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SOCIO—RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AMONG TRIBALS OF SOUTH GUJARAT

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BY

Rash Bihari Lal



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TRIBAL RESEARCH & TRAINING INSTITUTE, GUJARAT VIDYAPITH AHMEDABAD 380014.

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FOREWORD

In order to acquaint those who are interested about the research works conducted at Tribal Research and Training Institute, this research report is being released in mimeographed form. If researchers, social workers, administrators, students and other scholars who are involved in tribal development works make certain suggestions after going through this report, this will help the Institute in its future works. I congratulate the researcher who has conducted this research work.

R. D. ADATIA
Mahamatra

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Dr. Suresh Kumar Singh, Director of Anthropological Survey of India, on his last visit to the Institute in November 1976 had suggested us to undertake a study on revivalistic movements in a tribal area of Gujarat. This study is the out come of his suggestion. An earlier draft of this study has been included in a publication of the Survey on: Tribal movements in India. The Institute is grateful to all the informants for providing all the necessary information to the Researcher of the study on which this report is based.

Siddharaj Solanki
Acting Director

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AMONG TRIBALS OF SOUTH GUJARAT

No serious discussion of the social change among tribal communities in India can fail to give attention to tribal movements. The history of any tribal community setting itself the goal of catching up with the non-tribal community in the region is as old as hills. "As has been observed by the historian C. E. Black, (Tribal) societies may be said to meet the problem of change by concentrating their efforts alternatively on defending the existing conceptions and adapting them to an altered conception. This fundamental choice between inflexibility and adaptation reflects the accumulation of an infinite number of smaller choices"¹. Tribal movements represent a particular course of action for particular tribal societies that might be chosen as among others in the process of adaptation. As for the question, what do we mean by social movement, King (1956 : 27) presents an appropriate definition : "a group venture extending beyond a local community or a single event and involving a systematic effort to inaugurate changes in the thought, behaviour and social relationships"². All movements in the tribal areas of India have been, by and large, an exercise in fostering social changes by adapting the moral and spiritual values of the 'great tradition'. In this connection de Bryn (1951 : 3-5) says that a movement is "a communal expression of the renunciation of the struggle for life. It symbolizes the

efforts of a people to re-order and reorganize its way of life as a result of changed conditions..... Such movements, although they sometimes show strongly religious, syncretic features are, I believe, merely psychological reactions to existing situations. They are the people's attempt to gain relief or release from their distress, through the intervention of supernatural powers in the efficacy of which they firmly believe, which powers either belong to either indigeneous religion or are an element in an alien religion with which the people have become familiar"³. Thus, much of the programmes in the movements which occurred in tribal regions of India were aimed to bring directed change and modeled the great traditions of hindu culture.

From several parts of India, tribal movements and protests have been reported⁴. But in most of these, the emphasis is on the bizarre nature of the behaviour and beliefs of the adherents to the particular movements has been emphasized. They are often regarded as phenomena quite apart from social development, retrogressive, fantastic, hysterical led by insane or pretendant prophets. In this context they tend to postulate the movements as confederation of deviants in the tribal societies. Only a few of these movements have been studied in any detail by scholars who have remained in the communities long enough to gain the confidence of leaders and participants and compile a

description, history and analysis of beliefs and actions. An example of this, the Birsa movement in Chotanagpur has been excellently reported by Singh (1966). His work⁵, perhaps, is the only fullest documentation to date on a movement in a tribal region and led by a tribal person. Some other movements in other parts have also been studied by other scholars .

So far I have been able to discover, very little attention has been paid to such movements from the tribal regions of Gujarat. Desai (1977), in his work on the Gandhian movement in tribal areas of Surat district has made casual references about some of the other socio-religions movements in that region.⁶ Amongst the hindu population of Gujarat, the most important religious tradition has been that of the bhakti sect. The tribal communities there, too, could not escape the influence of this tradition. Thus, several of the bhakti sects which have been entrenched in the religious order of hindu population, gradually got extended to the tribal regions also. Not all, but some of them got wide acceptance by the tribals in south Gujarat. In case of one movement, although the ideological base had been a bhakti sect, it was adapted in defence of the tribal society. This study is an attempt to describe the various socio-religions movements among tribal communities of south Gujarat and to relate these movements to the aspirations of the leadership

about the patterns of society that are intended to emerge from this process. It is thus an attempt to look at change from "below". Altogether six religious sects have been discussed here about which I have been able to gather reliable materials. Besides these, there are a few others too but I think the sects covered by me are of major significance because of the number of followers, if not by other considerations. The movements which have been discussed here are on a fairly large scale for south Gujarat, bringing together several communities. In south Gujarat, the major tribal communities are Dhodias, Choudharys, Dublas, Gamits, Warlis, Konknas, Naikas, Bhils, Vasavas, etc. However, some social groups such as Dhodias, Choudharys, Gamits and Dublas have participated in these movements in greater number as well as intensely due to the history of the region and the earlier patterns of their organization. As such, before we look at the origin and nature of these movements it might be useful to glance at the background.

All the four tribes mentioned above are settled on the plains of Valsad and Surat districts. The distinct strip of valleys between Arabian sea and the Sahayadri range in the Southern Gujarat is the country of these tribes. They are predominantly settled agriculturists except Dublas whose traditional occupation was that of farm servants of hindu landowning class. They lived in settled villages. When compared to other tribal groups in Gujarat, these people were

better and advanced agriculturists .

The plains of Surat and Valsad districts have been penetrated by both the hindus and muslims as long back as in 16th century. When the Peshwas entered into Gujarat, they had first established their seat of rule at Songadh in Surat district in the year 1719. There are number of historical evidences which amply illustrate that these tribals who had been occupying the plain areas had come in contact with hindus, muslims and even Parsis much earlier. After 18th century, when the forest tracts of the plain were cleared and more and more cultivable land was made available the non-tribal population gradually started to increase in these regions. Until the late 18th century there were not much concentration of non-tribal population. Only in late 19th century several pockets of non-tribal concentration emerged in this area. With this, the process of grabbing the cultivable land of tribals by the non-tribals also started in full swing and relentlessly, so much so that in no time these migrants who were in small minority in this region, owned most of the cultivable land of this region. By the turn of this century, the non-tribal landowning communities, such as Anavil Brahmins, Kanbi Patidars and Parsis became the landlords and the tribals were reduced to subservient status. Many of them lost their land. An interesting account has been provided regarding the change in the exise policy and its

effects on adivasis (Desai : 1969), which runs as follows:

"The adivasis tapped their own trees for toddy and distilled liquor for themselves. But first in the beginning of the 20th century, the British administration and following it other native states such as Baroda, Rajpipla, Vansda, Sachin and Dharampur introduced a new excise policy known as the 'Madras system'. According to this system, the government sold by auction the right to sell liquor and toddy in particular places. The system was in vogue before prohibition was introduced in Gujarat area. Everyone else except the government was prohibited from producing liquor and toddy. He who did was punished. The adivasis lost their rights to prepare their own liquor and toddy but not their habits of drinking.

