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TOP SECRET



Preparing for the harvest ...

A new mood of aggressive evangelism has been emanating from America. Well-funded, superbly networked, backed by the highest of the land, seized of its moral supremacy, it has India as one of its key targets, reveals

VK Shashikumar in a disturbing exposé

This could be the plot of a fevered thriller. A jingoistic president, multi-million dollar corporations, high technology, a grand if furtive mission, networks spanning the globe, and

biblical invocations.

Only it's real. And its got India in its crosshair.

Religious expansionism has not witnessed this scale, scope, and state resources in a long time. Detailed investigations by Tehelka reveal that American evangelical agencies have established in India an enormous, well-coordinated and strategised religious conversion plan. The operation was launched in the early 1990s but really came into its own after George W Bush Jr, an avowed born-again Christian, became president of the United States in 2001. Since then, aggressive evangelists have found pro-active support from the new administration in their efforts to convert some sections of Indian society to Christianity. At the heart of this complex and sophisticated operation is a simple strategy-convert locals and then give them the know-how and money to plant their own churches and multiply.

Around the time that Bush Jr moved into the Oval office, a worldwide conversion movement, funded and effected by American evangelical groups, was peaking in India. The movement, which began as AD2000 & Beyond and 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 "unreached people groups" in India in the 21st century. It was just as the operation was taking off that the script changed. Much to the delight of American evangelicals, one of their own, George

Bush Jr, became the occupant of the White House.

In a major policy decision taken very early into his presidency, Bush, on January 29, 2001, unveiled a "faith based" social service initiative that included a new White House office to promote government aid to churches and Christian faith-based organisations. This, in effect, threw the massive weight of the federal government behind religious groups and religious conversions. The Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was set up in the White House in the first week of February 2002 and a man called Jim Towey was appointed director. (A snap introduction to Towey: he was the legal counsel to Mother Teresa in the late 1980s.) 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.

White House-Christian Coalition nexus

The American press is replete with reports on Bush's largesse to faith-based organisations. They say it's his "return gift" to the Christian Right for having loyally supported his presidential campaign. The Christian Coalition, founded by American TV evangelist and head of the multi-billion Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), Pat Robertson, played a crucial role in the 2000 election. Recently, in his TV programme, Club 700, broadcast on 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.

Indeed, Bush is keen to retain what we call the votebank and Americans 'the base'. After all, the Far Right Christian evangelists have also been the most loyal backers of his hardline militarism in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

But there is another, perhaps more important, reason why Bush is keen on supporting his evangelist friends who run huge transnational missionary organisations (TMOs). In the decade 1990-2000 they ran a global intelligence operation so complex and sophisticated that its scale and implications are no less than staggering. This operation has put in place a system which enables the US government to access any ethnographic information on any location virtually at the click of the mouse. This network in India, established with funding and strategic assistance from US-based TMOs, gives US intelligence agencies virtually real time access to every nook and corner of the country. (See 'List of TMOs Active in India')

Since Bush's ascendancy to the presidency this network of networks has multiplied rapidly in India. Bush supports conversion in India because he supports those American TMOs who fund and strategise conversion activities in this country. Organisations 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 of 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. Graham's TMO, Billy Graham Evangelist Association, supports conversion activities in Gurgaon, Haryana, and Kolkata.

When AD2000 was conceived for India, the plan was based on a military model with the intent to invade, occupy, control, or subjugate its population. It was based on solid intelligence emanating from the ground and well-researched information on various facets of selected people groups. The idea was to send out spying missions to source micro details on religion and culture. The social and economic divisions in the various Indian communities were closely examined. Given the oppressive and institutionalised caste system in the Hindu society, American evangelical strategists chalked out plans for reaching these various "unmixable" caste groups. The many faultlines running through the country-divisions in terms of ethnicity, caste, creed, language and

class-were all factored in during the generation of ethnographic data.

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. This movement that took shape over the 1990s, has now taken off because of a unique collaboration between the American government and US-based evangelical mission agencies. In the 1990s this movement was shaped by the World Evangelical Fellowship (an international alliance of national evangelical alliances), working with the AD2000 movement. It brought together a wide variety of individuals and organisations, under the single goal of achieving "a church for every people and the gospel for every person by the year 2000." Its focus was missionary mobilisation and church planting in India and other regions of the world where the Christian population was negligible. This movement was also a massive intelligence gathering exercise funded and supported by American missionary organisations that were responsible for the election of George W Bush.

Global evangelism plans

AD2000 first attracted attention at a convention of international evangelical missions called Lausanne II in Manila in 1989. The movement then spread rapidly around the globe to help catalyse evangelism. The strategy behind the movement was to establish pioneering global partnerships to eventually provide a church within every "unreached people group". Ralph Winter, founder of the US Center for World Mission, characterised the movement as "the largest, most pervasive global evangelical network ever to exist."

