

Shri Kishore Gavit on the Shabarikumbh

Shri Kishore Gavit, general secretary of *Akhil Bharatiya Shabarikumbh Samaroh Aayojan Samiti* is a resident of Mokhamar, a village in Dang district. He is a worker of the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram for the last 8 years and is a civil engineer by training. The Shabarimata Mandir is his brainchild. Like countless other workers, Shri Gavit has taken upon himself to make the Shabarikumbh a grand success. "Every village here has a temple of Mahadev and Hanuman, the majority of people here are Hindu Bhils" says Shri Gavit, " however for the past few years, Christian missionaries have spread their influence. Till recently, the missionary organization, *World Vision* used to baptize around 2000 Hindus every year. Their method was unique in some ways. The villages in this area are backward, so *World Vision* would form 'gram samitis' in the guise of rural development. These 'gram samitis' are active in each village over a five year period. Providing medical help, attending to various needs, providing monetary help, instilling anti-Hindu values in schools were the means used. The 'gram samiti' would provide fertile ground for conversion. Once conversion took place, the missionaries would take care of the converted folk and then leave them to their fate". Continued Shri Gavit, " The converted Hindus would face several hardships. It would so happen that in one family, the parents would be Hindus, the elder son would get converted and the younger one would remain Hindu. The converted member would get isolated ; the Christian missionaries would also neglect him. After facing such hardship, the converted member would feel like coming back to his ancestral religion. Change in religion would alienate him from his traditional customs and manners. Such converted Hindus who express a desire to return to Hinduism are taken to Unai, a spot 134 km from Subir village (the site of the Shabarikumbh). There, after a ritual bath, they are brought back to the Hindu fold. In the last few years, increasing activity of the *Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram* and Swami Assemananda, and after Sri MorariBapu's Ram Katha, Christian conversion activities have been halted to a great extent. The local *vanavasis* have now realized the importance of *swadharma* and Christian conversion shall stop completely after the proposed Kumbh".

Elaborating on the characteristics of the local people, Shri Gavit said, "The local Bhils worship the five elements as well as Dungaldev (Dongardev), Waghdev, Nagdev, Khanderao. Hunting is their traditional occupation. Nowadays they have also taken to farming. These Konkana and Dangiya-speaking Bhils have the greatest reverence for Shabari Mata and Sri Rama. They take care to see that the names of their children contain the word 'Ram'. The Dangiya dialect is a mixture of Marathi, Gujarati and Sanskrit".

Speaking about the arrangements being made for the Shabarikumbh, Shri Gavit said," Around 50 local farmers have given a total of 250 hectare land for the Kumbh. There will be hospital facilities at three places including intensive care facility. There will be a VIP tent for 1000 people; a semi-VIP tent for 3000 people and general tents for 5000 workers. The 1.5 km long *Kumbhghat* will be divided into two parts for the saints and VIP's and the general public respectively. A huge tent with a capacity for one lakh people and a separate tent (*sant sabha*) for the saints will be erected. There will be more than 500 stalls selling various items. Watch towers will be erected at various places to oversee security and various arrangements. An estimated 1.5 lakh devotees will visit the Lkumbh daily A total of more than 5 lakh devotees and saints will visit the Kumbh over three days. Free lodging and meals will be provided to all. Holy water from rivers all over the country will be brought for the Kumbh. All arrangements are nearly over".

Shri Gavit related an interesting incident that happened 20 years ago. Around twenty years ago, Umakant Maharaj Shinde of the Anand sect, Panchavati, Nashik had visited this area which was extremely underdeveloped at that time. He had then prophesized that the area would become a pilgrim spot in years to come. Shri Gavit expressed happiness that Umakant Maharaj's prophecy was becoming a reality after twenty years.

The joy and enthusiasm on Shri Gavit's face was a testimony to the impending success of the Kumbh.

As told to Parth Rajput, courtsey *Vivek* weekly (Marathi), 01 Jan 2006