resolve is to free the world from the ideologies of conversions and jehad'.) The Sangh with the open support of the state government has clearly drawn its battle lines. It is for people who cherish secular democracy in our land to expeditiously and resolutely respond.

Introduction

Plans are afoot to organise what is being described as a massive Shabri Kumbh in the tribal district of Dangs in Gujarat, on Feb 11-13, 2006. Organisations affiliated to the Sangh with the open support of the BJP state government are strenuously mobilising around 5 lakh adivasis and Hindutva activists to attend this gathering, in a remote and socially and environmentally highly sensitive and vulnerable forested region. It is this that provides the immediate context for two concerned citizens' investigations and this report based on their findings.

However the larger context of this report is that 1998 witnessed a series of organized attacks on the Christian tribal populations in Dangs, and anti-Christian mobilization has been unrelenting in the district since, although mercifully overt violence has not recurred. The investigation aims also to enquire about the sense of security experienced by the small Christian tribal population of the district. The still larger context for the report is the activities of the Sangh organizations in tribal regions in many states of India, including Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chatisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa that targets both Christian tribal people and missionaries. However, this report focuses on the Dangs in Gujarat.

Two fact-finding committees were formed to visit the district, and meet the local people, activists, VHP workers, district authorities and other concerned persons. The first committee comprised Irfan Engineer (Director Center for Study of Society and Secularism, Mumbai), Suresh Khairnar (Convener Dharma Nirpeksh Nagrik Manch, Nagpur), Digant Oza, (Editor Jalseva and a social activist, Ahmedabad) and Ram Puniyani, Secretary (All India Secular Forum). The second team comprised Harsh Mander (Anhad), Uttambhai Parmar, Rohit Prajapati (PUCL, Vadodara), Prasad Chacko (Regional Director, Action Aid Gujarat), Lakshmanbhai Rathore (Aman Samudaya, Gujarat) and Shabnam Hashmi (Anhad). Both teams visited Ahva, Subir, Unai, Saputara and talked to the local people and activists. The latter team also met local district officials and leaders of the RSS. The two teams visited the district consecutively between 10 and 21 December, 2005.

The teams aimed to address the following questions-Why is the Kumbh being held in this area at this point of time in this region? What is the link if any between the attacks and violence against the Christians in Dangs and this programme? Is there a sense of insecurity in local populations? What is the role of the state government in organizing and supporting this programme, if any? This report summarises their observations.

Political Economy of Dangs

Dangs is a predominantly adivasi area with sparse population and rich forest cover. British could not win over this area and got it leased from the Bhil Rajas of Dangs to exploit the rich teak wood in this area.

Dangs is the smallest district of the State of Gujarat. It has a population of 1,86,000 and covers 1,600 sq kms, the geographical area of Gujarat. Dangs is one of the two districts in the country having more than 90% forest-cover. The forest is rich in teak, sissoo, khair, bamboo and a wide variety of indigenous medicinal plants. The terrain of Dangs is hilly and rocky. Rainfall is heavy, although ironically the district is chronically water scarce due to poor subsoil. There are four major rivers but all are seasonal.

The population of Dangs is predominantly tribal. 92% residents of the district are tribal. The Bhils, Kokanis, Warlis are the major tribal groupings. There are also other numerically smaller tribal groupings such as the Gamits, Chodras and Kotawalias. The records indicate that the Bhils are the original inhabitants of Dangs, while the other tribal communities like the Kokanis and Warlis came to Dangs much later from the adjoining areas of Maharashtra and Gujarat. Nevertheless, all these tribal communities have, over a period of time, evolved a common Dangi identity in terms of social structure, norms, customs, culture and language.

The political economy of the Dangs has certain unique features which mark it off from the rest of the tribal belt of Gujarat. The tribal belt running through the eastern part of Gujarat consists of other districts viz. Valsad, Navasari, Surat, Vadodara, Narmada, Panchmahal, Sabarkantha and Banaskantha. A significant aspect of the political economy of these districts is that all of them have been brought increasingly closer to the rest of the political economy of Gujarat in particular and the country in general. These other tribal districts have witnessed a steady and increasing inroads made by non-tribal landed and commercial interests, private capital (foreign and Indian collaborations) state undertakings and projects. The consequences have been large-scale dispossession, displacement and marginalisation of the tribal people. In short in these districts the adivasis have to contend with not just the state's forest policy but also its other industrial and agricultural policy measures.

In contrast, Dangs presents an altogether different picture. Here, forest and forest-based activities still constitute the core of its political economy. The absence of non-tribal landed interest, private capital and state undertakings and projects has made the interface between the people of Dangs and the operations of the State forest policy as the primary source of dispossession, displacement and marginalisation of the traditional rights of the Dangi people. This is being complicated by the recent incursions of the Sangh in the region.

At the time of the entry of the British in the 1820s the Dangs was an independent kingdom ruled by 5 kings and 9 naiks. Cultivation of the abundant forestlands, hunting, fishing and gathering of wild-fruits and roots were the main forms of economy activity of the people. The concept of private ownership of land was non-existent and cultivation of the forestlands was done wherever it was possible and according to needs of the family. Shifting cultivation was the norm.

The British made several unsuccessful attempts to subjugate the Dangi kings. Finally, in 1842 the British tricked the Dangi kings to enter into a lease-agreement with them. The lease was further extended in 1862. As per the terms of this lease, the British acquired certain parts of the Dangs forest from which they could fell and transport timber, while the Dangi kings could continue to rule Dangs as nominally independent political rulers. Till 1948 the Dangs was administered under

the Foreign Jurisdiction Act of the British Government. In essence, the Dangi kings and the people continued to exercise their traditional rights over forest-lands, forest-produce and resources, while, at the same time, granting the British the right to fell and transport timber from certain areas of the forest for a limited period. However, having assessed the immense wealth of the forests of the Dangs, the British set upon a systematic plan to take over the entire forest itself.