This movement, spearheaded by Luis Bush from the movement's headquarters in Colorado Springs, US, was planned for large conversion of people living within the "10/40 Window". Incidentally, Billy Graham, a Christian fundamentalist and rabid evangelist, who was responsible for George W's "born again" Christian status and whom the president considers as his godfather was the honorary co-chairman of the AD 2000 movement.

The 10/40 window is the rectangular area comprising parts of North Africa and large parts of Asia between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north latitude where 95 percent of the world's "least evangelised poor are found." AD 2000 movement mobilised and funded evangelical operations in India. Further, they sponsored the May 17-25, 1995, Global Consultation on World Evangelization (GCOWE) in Seoul, South Korea, where nearly 4,000 Christian leaders from 186 countries, including India, gathered to draw up secret and covert evangelical plans. Many American evangelists now describe GCOWE, Seoul, as "the most strategic Christian gathering in history." That year also saw the transformation of the movement to a higher plane in the name of Joshua Project.

The first GCOWE consultation was held in Singapore in 1989. The first five years of the decade (1990-2000) were the years of seeding the clouds with the vision of a church for every people and the gospel for every person by the year 2000. This involved the building of a new kind of partnering relationships, a grassroots networking structure...a "network of networks."

While AD2000 spied out the land and its inhabitants to get an accurate picture of opportunities and challenges for conversion activities in India, they also framed subversive strategies to implement their plans. Concepts like PLUG, PREM and NICE were conceived. PLUG refers to the target group-people in every language, urban centre and geographic division. PREM refers to the techniques to use-prayer, research, evangelisation and mobilisation. NICE refers to how the work is to be done-networking, taking initiative, and using an evangelist to spur existing groups and cohorts in their efforts to convert people to Christianity.

Local networks

For Indian evangelical groups, access to American technology meant faster and more secure communication with their patrons. And, of course, the availability of the Bible in local languages. In fact, in today's India, the Bible is available in almost all languages and dialects. If the translation of the Bible was a symbol of huge transnational exercise, the massive distribution of gospel literature was nothing less than a distribution marvel. In India, a coordinated gospel literature distribution exercise was staged to reach 600,000 villages by the end of 2000. Finally, American evangelical organisations that also run cash-rich television channels pumped in money to buy slots on Indian television networks. In fact, Pat Robertson, who recently stepped down as the chairman of the Christian Coalition and the owner of the CBN set up a studio in Hyderabad to help Indian evangelicals minister through television programmes. These programmes are broadcast on various networks in India where CBN buys time.

The Joshua Project, started by a splinter group of CBN, was also a large-scale intelligence operation that brought together American strategists, theologians, 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 with the government of India. The logic behind this massive intelligence gathering operation was to "make a priority of establishing as a minimum, a pioneer church-planting movement within every ethno-linguistic people of over 10,000 individuals by December 31, 2000."

The launch of the Joshua Project in the mid-1990s resulted in scores of American research teams arriving in India to lay preliminary roadmaps for the church-planting mission. Everyone came on tourist visas and, on their arrival in India, their respective mission partners took them in. This partnership with Indian researchers 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.

Joshua Project II is a continuation and expansion of the original plan. Its professed aim is to "highlight all the least-reached peoples (non-Christian) of the world and to help build ministry networks and partnerships focusing on these people." The constant research and updating of ethnographic data from India should ring alarm bells within the intelligence agencies in India. In fact, the project maintains its "peoples lists" in cooperation with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Southern Baptists, as will be seen later, have traditionally worked hand-in-glove with the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). India's ethno-cultural data collected by the project is categorised by them as 'Security Level 2' because there is a danger to Indian and foreign missionaries if data relating to their conversion activities is made public.

The main target: India

As part of AD2000, Christian organisations in most countries, including India, had embarked on an ambitious National AD2000 Initiative. In India the Evangelical Fellowship of India was central to the fulfillment of the goals set by this initiative. According to the founders of AD2000 (and that includes Bush's pal Billy Graham) north India is the 'kairos', the key. India is where the era of modern missionary effort began nearly 200 years ago with the arrival of William Carey, the father of modern evangelical missions. However, the nine north and central Indian states of Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana were considered areas of immense strategic importance for the following reasons:

The Gangetic belt is one of the most heavily populated regions of the world. Forty percent of the Indian population lives here;
New Delhi is the capital and centre of political power in India;
It is the most socially deprived area of India (the Hindi belt has a literacy rate of 30 percent, infant

mortality is double the national average and the government of India officially designates four of these states as BIMARU (sick));

This area of India is known as the heartland of Hinduism, a religion that boasts of some 33 million gods; and It has the smallest Christian presence in all of India. According to the 1991 census, the Christian population of North India is 0.5 percent of the total population.