They had no money and they were not accustomed to handle money. The exchange and money economy was not known to them. They were given some money and drinks in lieu of their labour. They even did not know how to count. The result was growing indebtedness. And slowly they began to lose their land. They became either tenants or labourers. The new economy and the polity exploited their habit of drinking".⁷

A fragmented and ill-organized tribal society was no match against the landowning class although the latter were small in numbers. As a result of this the economic differentiation between the tribals and the land owning

non-tribals became extremely marked. On account of the economic power in their hand, they forced the tribals to become farm servants. From amongst all the tribal groups such farm servants were recruited. The worst plight was that of Dublas, who had already lost their land, and they were bound to accept the servitude of the landowners as bonded labourers.⁸ For the tribals they had no other choice other than to sink in dire poverty. By the turn of the century the tribals were put into worst economic situation. Illiteracy was rampant among them. Till that time not much attempt has been made to make them literate. However, few of the Dhodias, Choudharys and Gamits had started taking education in the beginning of this century. A school, with boarding facilities for tribal boys, had been started by the Gaikwad administration at Songadh in the year 1885. The tribal youngmen who came out after finishing their school education became gravely conscious of the miserable plight of the members of their society. And in order to improve their living conditions, they launched a reform movement.

These educated men believed that the root causes of misery of their people were the deep rooted traditional way of social life and drinking habits. Before they turned activist a few tribal men in that area had already started to live their life on the hindu model. One of such men was Dhariabhai who was an inhabitant of Ghata village in Vyara

taluka of Surat district. Dhariabhai, a Gamit fellow, was a farm servant of a Parsi landlord. His father Kanjibhai too had been farm servant with the same landlord. Kanjibhai was expert in reading foot prints. For his son's marriage he used his knowledge in searching a daughter-in-law and succeeded in seeking the hands of a girl who was full of virtues and also endowed with wisdom. After marriage she persuaded her husband to leave the employment of Parsi landlord and to start his own cultivation in the unreclaimed land. After some time, Dhariabhai after getting inspiration from his wife, erected a temple in the village in which images of hindu gods and goddesses were installed. Dhariabhai's reputation as Bhagat (priest) gradually started to increase. Dharia's younger brother Mochda was entrusted the work of preaching hindu religious gospels to the tribals so that they could leave their habits of drinking, wine and toddy and eating flesh. Taking regular baths and singing devotional prayers every day in the morning and evening for invocation were also insisted in the preachings. This made an impact on several tribal men and women of the area. It also became instrumental in uniting different tribal groups.

Like Dhariabhai and Mochadabhai another person from the same village also did the preachings. His name was Devjibhai. He became more popular among his people as a saintly man and more and more people listened to his preachings effectively.

This Devjibhai had been referred by the famous poet, Late Shri Jhaverchand Meghani, in his work "Lamp of humanity" as a saint of ancient iron age. Devjibhai sent his son Amar Singh to the Songhdh boarding school. On the completion of his education in that school Amarsingh was recommended by the school authorities for further education and the Gaikwad administration sent him to Behrampore in Orissa for higher education in rearing silk worms and for learning the art of making silk-sarees. His father Devjibhai was determined to make his son educated. In a 'durbar' meeting convened at Vyara, the Gamits gentry had been invited to attend. They had been offered perfumed scents which the Gamits, taking it as wine, put into their mouth. This made Devjibhai painful and from this incident he resolved to do something concrete for educating his own people. Due to this he sent his son for further education and also started spreading moral and ethical understanding among his own people. Devjibhai also preached the women folk of his society to get rid of wearing heavy limestone necklaces. These necklaces were so heavy that at times it used to be the cause of death of some women. He tried to impress upon the women to leave using that and inspired them to wear blouses for covering the upper part of the body. When Amarsingh came back after completing his education he joined the Gaikwad administration but remained in the service for a short time. He was a devotee to his father's non-violence gospels and moral and ethical ideas.

DEVI MOVEMENT

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As his job demanded him to kill the worms in order to get silk-threads, he decided to leave this job. Later on he also joined his father to bring reform in the tribal's way of life. He was not concerned only with the Gamits but desired to bring changes, in all the tribal communities of 'Rani-Paraj'⁹. He, his father and his teacher Fateh Khan, who was a muslim, convened a meeting of the adivasis under the banner of 'Rani-Pradesh Hit-wardhak Sabha'. This conference, held sometimes in 1905, lasted for three days and number of resolutions were passed with the aim to bring social reforms in the adivasi societies of that region. Those who became followers of this reformative movement, were asked to form 'Ekda' (or a group) by bringing more and more people in this group. But all these efforts of Devjibhai and Amarsingh did not succeed much and only a small minority could be influenced to follow the precepts, advocated by Amarsingh. During that very time another reformer, Ramanbhai of village Khadiya in neighbouring Mahuva taluka had persuaded the women members of his family to abandon the wearing of heavy limestone ornaments as he believed that they were the cause of uncleanliness of the women. His this reformative move was taken unfavourably by other members of his village and was excommunicated by them.

Such sporadic attempts by certain dedicated individuals did not make much impact and till the advent of Devi movement, by and large, the tribal societies continued to practice their age-old traditions. But soon after another wave of reform swept the area and this time it was different. Popularly known, as Devi-movement, it appealed to a large number of tribals, both in Surat and Valsad districts. This movement gave effective dimension to the earlier individual attempts. It was believed that a supernatural power was roaming in the area and was preaching people to stop drinking wine and tapping toddy. This episode took place sometimes in the year 1921. Two persons, one woman and a man visited the area from Khandesh. The woman was found to be seated near at the end of a 12 ft long pit. Men and women went to see her. Those who wanted to reach her, had to walk in the pit, after keeping something on the head. If that something did not fall while the person was moving across the whole length of the pit, with the hands swinging on the sides, he or she was considered a person endowed with purity of mind and pious attitude. If that fell down, the person was not considered worthy of following the path of Devi. Those who reached her after walking out the pit, were required to offer her a piece of red coloured cloth in which the man would gaze intently and then gave the final proclamation regarding the purity and sacredness of his or her being. The Devi, then gave

blessings to such individuals who were found to be pure and asked them to stop drinking wine and toddy and eating flesh. In this way both the woman and the man visited villages after villages. From each village one or two men were chosen by the Devi to move along with her. These chosen men were known as "Gorali" or "Govalas". After her departure, the village, where she was camping would celebrate a feast, which was termed as "bhandara". This movement became very widespread. It was believed that a kind of hot wind was blowing in all the direction, carrying the messages of Devi regarding getting rid of drinking habits. Some of the old persons informed me that this "Devi business" was a brainwave of Amarsingh who took this recourse to reform the members of his society. Whatever might be the truth, it certainly hit some regions effectively.

While these attempts were being made, the tyranny and oppression of the landowners, supported by the administration of the both British and Gaikwad regions, intensified to counteract the spread of reform. Non-tribals did not want the tribals to be reformed due to the simple reason of perpetuating their exploitation. The government, too, was interested in the continuation of the drinking habits of the tribals for getting revenue. When the effect of the religious movement began to be felt, both the landowners and government got alarmed, particularly the former. Among the Choudharys of

the Mandvi and Valod talukas, this Devi movement to abstain from liquor and eating flesh had made inroads which drew the attention of the British government. Their reaction was favourable but the Gaikwad administration reacted belligerently and continued to force drinking on the adivasis. It was reported that two or three persons used to hold an adivasi and poured liquor or toddy in his mouth as they poured castor oil in the mouth of a buffalo or a bullock.¹⁰ The landowners too did all which was possible for them in order to prevent the adivasis from becoming a teetotaler. The inhuman treatment given to the adivasis prompted some social workers of Navasari to do something to remove the calamity of the adivasis. But Gaikwad government issued orders prohibiting the entry of these social workers from Navasari, into the adivasi area since it felt that these persons were motivated to create conflict between the adivasis and landowning class as well as to ruin the Parsees.¹¹ Due to the fear of torture and harassment at the hands of landowners, Parsees and administration, the tribals ignored the message of Devi and relapsed into their drinking habits. Thus, ultimately the Devi movement was made to flop down. "After the failure of this movement there was boycott of those people who had given up drinking liquor, so much so that on such occasions such as marriage and death they were isolated. In this anti-prohibition movement the government, the wine shop owners and the adivasis who kept contract for selling toddy were all united."¹²

Almost during this time the Gandhian movement too was started in the region and many adivasis got involved in it and tried to bring reform in their society. Gandhian movement gave the much needed fillip to the reform movements initiated by the tribals themselves. Through the Gandhian movement the credibility of their earlier efforts was reaffirmed. But the path of reform was not a smooth one. Resistance from members of their own society was strong enough, apart from the government. A pretty good idea can be obtained from the following account. "Amongst The Chodhras there is a large section of the tribe which is under advanced Hindu influence, and therefore opposed to any kind of blood sacrifice. The differences between the two sections have become very pronounced since the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi in the tribal area, and his followers seek to put a final end to the custom of blood-sacrifice. Fights take place between the two sections, and these are followed by impressive ceremonies.