The 1870s Forest Act and other sets of rules made by the British officials provided the framework to maximize the revenues from the Dangs forest. Conservation of forest was sacrificed for further maximization of revenues.

The British also initiated measures to demarcate the forest into 'Reserved' and 'Protected' areas, leading to the increasing erosion of the rights of the Dangi people over the use of forestlands and forest-produce. Shifting cultivation, collection of fuel-wood, wood for house, mahwa, and other forest produce was banned in large tracts of the forest declared as 'Reserved' and 'Protected'. The Dangi people did resist these measures but such resistance was spontaneous and sporadic and did not sustain. The net effect of the British's take over of the forest of Dangs and the operationalisation of its Working Plan and demarcation-measures was that the Dangi people were deprived of large tracts of forest lands and forest produce which were the only source of livelihoods for them. By 1911 two-thirds of the land formerly held by the Dangis was taken over by the British. The large-scale displacement and deprivation of the traditional rights of Dangi people caused by the British forest policy was further accentuated by a total absence of alternative source of economic activity and livelihood.

The political economy of Dangs sadly did not see any drastic changes after the exit of the British. Agriculture on legally contested and sub-optimal forestlands continues to be main form of economic activity. Industrial activity is insignificant. The service-sector also consists of small-hotels, shops, trade and trade-related activities in the two towns of Ahwa and Waghai. Alternate seasonal employment is found in cane-cutting in the sugar co-operatives of Surat district, bamboo-cutting, collection of beedi-leaves (timru-patta), mahwa flowers, honey and in the public works undertaken by the district panchayat and Forest Department.

According to the 1991 census, nearly 87% of the population is dependent on agriculture (this includes agricultural labourers forming 16% of the main working population). Of the rest 4% are engaged in other services such as manufacturing, processing, servicing, household industry, construction, trade, transport and communication etc. the district has only around 12 enterprises employing 8,000 and odd workers.

In the mid-1960's when the Gujarat Government decided to survey the lands in Dangs to allot legal titles to the cultivators, the adivasis were either not informed about the survey or were misinformed. As a result, a good many of the cultivators found their land brought under 'Reserved' and 'Protected' forest.

The land-holding pattern in Dangs is predominantly titled towards small and uneconomic holdings. There is a near absence of large holdings. Class differentiation based on landholdings is also minimal. With very meagre irrigation facilities available, agriculture in Dangs is critically dependent on the rainfall. The seeds used are of the traditional variety. The use of HYV, fertilizers, tractors etc. is also marginal. Being poor, majority of the cultivators can hardly make any investment on their own. Consequently, the production and productivity, of all the crops is far below the rest of the State.

With very small and uneconomic holdings, the majority of the cultivators barely manage to survive for few months of the year on the crops harvested. The agricultural labourers, who constitute 16% of the total main workers find some employment only during the agricultural season. The adivasis who cultivate forestland without any legal title are constantly insecure and therefore disabled from investing in agriculture.

Thus, migrating to Surat district to work as cane-cutters in the sugar co-operatives, working in the bamboo-coupes meant for the central paper mills of Surat, collection of beedi-leaves (timru-patta) and other minor forest produce, are the only sources of alternate employment and income for the majority of the adivasis of Dangs. It is estimated that around 40,000 persons out of a population of 1,40,000 people, migrate every year to work as cane-cutters in the nine sugar co-operatives based in Surat and Valsad districts. These adivasis literally work as semi-bonded labourers. The living and working conditions are sub-human. After 8 months of toil and sweat all that they manage to save is a paltry Rs.3,000 to Rs. 5,000 on an average. Even this amount goes back to pay the loans taken at usurious rates or in house repairing and marriage. The wages are meagre (all the sugar co-operatives have been openly flouting the wages stipulated by the Gujarat High Court). A good part of wages due to the cane-cutters is pilfered by the mukkadams and the factory-supervisors through a wide variety of corrupt practices.

To sum up, the post-1947 political economy of Dangs presents a typical case of utter neglect, dispossession and non-development. Over the last fifty years the Dangi adivasis have been systematically deprived of their traditional rights over forestland, forest and forest resources and left to fend for themselves. Neither agriculture nor industry has been developed as source of secure employment and income. Wages and working conditions are strongly exploitative. The social sectors such as health and education are in a state of utter neglect and disarray.

The Dangs adivasis had put up a number of valiant struggles against the British to defend their traditional rights and political sovereignty. The extension and intensification of the alienation process by the new rulers in the post 1947 period has once again compelled the Dangi adivasis to take recourse to the path of resistance and struggle. Unlike in the past, the present struggle of the Dangi adivasis is acquiring a more organised and conscious form. The basic aim of this struggle is the total reassertion of the traditional rights of Dangi adivasis over forest-land, forest and forest produce and the creation of a political system, which allows for full, free and unhindered self-rule. The State, on its part, is doing its utmost to suppress and divert the struggle. It has been using a wide variety of tactics and methods towards this end. Physical repression, arrest under false charges and cases, denial of permission to hold public-meeting, charging the people for anti-national, anti-state, naxalite and terrorist activities. In all this the State has been getting an eager assistance from the vernacular press.

Of late, another tactic is being used by the State, through a systematic campaign to divide the Dangi adivasis on communal lines and pit them against each other. The BJP and RSS led outfits such as VHP and Bajrang Dal are spreading their tentacles into every nook and corner of Dangs on the ostensible plea of countering the proselytisation activities of the Christian missionaries and saving the 'Hindu' adivasis. There is no doubt, that this campaign has twin objectives. First is the suppression of the basic religious rights of the adivasis practising Christianity and thereby also curbing the rights of the Christian missionaries to carry on their activities. Second, is diverting the growing consciousness of the Dangi adivasis about their traditional rights and self-rule onto communal and anti-tribal and anti-people issues.