Clearly, north India was strategically important for the missionaries. What made things easier for them was the new buoyancy in India-US relations. Therefore, it was open to researchers and their research plans. Billy Graham and his ilk openly admit that they dispatched spying missions to India. "Just as Joshua sent out the spies to survey the land and report on its condition before the children of Israel moved out in obedience to God's command, many more missionaries and Christian workers are finding research information invaluable in laying their plans," say the AD2000 and Beyond Movement documents. Over the past eight years, tremendous energies and resources have been spent on spying out the land and its inhabitants.

The India Missions Association (IMA) in partnership with Gospel for Asia, another big American missionary outfit, researched and published very informative and accurate books that unraveled the intricate mosaic that is India. Some of those books are in Tehelka's possession. One of the big achievements of the Chennai-based IMA was conducting a detailed India-wide PIN code survey. India's postal service is one of the world's largest and it is important to understand why American mission agencies picked on India's postal system to devise their covert conversion strategy. The Indian postal system has a network of 1,52,786 post offices-89 percent of them in villages, which means one post office for 23.12 sq. km of rural land and one for every 3.16 sq. km of urban stretch, or one for a village with 4,612 people or one for 12,924 people in a town or city.

PIN-code theory

The 6-digit PIN code introduced in August 1972, identifies and locates every departmental delivery office. The first digit represents the zone, the second the sub-zone, the third digit shows the postal sorting district, the fourth digit indicates the mail route and the last two digits indicate the specific post office of destination in that zone. For this purpose the country has been divided into eight zones and each region in each zone has been assigned a particular postal circle in the first two digits of a PIN code. The Delhi circle, for instance, is 11. The digits 45 to 49 represent the Madhya Pradesh circle and 60 to 64 are for the Tamil Nadu circle.

This neat division of India through the postal codes is seen as a boon for strategising missionary work, coding the data emerging from the field and flowing it back to missionaries on the job. Given below are a few way in which pincodes have helped evangelical work:

There is no easier way of locating workers than attaching pincodes to them Media contacts can be linked easily with workers Sorting "harvest forces" and mailing lists is easyThe codes make distribution of gospel literature faster and easier Urban areas have more postal codes than rural areas. This helps in planning effectively to plant churches in each area.

To really come to grips with the implications of IMA's PIN-code theory one has to understand the 'Joshua Project II Data Background'. The report of the Joshua Project II is self-explanatory: "Joshua Project II provides a "blue-print" of the unfinished task of world evangelisation. It came out of the process of the AD2000 and Beyond Movement focusing on a list of approximately 2000 people groups that most need a church planting movement. The peoples listed here are over 10,000 in population and less than two percent Evangelical and less than five percent Christian adherent. Data has been compiled from many sources including: Southern Baptist Convention, Operation World, Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse, US Center for World Mission and the AD2000 movement.

"The mission of Joshua Project II is to highlight the peoples of the world who have the least exposure to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Joshua Project II seeks to accomplish this through information sharing and networking... the mission of the Joshua Project is threefold.

First, to gather, manage and distribute strategic population, progress indicator and ministry activity information to maximise the visibility of the least-reached peoples to the Church. The goal is a comprehensive, accurate, validated, public ally available list of all the ethno-cultural people groups of the world.

Second, to be a least-reached peoples networking resource to the Christian mission community.

Third, to enhance the flow of information between Great Commission organisations by using standardised data coding."

In India's case this "standardised data coding" has been married to IMA's survey. This has been used to such a degree that even the diverse language groups of India have been divided into PIN codes. The ability to send evangelists that are familiar to language and culture greatly facilitates the speed at which conversion can happen. It is also cost effective since tactics can be formed at home base. This also enables any Christian missionary organisation anywhere in the world to source any ethno-cultural or ethno-linguistic data on India at the click of the mouse. So let's say if one of Bush's Christian evangelical cronies wants to check out which missionary organisation is working with the Banjaras in Nalgonda, Khammam and Krishna districts in Andhra Pradesh, all he has to do is plug into this highly guarded database. It will tell him how many Banjaras were converted to Christianity over a specified period, the names of Indian Christian researchers working in community and which evangelical ministry coordinating the exercise of "saving souls". Just about any detail he wants is available on demand. Obviously, it flows the other way as well. So assuming that somebody at the CIA headquarters wants information on a particular district or region all that needs to be done is to call up Bush's mentor Rev Billy Graham. Graham will in turn log into databases maintained by a network of American Evangelical Missions. All this can happen in seconds and this is how technology has made evangelical activities so potentially dangerous.