In December 1929, a party of a hundred Chodhras proceeded with six goats to Ahin dev hill to perform the usual sacrifices. The reformers came to know of this plan and they mustered in large numbers to prevent the sacrifice. Before the party could reach the hill with the goats, the utaro (Place of sacrifice) was surrounded by the volunteers of the reformers' party and thus the sacrifice was not held. When both the parties were returning in the evening, one triumphant and the other full

of resentment, things came to a head and a free fight took place in which several persons were injured.

A few days later the reformers intended to hold a meeting at Serkui village to preach temperance and the abandonment of blood-sacrifices. The aggrieved party found in this an opportunity for wreaking its vengeance, and therefore after a feast of fowl and toddy, awaited the arrival of the reformers. They hid themselves in a river hollow near the place of meeting, and as soon as the reformers arrived, they fell upon them and beat them mercilessly. The reformers being in a small number had to make good their escape.

At the time when this incident took place, a party of one hundred Chodhras from the Bardoli Taluka were touring the villages preaching temperance, Mahatma Gandhi's message of the spinning wheel, and vegetarianism. The local reformers joined their comrades from the neighbouring taluka and one morning marched in an impressive procession to the village of Serkui, bearing the National colours and singing reform songs to the tune of music. They gathered in a circle round the spot where their comrades had spilt their blood. The leaders made impressive and forceful speeches in the Chodhri dialect exhorting the tribesmen to carry on with the reforms in spite of all obstacles. The speeches were followed by songs and prayers by a Brahmin who accompanied the processionists. When the prayer was over one of the leaders proceeded to a

mound of earth, and prostrating himself, picked up some soil and passed it three times over his head. He got up, and pointing to the sun, swore that he would even give up his life in the service of the tribe. Each Chodhra who was then in the circle followed the example of his leader and took the oath in a similar manner. The ceremony was witnessed by the frightened villagers of Serkui from the tops of trees, hedges, and from behind the fencings of their fields".¹³
(B.H.Mehta : 1934).

It is apparent that the tribals of South Gujarat had been going through a difficult transitional period during the first quarter of this century. Their own traditional belief was being eroded sharply and cultural transformation was gaining speed. This situation produced strains and impatience and inclined the people towards Bhakti sects which had already started to attract followers from amongst the tribals. On account of the failure of the earlier reformatory movement initiated by the educated tribals and also that of Devi movement, there developed a fertile field for the different Bhakti sects to grow into socio-religious movements in the region.

Sect or Sampradaya as it is known in Gujarat represent a set of moral values to which a tribal chooses to conform. Thus to say that a person adheres to the 'Moksha marg Sampradaya' means that he or she follows the code of spiritual

conduct laid down by the founder of the sampradaya, as well as the subsequent preachings of the monastic order. The strictness with which the code is followed depends on the individual as well as the enthusiasm of the monks.

SAT KAIWAL

The first Bhakti sect which arrived on the scene, as it appears from the available informations, was 'Kayam Panth' which is popularly known as 'Sat Kaiwal'. This sect had been founded in Kaira district by a saint whose name was Kuberswami. His real identity is shrouded in mystery. It is believed that he was not borne as a mortal being from the womb of a woman. Legendary tales about him say that he was sent to this earth by the supreme god "Sat Kaiwal" to preach his gospels. It is said that this world has been created by "Sat Kaiwal". He is supposed to be a formless entity but is pervasive everywhere in this universe. Out of nothingness he created the existence of all kind of living beings. The creation was effected as a part of his own self. He alone, as the creator of this universe, occupies the supreme position. When he discovered that mortal beings of the earth are going astray and are ignoring his very existence, he decided to send a special envoy. From his own self, he created Kuberswamiji and sent him on the earth. Kuberswami appeared as a young boy on the bank of a pond in the village Kasar in Kaira district in the year 1829. There he met a woman who belonged to Sarsa village of the same

district. Kuberswami told the woman the purpose of his appearance and asked her to adopt him as his son. That woman took him to her village which ultimately became the place where this sect was established. Kuberswami died in the year 1934 after living on this earth for 105 years. Many persons became his disciples and the sampradaya gained ground first in Kaira district itself. A temple was erected in Sarsa. The number of disciples rose high. From amongst the followers, a band of dedicated and trusted disciples were selected to be sent to other areas to preach the gospel of 'Sat Kaiwal'. The disciples were given the status of monks. Temples at other places were also erected. One such temple was erected at Umra village¹⁴ in Surat district. From here the monks visited the tribal areas.

One such monk, Tapasvi Raghu Ram became very popular in this region and many stories regarding his miraculous powers spread in the villages. While camping at Vyara he was approached by a tribal teacher, Ruwabhai of Kataswan village who used to come to Vyara daily to worship Rameshwar Mahadeo.¹⁵ Ruwabhai requested Tapasvi Raghu Ram to accept him as his disciple and to enlist him as a member of 'Kayam Panth'. Initially he was refused as the Maharajshri doubted his capacity for becoming a strict adherent follower of this sect, but on recommendation of a Bania disciple he accepted Ruwabhai as his disciple. Ruwabhai discussed the whole matter with Tentiabhai who was the village headman of the Kataswan village.

Tentiabhai too was educated and as such expressed his desire to follow this sect. Tentiabhai invited Tapasvi Raghu Ram to camp in his village, to which the latter agreed. On his visit he was given a warm welcome. A special mandap had been erected. Here, Tentiabhai alongwith his other kins took guru mantra from the saint. As long as the saint remained at Kataswan, he used to sit in samadhi during day time at the peak of a hillock and during night, sessions of spiritual discourse, devotional prayers, discussion used to take place. In no time the reputation of the saint reached even in the far flung villages. Tentiabhai himself was well known in the area as he was a big cultivator. After he took the 'guru mantra', an incident occurred in his life, which turned Tentiabhai into a devout devotee and staunch follower of this sect. Once while he was at Umra (he had become a frequent visitor), one Sadhu Jagannath offered him tobacco to chew which Tentiabhai accepted. Raghu Ram Maharaj came to know this by someone and in order to verify he enquired from Tentiabhai, in the very presence of Jagannath as to what had been offered by the latter to him. Jagannath got infuriated and left that place while Tentiabhai in order to avoid further confrontation as well as embarrassment spoke lie by answering his Guru that he had been offered nuts by Jagannath. Due to his speaking lie a huge fire broke into his house at Kataswan at almost that very time which engulfed his entire house and all the household articles including some cattles

got perished. When Tentia Patel found out this tragedy after his return from Umra, he felt mortified and repentant for speaking lie to Raghu Ram Maharaj. He wrote a letter to the Maharaj admitting his guilt of speaking lie and requested him for forgiveness. The latter conveyed to him that he ought not to worry regarding the destruction of his house and property and prophesized that he would soon be able to buy the big house of the Parsi landlord of the village as the latter would sell his house to him (Tentia Patel) only. The prophecy came true which turned him to become a firm believer of the sect.