The Sangh and anti-Christian mobilization

The total Christian population of Dangs today is less than 8,000 (around 5%), although a range of both Catholic and Protestant missionaries have established their missions in the district over a period of more than a hundred years. The population of Christians in Gujarat as a whole are even less, a mere 0.5%. Still the 'threat' of Christian conversion has been made into a strong and emotive propaganda plank by the Sangh in tribal areas, along with the more generalized manufacture of hatred against Muslims.

In Dangs, following the ascendancy of the BJP to the state government in Gujarat in 1995 and in the centre in 1996, anti-Christian propaganda was raised rapidly to boiling point. These efforts became far more organized from 1997, especially after the arrival in the district of Swami Aseemanand, a VHP functionary from West Bengal who initiated vicious anti-Christian propaganda and started projecting the work of Christian missions as a threat to both Hinduism and the national security. He has been visiting village after village, doing propaganda against Christian missionaries and Islamic Jihadis. He has also been propagating so-called re-conversion, *ghar-vapasi* (or homecoming) to Hinduism amongst the adivasis.

The District Gazetteer of Dangs states that the religion of the Dangi adivasis is animistic, with influences of Hindu gods. It states, 'The gods and goddesses of the Dangis are many and varied. They are the creation of local circumstances. The animals, plants, trees and places, which are useful or fearful, the forces of nature like rain, mountain, and all the inscrutable, are held in high esteem, looked upon with awe and worshipped'. Ghosts and spirits are revered. Tigers, cows, serpents, the moon, and gods of corn, the rains, the wind, the hills and forests, are all worshipped.

We observe a process by which adivasi places of worship, often sacred stones under a tree, are being expropriated by Hindutva activists. The gods are traditionally feted with home-brewed liquor and animal sacrifice; but under the new influences, they are converted gradually into practices that are more acceptable to the Brahminical traditions. They become vegetarian and teetotalers; gradually it is claimed that they are local versions of mainstream Hindu gods like Shiva.

It is erroneous to describe the abandonment of Christian faith, to the extent that it is taking place under Hindutva influence, as 're-conversions' or home-coming to Hinduism, because the adivasis were not Hindus to start with, at least not subscribing to the Brahminical mainstream traditions of the faith.

Whereas Christian missionaries are working in this area from over a century, organised and violent attacks on them were mounted against them in 1998. Throughout the year 1998, there were 38 recorded cases of anti Christian violence, especially attacks on places of worship. This violence was directed mainly against Christians and partly against the Muslims. It was propagated that the Christians missionaries achieved conversions by force and fraud and that the Christian population is going up dramatically. It was claimed that the converts do not contribute to the village festivals and so there are conflicts and tensions; the attacks were a result of the anger of villagers, it was alleged. A number of leaflets were published and the Gujarati newspapers added fuel to the fire, supporting the propaganda against the tiny Christian population of Gujarat. '*Hindu Jago, Christi Bhagao*' (Arise Hindus, throw out the Christians) represents the overall sentiment of these pamphlets. Christians were said to be foreigners who are converting the gullible tribal people. Bajrang Dal held a Trishul Diksha ceremony on 6 December 1998. On 25 December, 1998, coinciding with Christmas, a rally was called by Hindu Jagran Manch (HJM) in Ahva. The same day witnessed a series of attacks on Christians returning from prayer meetings

and on churches at various areas. The HJM, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA) and VHP claimed that these were spontaneous expressions of anger of the local vanvasis, while the investigations by human rights groups and reports of Communalism Combat confirmed that these were well planned attacks on Christians, which were rapidly aggravated after the BJP came to power at the state and the BJP led coalition came to power at the centre. Rather than assuaging the wounds of Christian community, Vajpayee added salt to the wounds with his characteristic masterly moral ambiguity, by calling for a national debate on conversion, thereby indirectly providing a rationale for the violence.

For last several years, the Sangh and its front organizations like the Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad and the Hindu Jagaran Manch have been targeting the tribal belt of India, which includes Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Orissa and Gujarat. The efforts of the Sangh organisations is to see that adivasis lose their identity, culture and traditions of worshiping nature without being part of any mainstream religion, by asserting that they are Hindus. Hindutva organisations insist on describing the tribal communities as vanvasis instead of adivasis. Vanvasi means forest dweller, whereas adivasi means original inhabitant. In the history manufactured by the Sangh, people like Christians and Muslims are ‘outsiders’ whereas caste Hindus are indigenous to India. They maintain that the Aryans were also original inhabitants in that they did not migrate from any other region, just as much as the tribal people.

But the real design is to convert adivasis into the Hindutva version of Hinduism, in the name of *ghar-vapasi* (homecoming) and *shudhikaran* (purification). This process in the region received a great boost on 18 January, 2002 when almost 2.5 lakh adivasis were mobilised to join a Vishal Hindu Mahasangam (grand Hindu gathering) at Jhabua in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh. For over 100 days, 300 full timers of Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad and Vishwa Hindu Parishad fanned out to the remotest villages of the Jhabua district, distributed photographs and statues of Hindu gods and goddesses, particularly Hanuman, and adivasis were taught Hindu *pooja* (worship), rituals and *bhajans*. In the last seven days of the preparations of Vishal Hindu Mahasangam, more than 4000 Sangh workers lived with tribal leaders in their family homes. Firebrand Hindutva speakers like Praveen Togadia and Sadhvi Ritambhara addressed the Mahasangam, and their speeches were characteristically laced with provocation, hate and venom.

Next at Alirajpur (again in Madhya Pradesh) in February 2004, a Hindu Sangam was organised, in which about 40,000 adivasis participated. One so-called Kumbh was then organized in Rajasthan’s tribal Banswara district, to coincide with the 13th anniversary of the Babri Masjid demolition, but it failed to live up to its hype, partly because of the extreme cold climate. Even so, leaders at the day-long event which was intended as a show of strength for the VHP-RSS combine, reiterated their determination to build a Ram temple in Ayodhya. Speaking at a rally to mark the end of the gathering, VHP leader Ashok Singhal, who was the main attraction along with Sangh Sarkaryavvah Mohan Bhagwat, said: ‘We will not compromise on it (building the temple) at any cost.’ The show of strength was preceded by *bhajans* at local temples and a big *yagna* at the local stadium. Construction of the Ram temple figured prominently in the speeches but vitriol was directed in particular at Christian missionaries. ‘We should be alert against the designs of Christians, Communists and the Islamic forces,’ Singhal warned. He alleged that adivasis were easily influenced by the missionaries because of the poor literacy levels in the region. Three senior ministers of the BJP cabinet, including Home Minister Gulab Chand Kataria, were present. ‘This is our new frontier against the forces which believe in forcible conversions. We cannot afford to lose this battle,’ the local VHP chief said.