Laptop evangelists

Latest cutting-edge web technologies are used to keep in touch with various "unreached people groups" through key local interlocutors. They also track on a regular basis status indicators like number of evangelists working within a people group, the number of Christian adherents, church growth and mission agency progress indicators. All this information is then used to "promote networking and partnerships focusing on least-reached peoples in order to promote the flow of strategic ministry activity information between individuals, churches, denominations and mission agencies.



Tehelka's undercover operation managed to set up networking contacts with the Joshua II project. Evidence of the meticulous nature of this data is available with Tehelka. The amazing network that has been established can be illustrated with the following anecdote. B Shreeprakash and B Jayaprakash from Kayamkulam, Kerala, came across the December 1998 issue of the National Missionary Intelligencer published by The National Missionary Society of India, Royappettah, Chennai, while waiting for an appointment with a doctor. That sparked off an amateur investigation exercise, the contents of which were put down in their report titled 'Conversions in India'. Here's an extract:

"As part of this work, an address namely, 'Workers Together' in US was contacted. To my surprise, a pastor of the Brethren Church, contacted me from my own town, his residence was only 1km away from that of mine. He called me over telephone and invited me for a personal meeting. On visiting his house, he handed over to me an Oxford Edition of the Bible, printed in New York, and a few booklets and pamphlets. What astonished me was, that the pastor had with him, a copy of letter which I had sent to US. On enquiring about how the nearness of my residence with that of the Pastor was understood by the party at Bangalore, he showed me an official directory of the list of the evangelicals working in India, with their family photographs and complete details arranged in order of PIN codes. Another directory of their worldwide network was also shown to me."

There cannot, perhaps, be a better example to understand the effects of marrying the IMA's survey with Joshua Project's database. The message is this—an American missionary agency will go to any length even if it means converting just one person. A letter written to an agency in the US is re-directed immediately to Bangalore and the agency in Bangalore in turn tracks down the nearest evangelist and directs him to take upon the task of ministering the gospel to the newest seeker. In fact, the mission goal of IMA, according to its general secretary, Ebenezer Sunder Raj, is: "We need a church within cycling distance, then within walking distance and finally within hearing distance." The Church growth figures that are with Tehelka clearly indicate that this mission mandate is on in full swing.

Data on India: the CIA connection

The "spying out" missions that generated the vast ethnographic data of the Indian people also involved detailed study of Dr KS Singh's 'People of India Project' that was launched in 1985 by the Anthropological Society of India (ASI). Under Singh's leadership, the ASI undertook an ambitious project to chart one of the most far-reaching ethnographic studies in the 20th century. Five hundred scholars spent over 26,000 field days to compile information for these volumes. This gigantic research work came handy for American and Indian strategists to draft their evangelical plans for India. According to Luis Bush, "Never before has this kind of information on India been so carefully surveyed, prepared, well published and distributed... We do not believe it is accidental. God is allowing us to "spy out the land" that we might go in and claim both it and its inhabitants for Him."

The data collected by experts from Wycliffe/Summer Institute of Linguistics, World Vision (WV) and the International Mission Board/Southern Baptists to compile the Joshua Project Peoples list included a detailed and comprehensive list of the people groups in India as well. Though this may appear normal international research activity - generating ethnographic profiles of non-Christian people groups in the 10/40 window - there are unseen dangers inherent in the compilation of such accurate people-group profiles.

The CIA has publicly admitted to having used Wycliffe/SIL and the Southern Baptists for covert intelligence operations in many parts of the world. The cosy relationship between the Wycliffe and CIA is documented exhaustively in a book *Thy Will Be Done* written in the 1990s by Gerald Colby and Charlotte Dennett. The book documents joint CIA-Wycliffe missions to source anthropological data from Latin America. Here's a quote from the book: "SIL had helped gather anthropological information on the Tarascan Indians that ended up in Nelson Rockefeller's intelligence files. The files contained cross-references to reveal behavioural patterns among Indian peoples in everything from socialisation (including aggressive tendencies) and personality traits, drives, emotions, and language structure, to political intrigue, kinship ties, traditional authority, mineral resources, exploitation, and labor relations. Rockefeller called these data the Strategic Index of Latin America." The question that will rattle not only the Indian government, but also outrage the Indian citizens is whether the American-funded "spying missions" carried out by Indian and

foreign missionary agencies through more than a decade has resulted in the preparation of a 'Strategic Index of India' at the CIA headquarters?