Soon, large number of tribals of several villages from Vyara taluka as well as from the neighbouring talukas of Mahuva, Valod, Mandvi and Bardoli accepted 'guru mantra' from Tapasvi Raghu Ram and also from other monks. In this manner, the "Sat Kaiwal" sampradaya got its root in the tribal region. It is difficult to say about the number of followers but it is quite popular. In Vyara taluka itself, there are three temples which were erected sometimes in 1950. For the temple at Vyara, 'Kewal Mandir', the land had been donated by a tribal woman, Ghanjriben Newabhai.

To be a follower of this sect, one has to take 'guru mantra' from a monk. The mantra is spoken into the ear of the person by the Guru. The mantra is as follows:

'Sahej Swabhaw Chahaw Guru Charna,
Kaiwal Kaiwal Gap Uchcharna,
Kari Snan Dhyan ur Guru Ka,
Sahej Dasa Sadhan haru bharee ka'

(With pure mind concentrate on the feet of the Guru and enchant the word "Kaiwal, Kaiwal" several times. And After taking bath, let the Guru enter into your thought with the purpose of worshipping the supreme God).

The disciples are required to lead a simple life, to be truthful, to adhere to complete abstention from drinking wine and toddy and eating meat. They are also required to take baths regularly and after bath to enchant the 'guru mantras' before the image of 'Karuna Sagar'. Normally everybody keeps one or two framed photograph of the 'Karuna Sagar Maharaj'. In case there is a temple in the locality the disciples are expected to visit either during either the morning or evening 'arati'. Those who become monks, have to reside in the temple of 'Karuna Sagar' and abstention from sex has to be strictly observed by them. In the temple at Vyara,¹⁶ the present priest is a tribal fellow from Broach district. Prior to him too, was the priest belonging to a tribal community. However, I was told that not more than ten tribals fellows have become monks.

This sampradaya cuts across the caste and ethnic boundaries. Its originator i.e. Kuberswami Maharaj, in one of his treatise had said that his religion will be known as 'Kayam Panth' and

those who will follow it will flourish permanently. In this manner, according to him, the name, the form and the panth of his religion are static. But those who want to attain salvation once for all, ought to get wedded with the doctrines of "Sat Kaiwal". He also called his sect as 'Gyan sampradaya' (deliverer of knowledge).

Altogether eighteen treatises had been written by the Kuberswamy Maharaj. But the most important ones are, 'Viswa bharam Vidhivansh = nidhi granth', and 'Pancham Swans Ved granth'. Most of these were written between 1920 and 1930. These were not published at that time. After his death, one of his pet disciple Sukhanandji Paramhans undertook the work of publishing these treatises. Many of the treatises were untraceable as Kuberswamy had given those to his different disciples. In this connection it is mentioned that one copy of the manuscript of both the above mentioned important treatises had been lying with Tentia Patel. Raghu Ram Maharaj had lot of confidence upon Tentia Patel and as such he had given the original manuscript (ofcourse there was another copy) to Tentia Patel. But after the death of Tentia Patel, his son Keshri Singh who became the leader of the Sati-Pati movement refused to part with those manuscripts when approached by Sukhanandji. All these treatises were published after receiving financial help from the followers. In publication of these treatises, no donor had been from the

tribal communities. But in a recent publication 'Bhagwan Karuna Sagar ni prathna vidhi', all the donors are tribals, from the Choudhary and Dhodia communities. In fact, it is claimed that on the request of these tribal followers, the publication has been made. One of the donor happens to be President of a Taluka Panchayat Samiti.

Moksha Margis or Vallbha Swami Sect

This sect had been established by one Vallabh Ram Surya Ram Vyas of Ahmedabad in about the begining of this century. Vallabh's father was a very religious and learned Brahmin of his time. Vallabh inherited the religious temperament of his father but he was an ambitious man. When he was a young man, several religious Bhakti sect were gaining popularity in Gujarat, such as Vallabhachari, Swaminarayan, Ramanuj sects, etc. Vallabh too got a vision to create a new sect as he believed that the other Bhakti sects were drifting the people from strict observance of hindu's great tradition. He was firm believer in the Omni-present Brahma and he launched to propogate the significance of enchanting 'Om! Om! '. But he could attract followers mainly from Ahmedabad district only. After his death his son Ramuji became successor to his father's "Gaddi". It was Ramuji who intensified the propogation of the sect founded by his father amongst the adivasis of Surat and Valsad districts. Ramuji was enthroned in the year 1925. As we had seen earlier this was the period when the adivasis in

south Gujarat were passing through a cultural crisis. When Ramuji started doing 'satsang' (discourse on religious ideas) in adivasis villages he got encouraging response. He started attracting followers, first from the Dhodia community and later on from Choudharys and Gamits too. By fifties this sect became very widespread. Its area of influence has been villages of Chikhli, Dharampur,¹⁸ Pardi, Bansda and Navsari talukas of Valsad district and Mahuva, Valod, and Vyara talukas of Surat district. Community wise, it attracted largest number of followers from Dhodia community. It was quite common in those days to see several Dhodia men wearing the 'U!' shaped tilak on their forehead, as prescribed by the Guru Ramuji of this sect. After the death of Ramuji in 1962, there was a slump in making more followers and gradually this sect's influence is on wane. Ramuji's successor is his eldest son but he is more a business man than a priestly fellow. He runs a big factory for manufacturing dyes. The 'Satsang' business has been entrusted to other fellows, mostly tribals but they are not much effective in making disciples. However, a temple is being erected at Anaval village in Bansda taluka. Anaval is a pilgrimage place for both the hinduised tribals and hindus as it is believed that Lord Ram has once visited this place. As Anaval has a underground hot spring, it also attracts hindus from distant places. This sect has a big temple at Ahmedabad. At the moment, the fellow who conducts 'arati' is a tribal young man from Pardi taluka, who is also

employed in the factory of Ramuji's son. Ramuji's wife is alive and it is she who looks after the temple and organisation of 'satsang', etc. in the tribal villages. She has published a treatise¹⁹ in the memory of her husband. This contains all the philosophies and ideologies of this sect. According to the claim made in the treatise, Ramuji was the fourth in the line of incarnation of Lord Vishnu, first being Rishavdeo, second Sukdeo and third Kabirji. While his father is claimed to be third and last in the line of incarnation, the first being Vedvyas and the second Vallabhdhola. Ramuji is considered as the chief architect of this 'Moksha Margi' sect and as such is referred as 'Moksha Margacharya'. His father, the founder of this sect is referred as 'Param Brahmanishtha'.

Majority of tribal followers have taken 'juru mantra' from Ramuji. At the time of taking 'juru mantra', the disciple has to make 22 promises to the Guru. The three important promises are : (1) Never to indulge in sexual relation with any woman other than the wife. Similarly, in case of a woman disciple she should never cohabit with any man other than her husband. (2) Total abstention from meat eating. (3) Strict observance of not taking any intoxicating thing such as wine, toddy, tobacco, cigarettes or 'biris', betels, etc. Besides these three main promises, the disciple has to make other promises, such as taking bath everyday, maintaining bodily cleanliness, offering puja to the Guru everyday before eating anything in

the morning, wearing the tilak on forehead, living an honest, pure and simple life, etc., etc. A disciple is also forbidden to inter-dine with others who are not followers of the sect. On account of this, many a times a 'Moksha-margi' is put into embarrassing situation when he has to visit such kins who are not 'Moksha-margis'. There he has to cook his own meal on a separate oven.