Shabri, the Kumbh and the pseudo-mythology of Dang:

The District Gazetteer mentions that there are legends that Ram and Lakshman roamed the forests of Dang, and met their Bhil devotee Shabri here. But similar legends prevail in many parts of the country, and the local adivasis in the past never held Ram and Shabri in any special reverence. Their gods, as mentioned earlier, were mainly animistic, and they worshipped the spirits of animals, crops, hills and many other creatures and objects of nature and daily living.

It may be appropriate here to recount briefly the story of Shabri. After Sita was kidnapped by Ravana, on their way southwards Ram and Lakshman passed through many a difficult terrain. The forests were sparsely populated, with occasional ashrams, such as one established by Rishi Matang whose heart grieved for the lowly and downtrodden. In his ashram, one tribal devotee of Ram, named Shabri, used to live. Her chosen ideal was Ram, for whom she waited a long time. Her Guru assured her that Ram would come one day. Simple hearted, poor, and belonging to lower caste, Shabri did not know much about running the ashram. Soon everyone left her. The birds, the flowers, the shrubs and occasional domesticated animal became her friends. One day, at last, Ram arrived in the ashram. The pleasure of Shabri knew no bounds. She washed his feet and offered him berries which she had collected from the forest that morning. Ram was happy eating the fruit that had been tasted by Shabri, lest the fruit should be bitter! Then Shabri inquired about the purpose of their hard journey. Ram recounted the sad tale of kidnapping of Sita. Shabri advised them to go further southwards to Pampa lake and to Kishkindha where the monkey king Sugreeva and the great Ram-devotee monkey Hanuman would be of help to them in their search for Sita.

The VHP and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, in their attempts to convert adivasis into Hinduism, have found this legend useful because of Shabri's tribal origins and her loyalty to the chosen icon of Hindutva, Ram. The legend is propagated that Ram had visited Dang, which according to them is the Dandkarnya of the Ramayana. A nearby hill, Chamak Dongar (Shining Mountain) has been touted as the *exact place* where Ram met Shabri and ate the wild berries tasted by her. (It is interesting that the politically driven 'faith' of the Hindutva activists is as certain of the exact location of Ram and Shabri's meeting as it is of the birth place of Ram in Ayodhya at the site of the Babri Masjid). They have built a huge temple at this place, for which a large number of trees were cut, and laws protecting tribal land ownership as well as forests were violated. This temple, with statues of Ram, Lakshman and Shabri was constructed in 2004. At Unai, a place near village Subir, there are many hot springs. It is being said that these hot springs were created by Ram. This cynically inventive new mythology also states that after this Shabri ended her life in the Yogagni (sacred fire) and the light which was created due to this is the reason for this hillock being called Chamak Dongar (Shining Mountain). It is being propagated that Shabri's Guru Matang Rishi used to bathe in the Pampa Sarovar. If Shabri lived here, then where is the Pampa Sarovar? At a nearby spot where Purna river flows, a small pond has been created by building check dams, misusing official development funds, and named Pampa Sarovar as mentioned in Ramayan, and it is here that the Kumbh is going to be held.

A word also about the Kumbh. The Kumbh Mela is a tradition unchanged through the millennia, organised by turns in four fixed locations of India, Nasik, Hardwar, Allahabad and Ujjain in cycles of twelve years each. Each twelve-year cycle includes the Maha (great) Kumbha Mela at Allahabad, attended by millions of people, making it the largest pilgrimage gathering around the world. Kumbha in Sanskrit means 'pot' or pitcher and 'mela' means 'festival'. Thus Kumbha Mela literally means festival of the pot, or in this case the pot of nectar. According to mythological accounts of Kumbha Mela, it derives its name from the immortal pot of nectar produced by the gods after the churning of the oceans or *amrit manthan*.

There is absolutely no religiously or culturally sanctioned system of organising new Kumbhs. In this sense, the Dangs Kumbh is at best a pseudo- Kumbh. Morari Bapu, a popular religious preacher, invited to Dangs in 2002, is said to have mooted the idea of the new Kumbh at the Dangs, at the 'precise' spot where Ram and Lakshman met Shabri and ate the berries given by her. Both teams met Suresh Kulkarni, who has been with RSS from last thirty years, and is leading the preparations for the Kumbh. He told us that number of sadhus and saints are going to grace the occasion and will be guiding the Hindus during the Kumbh. When asked that this Kumbh is not part of the Hindu tradition he shot back, can we not create new traditions? He said earlier this region had come under the impact of Christians to the extent that people had stopped celebrating Holi and Divali. Now with the efforts of Aseemanand, VKA and others, all these festivals are again being celebrated.

The propaganda materials including very professionally prepared CDs reveal the true intent of the Kumbh. These describe Christianity as a dangerous foreign faith, and call for its destruction in the same way as Ram had killed the demon Ravana. The committee which has been formed to hold this Kumbh has its head office in Surat and its members are mostly non-advansi non-Dangis. The chairman of local reception committee is a contractor. All preparations are being supervised by Swami Aseemanand who has a tight control over the area through informal network of advasis who are being indoctrinated in to the ideology of hate Christians. This is the main plank of VHP, Hindu Jagran Manch, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram propaganda, which their volunteers are spreading moving from village to village. Their incendiary message is that the Hindu religion is under threat due to Ravana like forces, the 'foreigners', the Christians and Jihadis. What Lord Ram did to Ravana needs to be repeated and foreigners thrown out. *Hindu Jago, Christi Bhagao* is their inflammatory central slogan.