Wycliffe, the Southern Baptists and World Vision have all been active in India as well. Could it be mere coincidence that Southern Baptists who are amongst President Bush's most loyal supporters, played an active role in the "spying out" missions? In fact, Colby and Dennett's book features a missionary of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, William Carlsen, who admits that he gave an eight-hour briefing to the CIA on Thailand's tribal areas. In the mid-1970s when the CIA's penetration of American missionary agencies made international headlines, the agency passed a self-limiting executive order to refrain from using foreign missionaries for intelligence gathering operations. Incidentally, it was George Bush Sr who in his first action as the new CIA director declared on February 11, 1976, that he would ban the practice of enlisting "clergymen and newsmen as intelligence agents." But this was just public grandstanding, doublespeak to save the CIA not only from embarrassment, but protect its operations in Latin American countries such as Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. As soon as this announcement was made the CIA granted itself a private waiver. This was confirmed in April 1996 when the then CIA director, John Deutch, testifying before a Senate intelligence committee, said that the agency could waive the ban in cases "unique and special threats to national security."

Faith-based policies of White House

Surprisingly, Bush's supporters like the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), made laborious protests then to condemn the collaboration between missionaries and the intelligence agency. "Any foreigner living in a foreign culture already comes under a natural suspicion. If this policy is reversed, it would totally erode the ministry of missionaries," said Jerry Rankin, the then president of the Southern Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board. In effect, this amounted to a plea to the CIA to keep their most well publicized (and hardly noticed) secret guarded!! The very fact that CIA has been courting religious missionaries in India and elsewhere is testimony to the fact that US funded evangelical missions have an unparalleled reach to the remotest corners of the country. Christianity Today in its issue of April 29, 1996, carried the following comment by the NAE President Don Argue: "For intelligence agencies to seek any relationship whatsoever with our religious workers must be unequivocally prohibited."

Yet, as recently as January 15, on a visit to the Union Bethel AME Church in New Orleans (this is a predominantly African-American congregation) Bush touted his faith-based initiatives. These initiatives are designed to break the constitutional sanctity of the separation of the State and the Church. Bush is desperate to entangle and enmesh faith-based organization as providers of various services. The Americans United For Separation of Church and State and some other inter-faith organisations have challenged the Bush plan for religious conversions. Americans United, founded in 1947, is a religious liberty watchdog group based in Washington, DC. But, the Bush administration has relentlessly pushed its religious agenda. It has now become inextricably linked with not only its social services policies domestically, but also with US foreign policy and the disbursal of aid to US-based TMOs. "President Bush shows little appreciation or understanding of the separation of church and state. Bush is closely aligned with ultra-conservative Christian groups that have opposed church-state separation for years. It is obvious they have great influence over his domestic and foreign policy agendas," Rob Boston, assistant director of communications, Americans United, told Tehelka.

These TMOs, themselves have been instrumental in influencing the faith-based policies of the Bush administration in the first place. Therefore, they in turn, by virtue of being Bush loyalists have carried the 'Bush Religious Agenda' to other countries, including India. While within the US this agenda "strikes at the heart of the religious freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment" of the US constitution, in the rest of the world, specially, India, it has vitally subverted its security and integrity. "The Religious Right organisations and fundamentalist Protestants groups have way too much influence over the Bush administration. Sadly, many Americans do not follow

foreign policy decisions (with the exception of the war in Iraq) and are either not aware of what is happening or, more often, simply do not care. As a result, we are on the verge of dismantling the wall of separation of church and state in America—a policy that, if enacted, is bound to have negative repercussions around the world as fundamentalist interpretations of Christianity increasingly become the basis for foreign policy," said Boston.

Crusade in India

India is key to the Bush religious agenda. His government has given grants to Christian charities that are involved in conversion activities in India. On October 3, 2002, the US department of health and human services announced that television evangelist, Pat Robertson's charity, Operation Blessing, would be given demonstration grants through the so-called Compassion Capital Fund. Robertson's organisation and the other "intermediaries" were free to distribute this federal grant (essentially American tax payers' money) to religious groups and community groups of their choice to provide social services. In other words, there was no restriction on how the federal grants were to be used. In an interview to Newsweek three years ago Robertson said, "I've got 10 good years left," and "my heart is on missions, and on getting people into the kingdom of God. That's the main thrust of my life." In the same interview, Robertson recalled fondly a recent crusade in India: "I spoke to a crowd of 500,000 people!" he said. "Eighty-two acres of people! The response was overwhelming." Robertson's Operation Blessing is very active in India through CBN India headquartered at Jubilee Hills in Hyderabad.