These promises are required to be made in order to purify one's self and according to the Guru this is the only way of achieving salvation. Self-purification is necessary. The Guru, at the time of giving mantras says that "if you cannot do any 'punya' (good deeds), it does not matter but at least never commit any sin. Further, just by enchanting mantras given by the Guru, you cannot claim the blessings of Guru and even if you get the blessings it will not be fruitful to you. It can be fruitful only when you lead your life according to the teaching of the Gurus which ultimately will bring salvation to you". The Guru also teaches several kind of mantras such as Gayatri mantra, Mahakal mantra, Surya mantra, Rahu mantra, Mrituyan'ya mantra; etc., etc. The main worship is offered to the Guru, not to any other God. If one wished to be a serious and dedicated disciple, he has to adhere to forty three articles of faith.

Sati Pati or Aarti Samaj or Aap ki Jai Wala

Popularly and widely known as 'Sati Pati Pratha' this is the one tribal movement in south Gujarat which though started as a religious movement turned later on as quasi-political movement. As the different religious movements were occurring in this region the tribal areas of Maharashtra too was experiencing such upheavals. In Dhulia district, one Gulia Maharaj had been propagating his religion amongst the adivasis living there. He is used to move from village to village and preach the adivasis to abandon their habit of drinking wine and toddy and meat eating. He also used to hold religious discourse to impress upon the adivasis for adoption of cleanliness and saintly life. But he did not form any sect. His main concern was that of reforming the adivasis and to do that he took the course of religious preachings. Gulia Maharaj did not enter into villages of Gujarat side. After the death of Gulia Maharaj in 1939 or 1940, Ramdas who also happened to be the younger brother of Gulia Maharaj undertook the responsibility of continuing the reformatory movement. Ramdas gradually gained popularity which in turn induced him to form a new sect. Ramdas used to visit the villages of Songadh and Vyara talukas of Gujarat side. There he came into touch with Keshri Singh of village Kataswan in Vyara taluka. As had been mentioned elsewhere, Keshri Singh's father, Tentia Patel was a trusted 'Bhakta' of 'Sat Kaiwal'. It is reported that

Tentiabhai was also bringing out a monthly journal, known as 'Samaj Sudhakar' and through this he used to propagate the messages of 'Karuna Sagar' Bhagwan. As such Keshri Singh had a magnificent heritage so far deep knowledge of hindu philosophy was concerned. Besides this, Keshri Singh is supposed to be the first matriculate from amongst tribals of entire Surat district. For high school education he had been sent to Baroda. For seven years he was employed in a ginning mill at Miyagam in Baroda district. Round about 42's movement he returned to his native village and joined Ramdas when approached by him. Eventually Ramdas concentrated in his own region. While in Gujarat Keshri Singh became the supreme leader of this sect. But it is alleged that Ramdas had become a great debauch and had been sexually exploiting the women of his sect. Due to that, he had fallen down in the esteem of his followers which paved the way for Keshri Singh to gain more popularity. Consequently he became the unchallenged leader of this sect in both Khandesh and Gujarat.

It is not clear whether the name of 'Sati Pati' for this sect was coined by Ramdas or by Keshri Singh or the people of that area. Ramdas died in 1957 or 1958. The basic philosophy of this sect is like this: 'There is sky, there is earth. Both meet each other and when there is rain from sky, plants grow out from the womb of earth. In the similar

manner when a man (who is like the sky) pours down his semen inside the genitals of the woman (who is like the earth), a living being is borne. 'Sati' is equivalent of a woman or mother and 'Pati' is the man or father and hence the followers of this sect are known as 'Sati-Pati Pratha Wala'. Later on this movement got another name - 'Aarti Samaj'. Ramdas introduced the element of performing 'Aarti' for Male Gulia Maharaj by the women folk. Later on Keshri Singh who began to assert his own leadership, gave a new dimension to the performance of 'Aarti'. Instead of Gulia Maharaj, women folk were performing his (Keshri Singh's) 'Aarti'. At the time of 'Aarti', hymns taught by the late Gulia Maharaj used to be sung. Later on Keshri Singh himself composed a set of about fifteen prayers and these were put to use at the time of 'Aarti'. These devotional songs have been published and circulated among the sect followers. Due to this 'Aarti' element this sect was used to be referred as 'Aarti Samaj'. Many people, who are not followers of Keshri Singh's refer his organization as 'Aap Ki Jai Wala'. When two members of this sect meet each other in course of day they greet each other by raising their enclosed hands on both sides upto the head and uttering 'Aap Ki Jai'. The palm of hand is enclosed to remind each other that everybody has come out of his mother's womb with both palms being closed.

When Keshri Singh emerged as the supreme leader of this sect, he attracted a great deal of more followers. His leadership had unleashed a new burst of enthusiasm amongst his followers. He is shrewd, well-read of several religious treatises, good organizer and has a remarkable gift of eloquence. On every 'amawas' and 'poonam' a large number of his followers congregate at his place to pay respect to him and to listen to his religious discourse. At such congregations Keshri Singh also gives political education to his followers. Referring to the tragic economic and social situations of the tribals, he makes passionate appeals to get united and fight out the exploiters and administrators who generally belong to non-tribal society. The main emphasis in his preachings is about the salvation of tribal community. In order to drive his message into the minds of his followers, he makes fiery speeches through which he tries to diffuse the spirit of antagonism against the non-tribals, particularly against the government personnel, moneylenders, traders, etc. But one should not imagine, as is generally propagated about him, that his motive is to instigate his tribal followers to be on warpath against the non-tribal society. What he intends is to inculcate in the minds of his followers regarding the economic injustice meted out by the members of non-tribal society to them and about the breakdown of the moral and ethical fabric of their own tribal culture when they try to imitate the way of life of non-tribals. It is claimed by some of his followers that the arguments,

which he puts in order to point out the tragic plight in which the tribal society has been forced to sink, are so convincing, inspiring and thought provoking that one is instantly stimulated to become a strong activist and to get engaged at once to do something daring to take revenge from the non-tribals.

He also spells out the economic problems and the gradual destruction of the tribal societies. The followers attend the 'Aarti' too and according to one's own individual capacity, they put money while taking the 'Aarti'. The followers bring their own rations. Cooking facilities are given by Keshri Singh. It is alleged that the followers render their labour in his agricultural field.

Keshri Singh, who is referred and called as 'Dada' is 72 years old chap but still at this age very agile. He is considered as 'Bhagwan' by his followers. Many stories regarding his miraculous powers are in circulation among his followers. He is also believed by his followers as an effective healer. His cocky manners and flamboyant behaviour made him a colourful personality. Many kind of stories are afloat regarding him. For instance he is supposed to possess spiritual power to cure diseases. His very touch has curative power. Many of his followers come to him to be healed. It is also believed that he can appear as well as disappear from any place if he so wishes. It is claimed that while he was

undergoing his term of sentence in the jail, he was found present at several important social gatherings. The way he enchants his mantras and the mysterious arithmetic he propounds to explain the rule of body, bestows a kind of supernatural aura around his personality. He is believed to sleep for only a couple of hours during 24 hours of day and night. It is also claimed by the disciples as well as by Keshri Singh himself that nobody can succeed in taking a photograph of his (Keshri Singh) from any camera. According to such claims, several persons made attempt to take his snap and in actuality each of them had clicked the shutter of the loaded camera but when the film was given for developing and printing, the roll of the film proved to be mysteriously blank in each case.

