Religion & Spirituality

The Mascot of Religious Imperialism!\

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This article by a former Chief Secretary of Assam appeared in the popular and second oldest circulating English Daily of the North-east, The Sentinel in its issue of 19th October, 2008 on its editorial page. It is very interesting and important. The author has reproduced a remark from the original article that had appeared in Tehelka published from Delhi. It says, “A new mood of aggressive evangelism has been emanating from America. American evangelical agencies have established in India an enormous, well-coordinated religious conversion plan. The operation was launched in the early 1990s, but really came into its own….in 2001.” Needless to remind here about the belief of formal Christian Church that no individual can gain salvation unless he follows the path shown by Christianity. It is further held that it is a sacred duty of every Christian to share this ‘truth’ with all those who have not yet come across this understanding. The more enthusiastic and militant groups of Christians further believe that it is also their sacred duty to spread the message in all possible ways. This belief is the driving force behind missionary activities all over the world and throughout history. There are other faiths in the world who profess that salvation is possible only through their faith. We in India, however, have believed that, ‘Truth is One, Sages call It by various names.’ We have dealt with this understanding in the July 15 issue of Ishani. We have also quoted there the utterances by great world teachers of our times, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Mahatma Gandhi. We, however, strongly believe that promotion of equal respect for all religions is the need of the hour. One of the important items of Gandhian agenda that he evolved during his lifetime was this. One of the 11 vows that are regularly recited at all Gandhian institutions is the vow of cultivating equal respect for all religions. Once we accept such a need and position, militant evangelization becomes irrelevant and unnecessary.

N.Th.

I thought that the Joshua Project, launched in 1990 by some international Christian organizations, was a social welfare project that aimed to provide succour to the downtrodden section of mankind in pursuance of the true spirit of compassion and love propagated by Jesus Christ, particularly in the underdeveloped and developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. I could never ever imagine that this project code-named ‘Joshua’ had all the intents and contents of a military operation, with the sole objective of winning the world by converting all ‘un-reached people’ to Christianity. Recently, I had the opportunity to go through the website www.joshuaproject.net, which contains a plethora of information on the world’s ‘people groups’ and the details of activities undertaken by the Project. I have also scanned
through some mind-boggling revelations by ‘Tehelka,’ which has done some detailed investigations into the ‘operation’ under the Joshua Project.

Some highlights of ‘Tehelka’s’ findings are reproduced below: “A new mood of aggressive evangelism has been emanating from America. American evangelical agencies have established in India an enormous, well-coordinated religious conversion plan. The operation was launched in the early 1990s but really came into its own after George W Bush Jr. became President of the United States in 2001. Since then, aggressive evangelists have found proactive support from the new administration in their efforts to convert some sections of the Indian society to Christianity. At the heart of this complex and sophisticated operation lies a simple strategy - convert locals and then give them the know-how and money to plant their own churches and multiply. The movement, which began as ‘AD2000 & Beyond’ and which later morphed into Joshua Project-I and Joshua Project-II, was designed to be a sledgehammer - a breathtaking, decade-long steamroller of a campaign that would set the stage for a systematic, sophisticated and self-sustaining ‘harvest’ of the ‘un-reached people groups’ in India in the 21st century. The Office of Faith-based and Community initiatives was set up at the White House in the first week of February 2002 and a man called Jim Towey (legal counsel to Mother Teresa in the late 1980s) was appointed director. Though Bush’s initiative to fund ‘salvation and religious conversion’ is stalled in the Congress over constitutional and civil rights concerns, he has pushed for its implementation through executive orders.”

It is really shocking to note that the President of the world’s largest democracy can be so biased. In a growing democracy like India, with a Constitution laying special thrust on its secular character, no one can even imagine having such a faith-based office at the PMO to promote religious causes inside the country, leave alone outside India.

CBN, Robertson created a stir by announcing that he is confident Bush will win the 2004 election in a ‘blowout’ because God has told him so. “Apart from Bush getting unequivocal support from Far Right Christian evangelists for his ‘hard-line militarism in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere,’ he gets tremendous amount of invaluable intelligence from his evangelist friends, who ‘run huge Transnational Missionary Organizations (TMOs).’ Organizations like the International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, Christian Aid, World Vision, Seventh Day Adventist Church and multi-billion enterprises run by evangelists like Pat Robertson, Billy Graham and Roger Houtsma, amongst many others, were instrumental in running a coordinated conversion campaign in India under the banner AD2000. These later became the Joshua Project and when the decade-long movement officially closed down in March 2001, Joshua Project II was launched to sustain conversions and intelligence-gathering.”

The social and economic divisions present in the various Indian communities were closely examined in the AD2000 Project. Given the oppressive and institutionalized caste system of the Hindu society, American evangelical strategists chalked out plans for reaching these various ‘unmixable’ caste groups. North India was designated the core target of American evangelists. It was described as the ‘core of the core of the core’ of a worldwide evangelical movement, conceived by fundamentalist American missionaries, which took place over the 1990s at the initiative of the World Evangelical Fellowship (an international alliance of national evangelical alliances). It brought together a wide variety of individuals and organizations, under the single goal of achieving ‘a church for every people and the gospel for every person by the year 2000.’