Manini Chatterjee (Indian Express 21 Sept '05) spoke to the ideological 'guru' of the movement Swami Aseemanand, who made no bones about the real aims of the 'Shabri Kumbh Mela'. 'Hindu Samaj faces two big challenges-Islamic Jihad and Christian conversions', he says. 'We need to confront both these threats on a global scale.' Proudly taking credit for inspiring the 1998 attacks, Aseemanand maintains, 'Over the last seven years, thousands of Christian converts in the region had "returned to the Hindu fold". The Shabri Kumbh Mela, scheduled to be held for the first time from February 11-13 (2006) and then every four years, would end missionary activity in Dangs and establish it as a key pilgrimage centre of India,' he adds.

Voices from the Dang: Testimonies

Many people we spoke to confirmed that anti-Christian mobilization in the Dang began with the arrival of Swami Aseemanand. The strategy was to identify the ancestral stones where adivasis would worship, perform rituals related to agriculture (Dungar Dev), and build small temples beside them. The adivasis would not initially comprehend the conspiratorial nature of this seemingly innocuous act; eventually the deity in the temple would be incorporated as lesser gods and goddesses of the Hindu Pantheon, identified over the years by the Brahminical leadership of the Sangh Parivar as befitting the lower caste or the ritual status of the 'vanvasis'. They say that the promotion of the Shabri legend is consistent with this approach of the Parivar to adivasi culture. Shabri, Hanuman and such mythological characters were loyal and subservient to the higher gods like Ram of the upper castes.

The modus operandi was to lure some disgruntled adivasi youth into outfits like Bajrang Dal, many a time with money and liquor and brainwash them with the venomous propaganda material. These youth would then be used to threaten the Christian adivasis and to engage in vandalism as and when required.

The groups we spoke to were concerned that Shabri Kumbh would result in displacement as has already happened with one of them, whose land was forcibly grabbed by the Aseemanand and the Kumbh Trust. He lost his land to the temple (Shabri Dham) that is being constructed. Initially he was forced to donate 1.25 acres of land; later they forced him to part with 9 acres, and within a month clear felled over 700 trees (natural as well as planted) from that plot of land. The adivasi representatives also were aware of the fact these events could also lead to a spurt in religious tourism and commercial activity, which have historically resulted in the inevitable displacement of adivasis.

The intense hate propaganda against Christians has started resulting in the intimidation of Christian community as a whole. We could see the fear writ on the face of most of the Christians we met. The first team itself was stopped by a local person on the suspicion that its members were Christians. The so called '*ghar vapasi*' or 'homecoming' to Hinduism is accomplished by indoctrination and subtle use of intimidation. Many adivasis we met showed their deep dislike for the tactics being used, and the very process of conversion of adivasis into Hinduism. The manufactured fear of conversion to Christianity was widely seen as a pretext to co-opt and convert adivasis to Hinduism.

The adivasis we spoke to said that conversion by Christian Missionaries did amount to some straining of relationships since those converted abandoned the traditional practices of that bonded them since centuries. However they also noted that this never assumed serious proportions till 1998 when the Hindutva forces started working on these contradictions and exacerbating them into full blown conflict.

Borkhal deo is a tribal god where adivasis offer wine and chicken. He has been converted in to Datta Bhagvan, a non-drinker vegetarian god. Initially all tribal kings and naiks opposed this move of HJM, but gradually they started keeping quiet about it. Earlier this used to be a place of making merry, now things are changing. Shabri is being said to be a Bhil. Many a tribal interviewed doubted if Shabri could have hailed from this area. Shabri is heard of only during recent years. It was pointed out that earlier Shabri was never mentioned in the literature put out by tourism department, neither had the trained guides been told to talk about Shabri.

Community leaders from neighbouring villages pointed out that they have heard about Shabri only from last one year. A meeting was held two years ago in the Raobhai's mango orchard. Some speakers, whose names they did not remember said that we are not adivasis, we are vanvasis. We must awaken. They selected Jairambhai's land for the temple. We had Shivar dev there. They insisted that it is Shabri temple, and said we will just make a small hut for her. Later they came to grab 16 acres of land of Jairam Kashiram and compensation has not been paid. This family is starving. This was organized by Aseemanand and others. Later they floated the idea of Kumbh mela in Jarsol. At Bhavani Dev, people were offering chicken and goat. They declared this as Shabri temple and since then the goat and chicken sacrifice has been stopped. The Jarsol land was demanded for the temple. In this land 5 quintals of rice could be grown. In Bhed Kargewal and Karanjeder also they did not want to give the land, three farmers opposed it and were again threatened with dire consequences. Their signatures of consent have been obtained under force.

Laxman Bagul, an activist from the area informed us that VKA promised to build a hospital and schools along with temple. While temple got built, the plans for the hospital were quietly shelved. Instead only a mobile van is there, no doctor or compounder. The driver of the van gives the medicines and injections. The earlier greeting Ram Ram is being replaced by the militant Hindutva 'Jai Shri Ram'. While returning from the 'Pampa Sarovar', the emaciated half clad adivasi children did wave to us and shouted Jai Shri Ram. Shabri Bhajans are being taught, we could procure a copy of the cassette, Jagran, produced by one Bhaskar Sharma of Surat, having songs of invocation for Shabri. In place of the promised school, one hostel for boys with the capacity of accommodating 60-70 children has been built. Earlier three hostels were opened but soon they were closed down. He states that some conversions have been taking due to the work of missionaries in the area of health in particular.