People from several tribal communities became his followers. Geographically, his followers come not only from Vyara, Songadh and Mandvi talukas but also from far flung villages of Dangs and Broach districts. Keshri Singh condemns liquor taking and meat eating and instructs his followers to obey the law of body and to lead an ordinary life.

He also prohibits wearing costly and heavy ornaments. In his preaching he exhorts that the moral fibre of the society had deteriorated and "the reason is that we fail to keep an account of our body from our arrival in the world to the departure from this world. And also it is necessary to relate

the ruling of the body with financial and other transactions. Since it is not happening in this country, the people are not miserable here. In his exhortations, he emphasized regarding tribal unity and regeneration of the tribal society.

It was Keshri Singh who turned this religious movement into a quasi-political movement. He believed that the poor plight of the tribals was no longer responsible for the social turmoil of the day. The fault lay with the non-tribals who were undermining the tribals. Before there could be a new golden age, the non-tribals would have to be chased from the area. He organised his followers and asked them to refuse payment of land revenue. This led to clashes between government officials and the tribals. During that very time tenancy act was to be passed. At several places the tribals claimed to be the owner of the land. This gave rise to conflict situation between the tribals and non-tribal landowners. In one clash at Valod in the year 1953, police had to open fire. It so happened that in a nearby village a tribal family claimed the land to be their own which somehow or other one non-tribal family managed to get recorded it in their name. This infuriated the tribal family and they agitated. To retaliate, the non-tribal family demolished the house of the tribal family which was, as claimed by the former, in their field. The members of the tribal family were forcibly taken into a truck and each one was put down at different places, far away from their home-site. On getting back, the head consulted his kin members and

other tribals of the village and they decided to approach Keshri Singh to get redress. Keshri Singh asked them to retaliate and demolish the house of the non-tribal family which was situated in Valod township. When the tribals expressed the fear of being shot down by the police, Keshri Singh assured them that no harm would come to them as the bullets shot at his followers would turn into flowers.²⁰ Later on a large number of tribals reached the house of the non-tribal family with the intention of demolishing it. On hearing it the non-tribal family sought the help of police to drive away the tribals. When the tribal reached the house, the police first fired in the air and as no harm came to a of the crowd, the tribals felt confirmed that bullets were turning into flower. They got more encouraged and shouted - "Phool" and "Dad: ki jai" and climbed up the roof of the house. Seeing that the police opened fired aiming them and when the bullet started hitting them, there was commotion and everybody fled. However, 9 persons were killed on the spot and several injured. An enquiry committee was instituted by the State Government but no body is aware of its findings. Ultimately, the land went to the non-tribal family by a decree of the court and the tribal's family members had no alternative other than to work as farm servants in the same field.

In the no-revenue campaign, clashes took place and at some places, the Mamlatdar, who went to collect the revenue was

assaulted. In one village, when the police party reached the village next day after a complain had been lodged by the Mamlatdar, all male members of the village put themselves inside their respective houses while the women of the families guarded the door with sickle in their hand. The women folks did not allow the police to enter their houses. After a couple of days those men were arrested and sentenced to one and half year of imprisonment. At one or two places also police force was used and several tribals were sent to jail after the verdict of the court. In one village, even a Parsee landowner was killed by his followers, but in absence of any evidence the charge against the accused was dismissed by the court. Such instances of confrontations with police force gradually subdued the ^{followers} of Keshri Singh and in course of time they refrained themselves from assaulting any government personnel and also started paying their revenues to the government. But such episodes also brought a kind of fear psychosis in the minds of government personnel and as a consequence of this they avoided visiting such villages which are known as strongholds of Keshri Singh. In a 'falia' (hamlet) of Valod village, not many non-tribal residents of Valod as well as government personnel dare to visit because of the fear of rough behaviour from the followers of Keshri Singh.

When I myself started exploring about meeting Keshri Singh I was dissuaded by almost all persons at Vyara, whether official or non-official. Some warned me that it was not safe to meet Keshri Singh as I might be manhandled by him or by his disciples while some were apprehensive that I would be refused interview by Keshri Singh and would also be humiliated and insulted. But when I expressed my determination regarding meeting him once personally irrespective of whatever treatment I would get at his hands, a couple of tribal residents of Vyara town came forward to help me in arranging a meeting with Keshri Singh. An individual was found out who was well known to Keshri Singh, although not belonging to his sect, and with him I went to the village Katasvan. On reaching his house, we were told that 'Dada' had gone somewhere but nobody knew where. After waiting for about an hour we could meet his second son, a young man of about 22-23 years. He was a soft spoken person and was polite in his treatment to us. He informed us that his father had gone to Khandesh side and was likely to come back in the evening and so if we come again tomorrow morning we would be able to meet him. Next morning I got a message on telephone (I was staying in government Rest House, Vyara) from farm house of Keshri Singh which has a telephone connection, asking me to reach Kataswan anytime as Keshri Singh would like to meet me. So on that day I again went to Kataswan and on reaching Keshri Singh's residence I had to wait for about an hour when Keshri Singh materialized from somewhere. We started talking at about 11 a.m.

and the first sitting went right upto 4 p.m. Although I wanted to leave but Keshri Singh insisted to stay overnight to which I readily complied as I was curious to know and see more. I was served with a simple but very tasty meal of 'Khichdi' (rice and pulse cooked together) at about 5 p.m. At about 7 p.m. Keshri Singh and myself again sat together for talking and this sitting ended at about 1.00p.m. In the meanwhile, at about 7.30 p.m. I heard female voices coming from inner part of the house. They were singing 'bhazans' (devotional songs). I asked Keshri Singh why shouldn't we join them but his reply was evasive.

To me, Keshri Singh appeared quite well informed, polished and urbane in his talks and behaviour. No doubt, he nurses contemptuous and aggressive feelings towards non-tribals but he did not appear to be a harsh person given to or wedded to violence as is generally publicized about him by the government personnel as well as non-tribals of that region. He is certainly anxious for his people to lead an honourable and dignified life. But he strongly feels that this is not possible so long non-tribals continue to dominate over and subjugate the tribal people in all walks of life. The only way, according to him, is to cultivate a deep awakening among his people about the primordial as well as non-primordial aspects of their rich heritage which has been handed down to them from their father. He also laments over the indifferent and antagonistic behaviour of many of his tribal brethren towards him and alleges that

they have sold them out to the non-tribal society and directly or indirectly are facilitating the non-tribal people to keep the tribals under their thumb.

During the afternoon and also the next morning when I was to take leave of him, I noticed that several persons, nearly 40 to 50 came there and after greeting him and sitting for a while there went away. These persons had come from different villages for attending the congregation. Some of them, as I learnt later, had come from far flung villages of Dangs district.

Keshri Singh sent petitions to central government, and issued several pamphlets amongst his followers, challenging the authority of the government to collect land revenue from them. He argued that they were owners of the land and the central government has been given the power to rule the country by the Britishers and the government was just a servant of the tribals. For his agitational approach and breaking the law and order situation, he was convicted four or five times and was sentenced to imprisonment. He even approached the President of India and sent memorandum to the commonwealth conference held at London in year 1961. The contents of the memorandum runs as follows:

Please to see

Established usage of
on her Majesty service

O.I.G.C.

On India Government Service

Established usage of

The Free Partnership of the Commonwealth

That proves

It is not the personal subject (matter).

Then who is responsible owner of the

Established usage of stamp, currency promises, promissory documents, coins and credit of India ?

Then who is the owner of India ? (Government of India ?)