This movement was also a massive intelligence gathering exercise funded and supported by American missionary organizations that were responsible for the election of George W. Bush. The Joshua Project, started by a splinter group of CBN, was “also a large-scale intelligence operation that brought together American strategists, theologists, missionary specialists, demographers, technologists, sociologists, anthropologists and researchers to create the most comprehensive people group profiles in the 10/40 Window. In fact, the ethno-linguistic profiling of the people groups in India, probably
cannot even be matched by data available with the Government of India,” observes ‘Tehelka.’

Under Joshua Project I scores of American research teams arrived in India in the mid-1990s to lay “preliminary roadmaps for the church-planting mission,” states ‘Tehelka.’ They partnered with Indian researchers which resulted in the production of enormous field data on various people groups in the country. This, in turn, led to the identification of areas and regions where evangelical activities could be carried out in a focused and methodical manner. The Joshua Project II is a continuation and expansion of the original plan. The Gangetic belt or the Hindi belt, with 40 per cent of the Indian population settled there, and the States declared as sick by the Government of India are the ‘focused areas’ for Joshua II, opines ‘Tehelka.’

According to ‘Tehelka,’ Rev Billy Graham and his ilk openly admit that they dispatched spying missions to India. In order to execute the India-centric plan, a detailed country-wide PIN code survey of the Indian postal system, which has a network of 1,52,786 post offices - 89 per cent of them in rural areas, was conducted by the Chennai-based Indian Missions Association (IMA), thereby providing complete data on each of the Indian villages for closer networking activities.

Although the ‘Tehelka’ investigation has dealt with several other important aspects of the Joshua Project II, I shall briefly dwell on the role played by “World Vision (WV) - the leading US Government agency providing economic and humanitarian assistance to developing countries.” WV projects itself as a ‘Christian relief and development agency’ working with the ‘poorest of the poor in India without respect to race, region, religion, gender or caste.’ It undertakes development programmes, known as ‘Area Development Programmes (ADP),’ which provides access to clean drinking water, healthcare, education, and looks into the setting up of income generating projects. However, ‘Tehelka’ claims that it has in its possession US-based WV Inc’s financial statement which was filed before the Internal Revenue Service, wherein WV is classified as a Church ministry. In any case, its mission statement is self-explanatory: “World Vision is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus
Christ, in working with the poor and oppressed, to promote human transformation, seek justice and bear witness to the Good News of the Kingdom of God.” Now it is really intriguing to note that the Government of Assam’s Rural Development department has recognized WV-India as a leading development agency in the State and has recommended that WV be the choice for receiving bilateral funds. The Government has also sought WV’s assistance in creating a proposal for US $80 million for development works in the State.

The most disturbing part of the entire concept, planning and execution of the Joshua Project is that it is being operated in the sovereign, socialist, secular, and democratic Republic of India, through covert as well as by overt means, with the help of political and State patronage. Would the Centre look into the issues raised and take appropriate, effective and urgent steps to safeguard the secular and multi-cultural identity of our society - the very fabric of Indian civilization? Otherwise, we are afraid that the growing social conflicts arising out of expansionist religious campaigns, which have already vitiated the environment in some parts of India, can pose as a real challenge to the unity and integrity of India.

(The writer was Chief Secretary, Assam)

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Use Non-Violence as a Foundation of Resolving Conflicts*

UNITED NATIONS - Paying tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 139th birth anniversary, U.N. General Assembly (U.N.G.A.) on Oct 2, 2008 asked its members to use the philosophy of non-violence as a foundation of resolving conflicts.

Placing a bust of the Mahatma by his side, President of U.N.G.A. Miguel d’Escoto Brockmann urged the member states to help the world adopt “Satyagraha” in all languages to begin a gradual and profound process of reflection into its meaning.

“If we do so we would have entered into the process of liberating humankind from its dependence on violence as a means to resolve differences,” he said.

Brockmann, a great admirer of Gandhi, said there is nothing passive or timid about this “love force” or “truth force”. On the contrary, “Satyagraha is a bold, brave, assertive and risk-taking method of struggle.”
The former Foreign Minister of Nicaragua called on the U.N. members to choose, “personally and collectively,” step-by-step experiments in the “infinite power” of truth, saying, “truth, in the final analysis, is synonym of love.”

Commending Gandhi’s message, he said Martin Luther King Jr’s application of his methods to the struggle in the United States for civil rights, economic justice and end of Vietnam War revealed the “power of growing non-violent movement to begin to transform the course of even the most powerful nation in history.”

“Echoing Gandhi, King proclaimed to the nation and the world that we must choose non-violence or non-existence,” he recalled.

Paying tribute to Gandhi, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said there is a “profound philosophical” connection between the fundamental principles of human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration and those practiced by Mahatma Gandhi.

“The answer for Mahatma Gandhi was always found in action, Ban said, describing him as “personal hero.”

Today, the legacy and the principles of the Mahatma, he said, are carried forward in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. “They are carried forward through the activities of the United Nations and our invaluable partners in civil society: religious leaders, teachers, artists and so many others.”

The legacy of Mahatma Gandhi is “more important than ever” as the rights of too many people around the world are still violated, Ban said. (PTI)

* Received by e-mail from MKGANDHI [info@mkgandhi.org] on Thursday, November 06, 2008.