Augustine Rajwade pointed out that VHP's entry was the primary cause for the breakdown in tribal culture. They introduced new mythology, new festivals and new norms of greeting each other. Tribal gods are always kept in open in contrast to Hindu gods for whom temples are built. He himself is a fourth generation Christian. Christian missionaries have been working in this area from 1885. Later, impressed by the spirit of service of the missionaries, some tribals converted to Christianity. In some cases one of the family members became Christian while others joined in later. Due to the work of HJM, VKA the Christians are feeling intimidated. A number of churches was attacked in 1998. During Kumbh, there is a fear that Christians will be attacked once again. During last decade nearly 1500 temples have come up. Many trees have been cut but their marks cannot be seen as the area has been flattened and well covered.

Budhabhai N. Patel says that Shabri is known from only the last 5-7 years. It seems to be a political ploy to popularise Shabri. People turn to Christianity as the public health services are not good. The Bhagats who are there are not able to handle most of the problems. Government is not giving any support to people grappling with disease and death. The Prayer healing of some missionaries works at places, leading to conversion. His elder brother got converted due to this.

Somaji Laxman (Vadpada) pointed out that check dams are being built for supplying water to Subir, which is being urbanised. Due to this there is a danger of floods. Dhonna Pandu Raopada says: We are aboriginals our forefathers never heard of Kumbh. They want us to forget our culture and bring in this one. Our children have heard about Shabri from the school texts. Many of them expressed the feeling that the temple should not be expanded as it will result in more land being taken up. The picture of Shabri which has been shown is not of tribal women. It is modern person. 700 trees were cut from Chamak Dongar, which is a protected forest. On the occasion of Kumbh, Naga Babas will come and play havoc with our culture.

Tapat Rao Anand Pawar alias Daher Raja is one of the five adivasi Rajas. We could talk to him near the collectorate. He receives the monthly pension of Rs 3034 from the Government. VHP decided to hold the Kumbh without consulting the 5 tribal Kings. Later they brought them a paper to sign, seeking their permission. The rajas were opposed to this work. The Kumbh being held happens to take place in the area that was formerly under this king. Poor adivasis are thinking it is good for them as some of them are given food daily at the site. But in the long term it is going to be harmful for the whole area. Agricultural land has been destroyed. The non adivasis will dominate the area due to this Kumbh.

Deoram Bhai Patil is a *pracharak* of RSS, he retired as deputy Mamlatdar and is currently working for the problems of pensioners. He is the member of reception committee for the Shabri Kumbh. One Kishore Bhai Gavit, a contractor is the convener of reception committee. They maintain that adivasis convert due to poverty. There are families where one brother is Hindu while another is Christian.

Fr. Francis, Principal of Navjyot School, Subir, says: Most of the teachers and students are non-christian adivasis; there are 483 students in the school out of which only 81 are Christians. There is not much conversion. The moral science class includes teachings from different religions. The book is called Jeevan Kala, different for each class. Adivasis have started describing themselves as Hindu Bhil, rather than just Bhil, because writing 'Hindu' helps them in getting scholarships from the state government. People around are fairly supportive of our school. However, in the attacks on the school in 1998, local youth were also involved. The Shabri Kumbh may recreate the atmosphere of intimidation for the Christians. Different Departments of government are helping the organization of Shabri Kumbh. The Chief Minister Narendra Modi was on TV saying that Government will do everything possible to support the Kumbh and that he will also visit the place.

We met the Congress MLA, Madhubhai Bhoje, who also happens to be the deputy leader of opposition. He said the 700 trees from protected, reserved and private lands have been cut. He has raised the issue in the Vidhan Sabha and has also taken it up with the forest department, who has not replied to his letter. Instead of responding to his queries, the insinuations in the media show him as an anti Hindu leader. There is no local Dangi in the temple management trust while only one Dangi is there in VKA. For the purpose of the Kumbh, 12 check dams are being constructed. All the money earmarked for development of Dangs is being spent on this work depriving the real developmental work needed in the area of education and health. He fears that prostitution may go up due to this Mela and also the incidence of HIV will shoot up due to this.

Madhubhai Bhoje, Congress MLA of Dang-Vansda, was more vocal and levelled serious allegations: 'The Central government has allotted Rs. 15 Crore for carrying out development work in the district. There are 311 villages in Dangs but the district administration has spent Rs. 9 crore on constructing check-dams all over eastern Dangs keeping in mind the venue for the Kumbh. They built 20 check-dams to create an imaginary Pampa Sarover. I have written to the Central government to investigate the misuse of money.' Bhoje also pointed out that the state government and district administration are helping the RSS in a big way to make the function 'successful.'

Gulabbhai Pawar of Dangi Lok Adhikar Sangh said the Kumbh Mela posed a threat not just to the indigenous beliefs and life style of the adivasis but also spelt an ecological disaster. 'The entire population of Dangs is 1.86 lakh. A Kumbh Mela with lakhs of pilgrims will completely destroy the environment of this region'.

The open Sangh- State Nexus

The teams observed with great concern that even the pretence of distance between the state apparatus and the Sangh has been abandoned. The local administration, its functionaries, vehicles and funds, are openly being used for the advancement of the intensely divisive state agenda.

Forty temporary townships are being constructed by clearing forests, with a capacity of 5,000 each, in preparation for the Kumbh. We visited one of these, and found that it was openly managed by the RSS, with their posters, slogans, literature and reverential pictures of their national leader Sudarshan. We observed a number of government vehicles in the campus. There were busloads of schoolchildren. On enquiry, we were informed that they were from government schools and were brought on organized trips to the site, and also made joint donations to the RSS organized Kumbh samiti. RSS prachark Suresh Kulkarni informed us that Government is going to provide for transport, medicines, security during the Kumbh. Already it has started building and construction work as the preparation for the Kumbh. The district administration and public development funds are being openly misused for a programme that serves the narrow and dangerous political objectives of non-state organizations of the Sangh. The District Collector showed considerable bias in supporting these activities in the name of tribal development and reform. The lines between the RSS and the government machinery were completely collapsed.

Dangs Collector RM Jadhav confirmed to Mahesh Langa of Tehalka of the administration's involvement: 'We are providing infrastructure support like electricity, check-dams etc. for the Kumbh.' When asked whether Dangs needed a Kumbh, Jadhav parried it, saying, 'It's a religious issue. What can you do if people want it?'