Incidentally, Robertson deftly defrauded the Indian government because Indian laws do not permit issuance of visas to Christian missionaries. In response to an unstirred question (NO. 969) in the Lok Sabha on February 27, 2001 the minister of state for home, Vidyasagar Rao, responded that "no new missionaries are allowed after 1984. However, short term visas are being issued to the foreigners who are coming only in administrative capacity, to review working of their organisations etc." Certainly, Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition in the US and head of the multi-million Christian Broadcasting Network, might have had "administrative" reasons to travel to India. But he, surely, did not have either the permission or the right to evangelise.

The Indian government has been caught napping. Rev Bush, head of a decade-long global evangelisation programme, visited India in January 2003. He was a guest of the Evangelical Fellowship of India and presumably traveled to India on a tourist visa. In the early years of 2000, many evangelists entered India fraudulently. Amongst them were extremist Christians like Don Noble, president of Maranatha Volunteers International affiliated to a fundamentalist Christian group, the Seventh Day Adventists and Pastor Michael Ryan, director of Global Mission, the Seventh Day Adventist church's international outreach department which co-ordinates India evangelistic initiative. The US state department website makes no bones about the fact that American evangelists enter India by employing fraudulent means.

In the context of the fact that Robertson is one of America's most rabid Christian fundamentalists, Bush's largesse to him certainly has implications for India. In an interview broadcast on his own TV channel this is what Robertson had to say on one of the religions followed in India: "Hinduism and many of the occult activities that come out of the Orient are inspired by demons and demon worship...There's this concept that all religions are the same and all are good. That is not true. The worship of the Devil is not good." Robertson's friend and fellow evangelist, Jerry Falwell, also a TV preacher, ignited anti-American violence across many countries in November 2002 when he called the Prophet Mohammad a "terrorist" on American television. In Jammu and Kashmir, Falwell's remarks were published in local newspaper. As word spread protestors spilled out into the street pelting stones and shouting anti-American slogans.

The Oval Office centre

According to Americans United, "Robertson's Operation Blessing, a \$66 million-a-year agency, also has a controversial history...The controversy over Operation Blessing stretches back to 1994, when Robertson used his '700 Club' daily cable television programme to raise funds for the charity. Robertson told viewers Operation Blessing was using cargo planes to aid refugees from Rwanda who had fled into the neighbouring nation of Zaire (now known as Congo) to escape a violent civil war...In fact, Robertson was using his planes to haul mining equipment in and out of Zaire for African Development Corporation, his for-profit diamond mining company."

Incidentally, Robertson sought the Republican nomination for president in 1988 and later founded the Christian Coalition, a political group that has worked tirelessly to elect Republicans to public offices nationwide. Bush's presidential election victory has been, by far, the coalition's biggest success till date. After having installed a Christian fundamentalist as the President of America, Robertson stepped down as the president of the Christian Coalition in December 2001. The Washington Post, in a dispatch on December 24, 2001 noted that the religious right had found its "center in Oval office". The writer of this dispatch, Diana Milbank wrote, "A procession of religious leaders who have met with him testify to his faith, while Websites encourage people to fast and pray for the president."

For American evangelicals, Bush is "God's man at this hour". The Bush administration's faith based initiatives-'charitable choice' as it is often called-was one of his key campaign planks during the 2000 presidential campaign. In fact, as Texas governor, Bush had become a fervent advocate of this policy that enabled Christian religious organisations to evangelise while providing publicly financed service.

As president, Bush has expanded the 'charitable choice' approach to virtually all aspects of government aid-national and foreign. "In every instance when my administration sees a responsibility to help people, we will look first to faith-based institutions, to charities and to community groups that have shown their ability to save and change lives," Bush told a rally in Indianapolis on July 22, 1999. Evangelists all over the world were and still continue to be happy with the language used by Bush, full of Biblical references and metaphors, as it is. "Saving Souls" is a common and often-used expression by evangelists all over the world to refer to religious conversion.

Exploiting the AIDS victims

On September 21, 2000, Bush wrote in USA Today that he would allocate \$80 billion over 10 years in tax incentives to help churches (in America) provide social services. The US government has established an unparalleled partnership with Christian religious organisations. In the last week of September 2003, the US administration announced new rules enabling Christian religious institutions to access \$20 billion worth of federal grants. Faith-based organisations can access and use this fund to deliver services from drug/alcohol de-addiction to prison reform to HIV/AIDS related care and support activities. The idea, of course, is to give opportunities to those who suffer to be "reborn", just as Bush was after years of alcohol addiction.

Even though the Bush administration has denied that its initiatives support evangelical activities, the fact is that faith-based organisations use prayer and proselytising as an integral part of its provision of social services. After all, Bush has often cited his own "reborn" status to justify the interventions of faith based organisations in the social sector. In his autobiography, A Charge To Keep, itself a twist on a well-known hymn, Bush wrote that evangelist Billy Graham had "planted a mustard seed in my heart, and I started to change... It was the beginning of a new walk where I would recommit my heart to Jesus Christ."

