What Happened in Dangs?
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The history behind recent Hindu-Christian clashes in Gujarat

On January 7, 1999, the respected Sarvodaya leader Ghelubhai Nayak, 82, made a report to India's National Human Rights Commission on the Hindu-Christian conflict in the Dangs District of Gujarat. It is here that violence occurred in December and January which attracted international attention, just prior to the murder of Staines. This report, originally published in the Observer is one of the few on-the-scene accounts by a long-time resident.

Myself and my elder brother, Chottubhai Nayak, came to Dangs in 1948 at the behest of late Sardar Patel for commencing tribal welfare activities in this backward region. I and my Gandhian colleagues condemn violence. However, we are anguished to bring to your notice the ground realities behind the recent incidents in Dangs which haven't come to the fore or have been deliberately ignored by the large sections of the media, which in turn has led to a one-sided media reporting and press statements inflaming the area further.

There is no dearth of evidence to prove that the violence is a reaction to the organized conversion activities of the Christian missionaries in the area with means that are clearly

questionable and even illegal. The single-point program of the missionaries is to convert the tribals and in doing so they are often using means that go far beyond the realm of social service. They entice with a curious mix of blind faith and allurements. The population of converted (Christian) tribals, which was just around 500 when we came to Dangs in 1948, today stands around 40,000 which is over 30 percent of the total tribal population of the area around Dangs.

The violence in Dangs began on Christmas day after some Christian youths pelted stones on the rally of the Hindu Jagran Manch and burned the jeep of a tribal participant in the rally. There have been at least 15 instances in the past three years in Dangs wherein the Christians, under the influence of their preachers, desecrated idols of Lord Hanuman, who is worshiped in this area by a large section of tribals for ages. In one incident in Gaadhvi village three years ago, they urinated on an idol of Hanuman, and later in Jharsod village they crushed Hanuman's idol to pieces and threw it away in the river.

Then there have been several instances where tension has gripped a village after the Christians publicly called Hindu Gods as Satan [the devil], again under the influence of their preachers. Another cause of the increasing tension is the refusal of the Christians tribals to contribute to the traditional tribal festivals.

In many cases a tribal who accepts Christian faith starts pressuring his brother into accepting the faith, and this often results in bloody fights over the issue. In a case last October, I

had warned the district collector about an attempt by some Christians to disturb peace when they twice beat up no less than the nephew of the former Bhil Raja of Linga (in Dangs) when he refused to marry his son to the daughter of a Christian, who was forcing him to enter into the matrimonial alliance. The Christians of Linga have also been opposing the construction of a Hanuman temple on a piece of land which is owned by the Raja of Linga, Bhavar Singh, and to which they have no right.

Let me remind you that Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, denounced the conversion activity by Christian missionaries as "a blot on humanity in the name of social service." Even Vinoba Bhave, the greatest saint that the country can boast of in the past several centuries, denounced conversion activity and called for a legal ban on any kind of conversion. I have been a close witness to the entire episode in Dangs, and I stand by whatever I have mentioned in this communication.

How Korea and the Philippines Came to Christ

Christians already claim two major 20th century successes in Asia: the Philippines and Korea. The history of the Philippines, now 94% Christian, is succinctly summarized in the Encyclopedia Britannica: "In the 16th century, friars [priests] marched with the soldiers [of Spain] and soon accomplished the nominal conversion to Roman Catholicism of all the natives. Native religion was vigorously suppressed." Military conquest by Christians won't happen today, but the Philippines provide an important economic message. Despite three centuries of Christian rule, they are poor. So are the Christian countries of Central and South America, and so too would

likely be a Christian India--contrary to the impression missionaries tend to create.