His tone was similar when the team presented its apprehensions regarding the Shabri Kumbh to the District Collector. Considering the history of anti-Christian mobilization in the Dangs, particularly in the context of the violence unleashed by the Sangh Parivar outfits in 1998, we expressed fear that such a large scale mobilization by the Sangh would certainly lead to terrorization of the Christian community in the district. We also inquired as to what preparations are being made to ensure that the rule of law would prevail, and the Christian community would be protected from violence of any kind. We reminded him of the violence unleashed on the Christian community of Dangs in 1998, and also of the anti-Christian riots engineered by the Parivar outfits in Alirajpur in the recent past. We also raised serious concerns pertaining to literature and propaganda material that the organizers of the Kumbh have been circulating across the country.

The Collector asserted that the district administration would ensure that the Kumbh passed off peacefully, and no one would be allowed to take law into their hands. But it was disturbing that as the DM he refused to take cognizance of the venomous propaganda by the Parivar that was already reaching a crescendo. He pointed out there were no complaints registered by anyone till date. He said that the people of Dangs were peaceful in nature; and that unless instigated by outside forces there would not be any trouble. When reminded that the mobilization was going to be mainly from outside Dangs, he stated that this was a matter related to religion and faith, and should be taken as something positive; there was no reason to believe that a religious event should lead to violence. We could not desist from giving him some lessons from history, particularly Babri masjid demolition!

It is sad that a District Collector could define and justify communal mobilization happening under his nose as religious and cultural awakening, thus unabashedly adopting the rhetoric and idiom of the Hindutva forces. He took pains to explain how Shabri Kumbh would serve as an

excellent stimulus for the development of religious tourism and thereby bring in returns for the district and provide employment to the adivasis. He did not forget to praise Narendra Modi as a CM committed to the development of the state. When one of the team members enquired whether the myth of Shabri around which this whole Kumbh Mela is being organized is really part of the cultural belief and tradition of the Dang adivasis or just another instance of cultural onslaught by the Hindutva forces, the Collector categorically stated that it is very much part of their tradition, and that any adivasi would vouch for it. He openly supported the entire Kumbh mobilization as an opportunity to uplift the adivasis, awaken their religious spirit and to initiate much needed infrastructure development. It was all the more shocking when he equated adivasi culture to alcoholism and vices; and reluctance to access modern education. The Kumbh mela would lead to cultural reform and help instill moral values in the adivasi community. He did not fail to reiterate his commitment to lead the adivasis into the 'mainstream', and not keep them in their present under-developed state. Events like the Kumbh would give them an opportunity to interact with the 'developed' world!

The team expressed serious apprehensions regarding the damage that was certainly going to be inflicted on the already endangered eco-system in the Dangs. The District administration has still not even considered the serious environmental implications of 500,000 odd people entering the protected forest areas and the rivers of this district. The pollution and contamination of land and water that would be caused by overwhelming human presence, danger to flora and fauna, fire hazards. The dangers are infinite. The DM just perfunctorily assured us that this aspect would be taken into account. It should be noted that the total population of the district is only about 1,86,000, and the Kumbh Mela organizers are expecting to mobilize over 500,000 people. Even if 5000 people were to gather in the protected forest areas the danger of damage to environment could be substantial!

To a query regarding the source of funds for developmental work undertaken in preparation for the Kumbh, particularly the roads leading to the site, the structures built in Poorna river, land leveling and other earthworks undertaken, the DM categorically mentioned that all these were public works undertaken by the government. We also enquired if there have been any illegal encroachments on the river-bed. He denied that there was any such encroachment, and also said that the construction of a platform in the 'Pampa Sarovar' had been stopped right at the outset. He did not agree with our observation that this was blatant misuse of state funds, particularly for the purpose of communal mobilization. He was firm in his opinion that this was essentially an opportunity for the hitherto undeveloped regions of Dangs to be bestowed with roads, check-dams, electricity and other infrastructural facilities. The adivasis of the Dangs had to wait for six decades for the Shabri Kumbh Mela in order to be gifted with infrastructure; even as the district was declared among the poorest district in our country!

It was interesting to note that the DM had no qualms in providing us with the CD being propagated by the Shabri Kumbh Committee. He issued us a copy of the CD on submitting an application for the same. In a later telephonic conversation regarding the inflammatory and venomous content in this CD, extremely anti-Christian in nature, he said that he did not see anything objectionable in the CD. He did not seem to realize that it is his constitutional duty to take action against the people propagating such provocative communication material.

It was heartening that by contrast the DFO was an officer who was conscientious and extremely concerned about the impact that the Kumbh would have on the forests and the environment. Mr. Deep Choudhury refused to comment adversely on the social and political aspects of the Kumbh, but made it absolutely clear that if such a large number of people were to visit the forested areas, there would be no way to protect the forests, and damage to environment was going to be certain.

He made it clear that such events in protected areas would certainly take on an illegal dimension since it would lead gross violation of the provisions of the Forest Conservation Act. He did not mince his words when he observed that it was impossible to mobilize enough personnel to control the activities of even 5000 people; by any stretch of imagination it would be foolhardy to assume that the activities of 500,000 people could be controlled. In response to our question whether he has till date appraised the higher authority regarding the impending environmental disaster, he replied in the positive, and also issued us the copy of the letter that he has written to the Collector and other officials.