Bush has repeatedly singled out and praised faith-based organisations whose core philosophy is conversion while dispensing social services. During last year's State of the Union speech his

invited guests were Tonja Myles of the 'Set Free Indeed Program' at Healing Place Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Henry Lozano of Teen Challenge, California. Both programmes use religious conversion as treatment. Within the US, Bush's praise for religious conversion programmes has raised concerns as well. Early into the Bush presidency, the United Methodist Church, the second-largest Protestant denomination in the US, made it plain that the president's faith-based initiatives were essentially about conversion. In a press release on June 14, 2001, a representative of the Methodist Church, Rev. Eliezer Valentin Castanon, said: "No one can honestly believe that a program funded with tax dollars, which requires as a major component of treatment the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, will not advance religion."

One faith-based programme that Bush goes gaga about is the prison-based InnerChange Freedom Initiative started by Charles Colson. Incidentally, Colson was one of the characters from the Watergate episode; he spent seven months in prison for obstructing justice in a one of the Watergate cases. "InnerChange is an intensive Bible-centered program, ostensibly open to inmates of all religious persuasions, but every month inmates are evaluated on whether they "demonstrate a belief in Jesus Christ," wrote Robyn E Blumner, perspective columnist of the St Petersburg Times, on September 28, 2003. "Those inmates who fail to show the proper level of piety are removed and lose the special freedoms and privileges dangled before inmates as incentives to participate," he added. Bush introduced InnerChange into the Texas prison system when he was governor. At present it operates in four states and the Bush government subsidises its conversion activities with the American tax-payers' money.

What underlies all this is that the Bush administration's conservative evangelical worldview has proliferated to countries like India. Here the Church and Christian NGOs have been involved for a long time in the provision of voluntary social service. But churches and Christian NGOs in India and the trans-national (read American) faith-based NGOs who have a large presence in India have gleefully responded to the message emanating from the White House. Bush's support for religious conversion has happened on the persuasive power of the dollar. It is safe to say that almost all evangelical organisations in India and non-Catholic churches and the Christian NGOs get their funding from their American patrons or from USAID. These groups, like CARE or World Vision tend to Christian social workers and consciously infuse Christian religiosity as part of the help they provide to socially and economically marginalised communities.

Holistic development tactics

World Vision, the world's largest Christian church mission agency, has traditionally been closely linked with successive American governments. The former US Ambassador for International Religious Freedoms, Dr Robert Seiple, was WV chief for 11 years till 1998 when he was picked by former president, Bill Clinton, to head the office of International Religious Freedoms. Around the period when Seiple was the president of WV, its vice-president from 1993 to 1998 was Andrew S. Natsios. He is now the administrator of the US Agency for International Development (USAID). For more than 40 years, USAID has been the leading government agency providing economic and humanitarian assistance to developing countries.

WV's focus is children and community development. It is involved in more than 162 projects in 25 states. It projects its community development programmes as "holistic development". This is implemented through Area Development Programmes (ADP). Each ADP works in an area that is contiguous geographically, economically or ethnically. These programmes provide access to clean drinking water, healthcare, education and setting up of income generating projects. But infused with such development works is the spiritual component-Bible classes.

In India, WV projects itself as a "Christian relief and development agency with more than 40 years experience in working with the poorest of the poor in India without respect to race, region, religion, gender or caste." However, Tehelka has in its possession US-based WV Inc.'s financial statement filed before the Internal Revenue Service, wherein, it 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."

Though, WV, has consultative status with UNESCO and partnerships with UN agencies like UNICEF, WHO, UNHCR and ILO, the fact is that its financial records reveal that it has funded evangelical activities all over the world, including India. WV uses its international clout and its close links with the US government through USAID to network with governments and corporate entities in the developing world.

WV has an ongoing channel of interaction with the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII); its 2003 financial report it states that "the Rural Development Department of the Government of Assam recognised 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 work in the state."

The income and expenditure account for the year ended September 30, 2002 shows that its total income was Rs 95.5 crores, which included foreign contribution of Rs 87.8 crores. For an organisation that claims to be only involved in development and relief work, it is quite stealthy about its positioning and exact nature of activities. When approached by Tehelka as part of its undercover operation for an interview, WV India's national director, Dr Jayakumar Christian, after having agreed to the interview backed out because he wanted copies of the fictitious Christian magazine that Tehelka claimed to be representing.

However, what goes unnoticed by the governments and the corporate world is WV India's evangelical missions as part of its development agenda. Proselytisation is an integral part of its provision of development services under its much-touted ADP programmes. Though none of the literature published by WV India even mentions its evangelisation missions, foreign publications of WV India proudly proclaim its "spiritual" component.