That is why her Majesty intervention is necessary

Sd/- K. Keshri Singh

In a pamphlet issued by him amongst his followers he condemned the activities of the educated tribals who were responsible, in his belief, to be the cause of sad plight of their communities. He posed the question - "Is it better to be a cowherd of buffaloes or cowherd of asses ?"

In this manner, he organised agitations but could not succeed. On seeing the firm attitude of the government, he now calls his organization as 'Adhyatmic Jyot Jyoti Pradipt Samaj' and also by 'the Race Relations Board Conciliation Committee'. It is said that he has constituted an advisory board. Now he propagates that his organization is for spread of spiritual teaching and he has no agitational motives but just wanted

to assert that without relating the spiritual account of the ruling of body with the day to day dealings in financial matters, there is no salvation for the human beings from misery. However, with the growth and rapid expansion of education in the region, more and more tribals are losing faith in him and in the credibility of his preaching. Amongst the illiterate tribals, he still appears to be a force. But at any rate he is now a spent force.

Sanatan Dharm Seva Sangh

This organization came recently on the scene to recruit followers from amongst the tribals. Its activities are confined to the villages of a few talukas such as Pardi and Valsad. This has mainly been successful amongst Dhodia community. The saints of this organization, such as Vidyanand Maharaj and Akhanand Maharaj (they reside at Panchvati, Nasik) and Swami Dayanand Vedpathi Maharaj (he has established a Vedashram at Chandod on the bank of river Narmada) frequently hold 'Satsang' in tribal villages and through it attract disciples. The disciples are required to abstain from drinking wine, and eating meat and are required to lead pious life. It started its activities in the end of 1950 and by this time has recruited a large number of following, although localized in a small region. In the recent Kumbh mela at 'Prayag', the organization held its first conference. The organization arranged a special train, from

Bombay on finding a good response from tribals to attend the conference. It is reported that nearly one thousand persons, mostly tribals from Pardi and Valsad talukas attended the conference at Prayag.

Influential tribal leaders like Shri Uttambhai Patel also happens to be follower of this sect. Most of the well-to-do tribal agriculturists of the region have become followers. Many caste Hindus also follow this sect. To increase the number of followers, the Saints of this organization frequently visit different villages and at the stance of some followers organize Satsang in a village. Recently, such a Satsang had been held at Chanvai village in which more than 1,000 persons from different villages gathered to listen the discourse given by the Saints. For promoting the activities of the sect, a district level committee has been organized, which is known as "Shri Valsad Zila Sanatam Dharma Seva Sangh" in which many influential tribal persons, particularly from the Dhodia community, are active members.

Kalwadia Panth

Kalwadia Panth's Guru was Fakirbhai, a man from potterer's community, belonging to village Kalwada, near Khergam in Valsad taluka. After his death his sons Vallabhbai and Maganbhai have become Gurus. This sect has also a sizable following amongst tribals, nearly five thousand. This Panth's followers are confined in villages of Valsad taluka only.

This Panth has originated from the teachings of Khwaja Garib Nawaj Chisti of Ajmer. In this region it was first propagated by Nadarsa Baba of Vansda. His successor was Mirza Baba of Surat who was succeeded by Malek Baba of Olpad. Fakirbhai was the disciple of Malek Baba. It is Fakirbhai who intensified the propagation of this Panth amongst the tribals. A big congregation of the followers of this sect takes place once in a year at the 'Dargah' of Fakirbhai at Kalwada village. When Fakirbhai died he was buried in his own house and a 'Dargah' has been built over his 'Samadhi'. The annual congregation takes place here.

The followers of this panth in a village assemble during night and hold 'bhajan' sessions. Men and women who attend such sessions go on singing hymns and devotional songs in praise of the Gurus of this sect. While hymn-singing, they shake their heads furiously. This is done with a view to forget other worldly things and become fully absorbed in the propiation of the Gurus. One of the important hymn is as follows:

"Sohom mantra jape nit prani,
Bin jibhya bin dant,
Bina jibh hāṛe nahin honth
Lagi Surat nishan chot."

(Every one ought to enchant 'sohom' mantra everyday, without using the tongue and teeth. Without the movement of the tongue, the lips cannot move. In this manner only the image of the Guru will get surely fixed in the mind.)

Swami Narayan Sect

Although quite an old sect in Gujarat, it started to recruit followers from amongst the tribals only recently. The theology of this sect stresses salvation through work. This sect has laid down a set of practical and puritan rules for his followers which stressed that salvation lay through work carried out carefully and methodically each day. These are contained in a book of precepts called 'Sikshak Patra'. Two hundred and six commandments were laid down. Prohibition included taking of animal life, eating flesh, drinking alcohol, gambling, swearing, bribery and adultery.

A huge temple has been erected at Vyara and one is under construction at Karchelia in Mahuva taluka. This indicates that the monks of this sect are to intensify the campaign of recruiting tribals into this sect. The fourth in line of chief monk, Pramukh Swamiji as he is called (his real name is Narayan Swarup Das ji), visits the tribal areas frequently to hold 'Satsang'. At the inauguration of the temple at Vyara, a large crowd of adivasis had come (the inauguration took place last year). Many adivasi leaders had been invited and a dancing troupe from Dangs area was also called for giving a dance programme on the occasion.

This sect has been able to recruit tribal followers from villages of Vyara, Valod and Mahuva talukas. Educated tribals

from the Dhodia community mainly constitute its followers. But as the resources of this sect is huge, it is expected that it will be more effective in the coming years in the tribal areas.

Conclusion

Most of the sects are of the nature of the conversionist sect which takes no interest in programmes of social reform or in the political solution of social problems. The leaders of the sect mobilize the group and use techniques of mass persuasion in order to convert individuals. In South Gujarat such conversion is effected through 'satsang'. Due to this nature of the sects the group belonging to these sects do not have strained or contemptuous relationship with the members who have not joined the sect. But they do feel a little bit superior than members of traditional society. However, by and large, this does not in anyway affect the social relationships. The strict adherent of the sects may not accept food in the house of a non-sect individual of his own society but no offence is taken of that by the latter and alternative arrangements are made for the formers' meal.

On the whole it seems that these sects are linked with moral development of individuals. In a few cases relationship between sects have been found to be antagonistic. For instance it was observed that the members of the Kalwadia panth do frequently quarrel with members of Sanatan Dharam panth.

A couple of years back, a fight took place between the followers of Kalwadia Parth and Sanatan Dharma Panth at village Paladhara. There the saints of the Sanatan Dharma Panth were holding a 'Satsang' and in course of his religious discourse Swami Vidyananda made a derogatory remark about the Kalwadia Panth. He labelled it as 'Bharwadia panth' (Bharwadias are a sub-caste of Hindu and are given a lower rank in the social status hierarchy of Hindu caste system). This enraged the followers of Kalwadia Panth and they forced Swami Vivekananda to get down from the 'Gadi' (the raised platform from where he was speaking) and compelled him to catch hold of his both ears and to bow his head downwards as a gesture of making penance for offending the dignity of the Guru of Kalwadia Panth. They had even decided to beat him but on a second thought, they restrained themselves. Due to this, tension grew between the followers of two sects. However, after a week they repented for this dastardly behaviour and sent a written apology to Swami Vivekanand. But, nevertheless, the followers of these two sect do not see from eye to eye with each other. The followers of Sanatan Dharma allege that in all their 'Satsangs' the followers of Kalwadia Panth want to create disturbances.

Similarly the members of "Sati Pati" panth despise the followers of 'Sat Kaiwal'. The former treat the latter as traitors to their traditional society.