The team also visited 'Jarsol Dahad', which is being transformed into Pampa Sarovar. 'Dahad' in Dangi means a small natural mass of water collected in the river due to conducive rock formations along the bank. Jarsol is the village that the Shabri Kumbh committee has chosen to have the Kumbh Mela. Poorna river which flows through this village has a 'Dahad' which has been now re-named as 'Pampa Sarovar'. Hectic activity is going on around this site to prepare this part of the river and its banks for the Kumbh. Approach roads have been already made, a check dam has been constructed in the 'Dahad' to ensure adequate quantity of water for the large number of people who would be taking their 'holy dip'. Elaborate arrangements like bathing ghats, flights of steps going down into the river bed and a huge raised platform on the riverbed are currently being built. We also noticed pipes unloaded on the site, presumably to lift water from the river to fulfill the needs of the 500,000 odd people who would be participating in the Kumbh. These are the infrastructural facilities being built with state funding, which the DM justified as developmental programmes. We enquired with the local labourers working on the site as to who have been given the contract to execute this project. They informed us that 'Anarde Foundation' (a well known NGO working on Watershed Development in Gujarat) has been given the project to construct the check dam. We can safely conclude from this that public funds for rural development have been used for this purpose, since in Gujarat there is a well known scheme, usually availed of by NGOs for constructing check dams with 60% to 80% co-funding from the state government. We need to collect more information to ascertain the scheme and mode of decision making pertaining to these public works that have been undertaken.

Conclusion

What is important to understand is that the intended Kumbh Mela is not a religious issue. It is not a battle of Hindus against Christians. It is a political game to mislead the adivasis, and divert their anger at pauperisation and dispossession by the state and non-advansi outsiders, by cynically creating a pseudo-mythology. It aims to alienate them from their land and culture, to Hinduise them to build a majority constituency on the basis of religion and to reap political benefits, and to create grave divisions in the name of religion, their eating habits and political affiliations among the adivasis. The issues at stake are tribal culture, tribal identity and their livelihoods, the freedom to pursue and propagate one's faith guaranteed under the Constitution, and the security of minorities.

The openly partisan support of the state government for the dangerous sectarian objectives of the Sangh needs to be combated, and the safety of minorities secured, else the tribal regions of India, already dispossessed and pauperised, will flow with the blood of sectarian hatred.

At the outskirts of Shabri Temple, there is a pillar which has a slogan in Hindi, which reads : '*Sankalap: Dharmantaran aur Jehad ke Vichar ko Vishwa se Nirmool Karenge.*' (Our resolve is to free the world from the ideologies of conversions and jehad'.) The Sangh with the open support of the state government has clearly drawn its battle lines. It is for people who cherish secular democracy in our land to expeditiously and resolutely respond.

Kumbh Fallout and Strategies

1. The problems in Dangs began in 1998. Around 1988 VKA started working here. The BJP Govt. in center and Aseemanand coming to Dangs in 1997 are two important points.
2. The indoctrination of section of Adivasis is very intense. Their hatred for Christians is visible all through.
3. The cultural indoctrination of Adivasi as Hindu is the core focus of the campaign. The Tribal nature worship is being equated to Hindu practices to begin with and later these practices are there is a change also.
4. The major God being promoted is Hanuman and the Goddess: Shabri. Lets recall for upper caste the major god around which the consolidation of RSS took place was Ram. Hanuman and Shabri both are devotees, servants of Ram. Upper caste-Ram. Adivasis-Hanuman and Shabri. That's the equation sought by the HJM campaign. Shabri gives another message in the present context, an Adivasi woman is devotee of a Hindu God Ram, what is the message for Adivasis.
5. Shabri Kumbh is the new invention. It is being said, Hindu religion is in danger due to the foreigners, the Ravan equivalents, the Christians and Muslims. To protect the Hindu faith this Kumbh is being held. The underlying message is to promote Anti Christians and anti Muslim sentiments.
6. The major emphasis of HJM is temple. Modern education and health are low on the priority. As per them Adivasis need Gods and Goddesses other things can wait.
7. The core issue is that of Adivasi empowerment. Adivasi land has been as such grabbed by outsiders. The education process run by Christian missionaries is a threat to the designs of upper caste/ upper class. So Christian missions need to be thrown out from these areas.
8. In this Shabri Kumbh work already ecological damage has been done. The social impact of lakhs of pilgrims coming to this area is also fraught with dangers.
9. The land appropriated from individuals has not been done as per the proper procedure. Many of them have been intimidated into giving their land. The Christians whose land has been taken over are frightened to open their mouth.
10. There is a general atmosphere of intimidation amongst the minorities.
11. The funds for development of Dangs have been diverted for this work alone. The other social projects and development in other areas will be sidetracked.
12. In case of Ram Temple movement a myth of Lord Ram's birth was manufactured. The Mosque was demolished to achieve the polarization along religious lines. This whole campaign was in the wake of rise in the Dalit conciouness from the decade of seventies, culminating in Madal Commission.

In this case a myth, a legend has been constructed to build a temple and to start a Kumbh to polarize Adivasis around Hindutva politics. Two polar opposite methods for the same goal.

25. Recommendations-Suggestions:

1. There is an urgent need to stop the ecological damage being brought in by the preparations for the Kumbh. Need to file a Public Interest Litigation.
2. Awareness campaigns need to be taken up in the Adivasi areas to let the Adivasis know about the real goal and intent behind the Shabri Kumbh. They should be made aware of their rights and to unite for preservation of that.
3. The issues of temple and Kumbh are given an emotional tilt and rooting due to which it is difficult to fight for the basic problems of Adivasis. Once they are aware of the dichotomy between their needs and the designs of Sangh their organization into a force defending their human rights will be easier.
4. Adivasi culture has its own uniqueness. The offense of Hindu Right has calculated and constructed the mythology in a way as to show Adivasis as the servants of upper caste. This correlation needs to be brought out.
5. The local/National groups/ groups working against communalism/groups working for human rights need to come together to ward off this scheme which will be endangering the tribal society.
6. Popular literature, CDs etc need to be brought out on urgent basis to broaden the awareness work.
7. Awareness meeting with the local activists need to be organized.
8. Media can help the preservation of Human rights a lot. Approach to media needs to be laid on the proper footing.
9. The intimidation of minorities is a striking observation. They need to be reassured and local networks provided to protect them from the intimidation/attacks from the HJM/VH P-To build social and political mechanism for their protection. To request the central Government to ensure that Minorities will be protected. This more so because local administration is hand in glove with the HJM/VHP.