Korea is instructive for a different reason, and its situation has many parallels to that of India. According to an article by Andrew E. Kim entitled "A History of Christianity in Korea," "Since the introduction of Catholicism in 1784, followed by Protestant missionaries in 1884, Christianity has proceeded to become--after Buddhism--the largest religion in the country. Today about one-third of South Korea's 45 million people are Christian. Since the early 1960s, when Christians scarcely topped one million, the number has increased faster than any other country, doubling every decade. By 1994, there were 35,000 churches and 50,000 pastors, making the South Korean church one of the most vital and dynamic in the world." Mr. Kim's paper at www.tparents.org/Library/Religion/Cta/Korean-Christianity.htm lists the critical factors in the surge: "Foreign funds amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars annually pouring in after the Korean War from Christian countries;" "Those becoming aware of the church through its charitable work later took great interest in its doctrine and were converted;" "Bible translations and broadcast Christian music and dramas;" "Placing worker-evangelists in the workplace and chaplains in the armed forces;" "The 1984 mass by Pope John Paul II;" and "The Koreanization of Christian theology." Sound familiar? It should, for the Christian church in India is putting into action these same proven methods.

Kashmir: The Slaughter of Hindus Quietly Continues

Massacres of Hindus by Muslim insurgents in Kashmir are so common as to attract attention only when large numbers die. At right are some of 23 Hindus--men, women and children--shot dead January 25, 1998. A similar slaughter took place June 20, 1998, when five men killed 25 Hindus in a wedding party, including the groom. According to the web site www.kashmir-information.com, during the period from December, 1998, to February, 1999, while Hindu-Christian clashes were gaining world attention, 171 non-combatant Hindus died in Kashmir's Hindu-Muslim separatist war. On February 12, 1999, three weeks after the Staines were murdered, Muslim terrorists slit the throats of a Hindu family in Sukcha village, killing four people including a four-year-old boy and a 15-year-old girl. It received minor attention in the press, leaving the world uninformed on India's violence.

No Place for Hindus in Catholic Heaven

The Catholic Archbishop of Hyderabad, A. Arulappa, surprised many when he said February 10, "Real conversion is

conversion to God. Every religion offers something beautiful for us to absorb." He said the conversions taking place today in India are "totally wrong." Research shows, however, that the Archbishop's statements are not in line with the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It clearly states in section 846 "Outside the Church, there is no salvation [deliverance from sin and entrance to heaven]" and in Section 848, "the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men." Even fellow Indian Christians were shocked by Arulappa's admission. Some called for him to step down "if he did not strongly believe in Christian ideals."

It is important for Hindus to understand Catholic beliefs, and to realize that individual Catholics may take public

stances that obscure the Church's actual doctrines--especially that the Catholic Church is the one and only means to salvation. Priests, such as Bede Griffiths, who dress, act and worship like Hindus do confuse Hindus and seek to make Catholicism, a foreign faith, appear indigenous.

But the Church is not confused. Long ago, in 1870, in The First Vatican Council, Hindu beliefs were specifically selected for condemnation in the "five anathemas against pantheism." Jesuit John Hardon in the Church-authorized book, The Catholic Catechism, lists the anathemas ("formal ecclesiastical ban, denunciation, curse"). The second anathema curses the belief that "God and all things possess one and the same substance and essence," and the fourth that "The divine essence

becomes all things by a manifestation or evolution of itself." Hardon then characterizes these beliefs as "too extreme for anyone but a Hindu Vedantist to take seriously."

Lest we deem this doctrine obsolete, much of it is repeated in Cardinal Ratzinger's 1989 "Letter to the Bishops on Christian Meditation." To curb the growing practice of Hindu and Buddhist meditation among Catholic monks and nuns, Ratzinger, one of the highest officials of the Church, decried yoga and meditation in such terms as "imprisoning the person;" "incapable of [creating] a free openness to the transcendental God;" "impossible to be absorbed in the divine self;" "methods ... [with] dangers and errors;" "a temptation;" "impossible [way] to arrive at a perfect love of God;"

"can lead to psychic disturbance and moral deviations."

It is urgent that Hindus study actual Christian doctrine, and not be misled by conciliatory pronouncements. Start with the Vatican itself at www.vatican.net/.