There does not appear to be any visible evidence regarding respectful treatment given by Hindus to a tribal member of a religious sect. It does not make much difference. No sense of equality is harboured by the Hindus for the sect's members. But most of the sects' member do try not to mingle much with the Hindus. A kind of avoidance is maintained by the Hindus. Only successful political leaders are given respectful treatment by the Hindus. Otherwise the stereotyped attitude towards the tribals has not changed irrespective of whether one belongs to a sect or not. On the contrary, hostility towards tribals is growing.

Most of the sects, barring the 'SatiPati' panth, have been introduced to the tribal areas after these took an institutionalized form elsewhere. Some of these sects, such as Swami Narayan, Sat Kaiwal and Mokshmargi have been working on an institutional form even before these got introduced in tribal areas. Not all, but two or three sects have their own place of worship but that too not on village level. Sat Kaiwal sect has three temples in Vyara taluka, Swami Narayan has recently constructed a big temple at Vyara and at the inauguration of the temple, the chief guest was a powerful tribal leader of that region. Another temple is under construction at Karchelia in Mahuva taluka (in the neighbourhood of Vyara). Moksh margis have their own temple at Anaval in Bansda taluka.

Nearly all sects use Gujarati script. The tribal followers too use this very script. However the 'Sati Pati' sect uses Hindi script but the language is a mixture of Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi. The use of Hindi script is for the benefit of its followers in Maharashtra region.

Each sect has its own rules for religious ceremonies. But for life cycle ceremonies, only 'Sati Pati' sect and 'Mokshmargi' sect have distinct rules. For instance the followers of the 'Sati Pati' sect are not required to wail at the time of death of any member in the family. Marriage ceremonies are observed in a most simple manner. The bride and bride-groom are just required to garland each other before "Dada's" as well as their parent's presence and obtain their blessings.

None of the sects have become endogamous group. However, sometimes it is observed that while looking for a daughter-in-law or son-in-law, a family belonging to the same sect gets preference. But among the persons of younger generation, even such consideration does not occupy any significant place. It is worth noting here that among the Gamits, families belonging to Moksha Margi sect have been found to take spouses from even families converted to Christianity and vice versa.

Although some leaders have gained most of the support from the sect to which they belonged, these sects, on the whole, are not relevant to political behaviour of its members. The Satjanti or Aarti Samaj may be called quasi political movements.

The strict adherents of this sect have not been participating in the Assembly and Parliament elections. The sects, as such, do not appear to work for mass politicisation. In the village Panchayat elections, persons belonging to a particular sect in the village do have a consensus to vote for a particular individual in case he belongs to their sect. Otherwise there does not seem to be much evidence that sects, as such, have taken part in politics or in elections.

However, the awakening these movements brought among the tribals, soon created a political response, which in turn led the movement in other direction. Many leaders of social reform are now found functioning in the broad framework of political agitation. It may be emphasized that the larger dimensions of social regeneration and awakening are preconditions of principles of self determination and self rule of their area.

It is clear that the sects were usually formed by a personality of holiness and charisma. In case of all the sects the Gurus started to attract a large following of devotees who promised to change their old corrupt life. In case of the Sati Pati movement it caused a conflict with authority, especially when the doctrine was preached in a militant fashion. Through these sects, the tribals were able to gain a feeling of moral superiority and self respect which went hand in hand with their economic advance. The latter was one of the main reasons why more and more tribals became devotees of one sect or other.

They also desired to raise their ritual status in the wider society. The Sati Pati movement demonstrated how a religious movement inevitably took on political aspects. Religion and politics were not separate spheres in the tribal mind. Keshri's prophecy of a better time with their own ruler meant that he considered it righteous to oppose the existing power. As he considered that their way of life was being threatened and their local dominance being undermined, he organized agitations against non-tribals and the authority. This revolutionist sectarianism was a response to a situation of culture strain. Enough militancy had been stirred up by him to alarm the non-tribals as well as the authority. This movement can be seen as that which arose out of intense xenophobia, the hated object was non-tribals and governmental domination. The leader of this sect guarantees for his followers either a return to the golden age of tribal culture or the coming of a future millenium.

All these movements are largely committed by acculturation to the symbols of culture contact. These sects were born in reply to social change and deterioration in the traditional culture. These also symbolize the fact that for the tribals the price of survival has been the pain of accommodation. The unrealistic promises and expressive practices of these movements reduce the frustration of social domination and cultural deprecation by elaborating a compensatory universe. They are like messianic movements often preoccupied with directly

healing or easing the multitude of physical and spiritual ills that afflict tribals in a situation of culture contact. They also offer to their members a sense of competence and creativity in face of the denigration of these qualities. Again, anyone who has experienced present day tribal life and the comparative deprivation that progress has brought upon it, cannot ignore the entertainment value in the social and ritual life of these movements. They almost all act to replace the village boredom and deprivation with the satisfaction of sociability and religious adventure. But, because of the heightened emotion characteristic of these movements, the unrealistic expectations they create in their followers, and their neglect of the larger situation of which they are a part and to which they have reacted but remain attached, they are bound to be short-lived.

Notes and References

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2. King, C.W., Social movements in the United States, New York, 1956.
3. Bruyn, J.V.de. The Mansron cult of Biak, South Pacific, 1951 V, 1-11.
4. For instance Santhal rebellion, Sardar movement, Kherwara Bhil's rebellion, Birsa movement, Jharkhand movement, etc, etc.
5. Singh, Suresh, Dust Storm and Hanging Mist, Calcutta, 1956.
6. Desai, I.P., The Vedchhi Movement, Surat (mimeograph), 1969.
7. Ibid
8. For details, See Lal, R.B., Bonded Labour in Gujarat, (mimeograph), 1977
9. Rani in Gujarati language means forest. Thus, Rani Paraj means forest region.
10. Desai, I.P. Ibid
11. Ibid
12. Ibid
13. Mehta, B.H. Religions thoughts and worship among the Chodhras of Gujarat, The Journal of the Anthropological Society, Bombay, Vol. XV, No. 34, 1934.
14. Umra village is now within the boundry of Surat city Municipal Corporation.
15. There is an ancient temple of Rameshwar Mahadeo at Vyara
16. For construction of the temple, the land measuring about 2 gunthas had been donated by a tribal woman who is a widow.
17. Although Vallabh Ram has settled down in Ahmedabad, originally he belonged to Surat and this may be the reason that for propagation of his sect he chose his home district, Surat and the neighbouring district, Valsad.

18. Only in the plains of Dharampur taluka which is inhabited by the people of Dhodia community.

19. The title of the treatise is "Ramuji Smriti Granth", published in the 1967 from Ahmedabad. Her son is also publishing a weekly eight page 'patrika' known as 'Chetavani'.

20. Similar types of beliefs have been reported by several authors who have studied tribal movements in other States. For instance, Surendra Prasad Sinha in his paper 'The nature of religion of Birsa (1895-1900)' published in Aspects of Religion in Indian Society, Ed.L.P.Vidyarthi, 1961 has made the following observation:

".....that the sprinkling of Bir-da would make his followers invincible, that the bullets and powder magazine and the Government armed forces would turn into water..... (p.320)

I can quote another instance from amongst the Bhils of Panchmahal. The Bhils, when revolted against the rulers of Santrampur State in 1912-13, were suppressed by the British army which on confrontation with the armed Bhils first made blank fires to scare them off. Finding that the bullets of the armed soldiers did not injure any of them, the Bhils believed that that was due to magical and supernatural power of their Guru Govind who had inspired them to revolt violently. Upon this they rushed in greater number to attack the armed soldiers but when real firing was resorted to, several Bhils were killed.