Take for instance, WV New Zealand's report (4 September 2002) on the funding of ADP in Dahod, Gujarat. Under the head, 'spiritual development' the report states: "Held a vacation Bible school for 150 children from different villages. The children participated in games, Bible quizzes, drama and other activities. Organised a one-day spiritual retreat for 40 young people and a children's Christmas party. Each of Dahod's 45 villages chose five needy children to attend the party." In Dumaria, Banka district, eastern Bihar, "the ADP supports local churches by running leadership-training courses for pastors and church leaders."

What has an ADP got to do with running leadership-training courses for pastors and church leaders? Incidentally, WV New Zealand funds ADP programmes in the tribal pockets of India. The New Zealand Government's Voluntary Agencies Support Scheme (VASS) jointly fund the two-year project, the NZ government matching WV contributions on a 2:1 basis. There are many other instances of evangelical programmes run by WV India.

In the Gajapati ADP, situated in Gumma Block of Orissa's Gajapati district, a WV report admits that "Canadian missionaries have worked in the area for just over 50 years and today 85-90 percent of the community is Christian. However, local church leaders had little understanding of the importance of their role in community development. ADP staff build relationships with these leaders to improve church co-operation and participation in development initiatives." Here WV organised two training camps for local church leaders in holistic development.

Targeting the tribals

In Mayurbhanj, again in Orissa, WV regularly organises spiritual development programmes as part of its ADP package. The WV report says: "Opposition to Christian workers and organisations flares up occasionally in this area, generally from those with vested interests in tribal people remaining illiterate and powerless. WV supports local churches by organising leadership courses for pastors and church leaders."

WV India is active in Bhil tribal areas and openly admits its evangelical intentions: "The Bhil people worship ancestral spirits but also celebrate all the Hindu festivals. Their superstitions about evil spirits make them suspicious of change, which hinders community development. ADP staff live among the Bhil people they work with, gaining the villagers' trust and showing their Christian love for the people by their actions and commitment."

This being the case it is not surprising that WV India was honoured with the 2003 Mahatma Gandhi Award for Social Justice. This award is hosted by the All India Christian Council. Incidentally, Joseph D'Souza who was AICC's President during that year also heads an evangelical network, Operation Mobilisation, in India. OM, again, is an American TMO. It was founded by Georg Verwer and today is a global ministry "committed to working in partnership with churches and other Christian organisations for the purpose of World mission."

Essentially, Bush has sparked off a theological fight between those Christian organisations who believe that their expression of faith is serving the marginalised, dispossessed and hungry in a non-sectarian way and the others who believe that the only way to bring change and reform is by Bible thumping. Unfortunately, the Bible thumpers are winning and they are being underwritten by the American tax payers.

What they are probably not aware is that missionaries in India's back of the beyond villages, like Karala, (see box) have been pulled into Bush's missionary zeal. Sadly, while Pastor Prabhat Nayak is deeply committed to bring the villagers of Karala to Christ, he is unaware that Christian evangelical theology and money doled out by the White House threatens to rip apart the social fabric of India.

The US administration headed by Bush is the most overtly religious in memory. Numerous press reports in America and Europe have highlighted instances where "cabinet meetings start with prayers and where no presidential speech is complete without some statement of Christian faith." His foreign policy often seems rooted in biblical theology. The world has already seen Christianity vs Islam being played out in the war debate over Iraq. The Christian Right is solidly behind Bush's Christianity First policy. Richard Land, a key leader of the Southern Baptist Convention, has strongly supported Bush's faith-based foreign policy. By the way, Land, is a key member of US government's Committee on International Religious Freedoms.

The Southern Baptists fiercely believe in conversion. Not many would know that people like Land oversee the US International Religious Freedoms report. The 2003 report is a no-nonsense document that conveys the official US policy supporting evangelisation. It openly admits that "US officials have continued to engage state officials on the implementation and reversal of anti-conversion laws." Here's an excerpt from the report:

"This act (Foreigners Act) strictly prohibits visitors who are in the country on tourist visas from engaging in religious preaching without first obtaining permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Given this context, the Government discourages foreign missionaries from entering the country and has a policy of expelling foreigners who perform missionary work without the correct visa...New missionaries currently enter as tourists on short-term visas. U.S. citizens accused of religious preaching while visiting India as tourists have faced difficulties obtaining permission to return to the country for up to a decade after the event."

Christian NGOs in India

The Bush administration's prescription of religiosity as social policy has gratified the religious Right in the US. The proponents of faith-based initiatives want US government funds to go to those churches and Christian NGOs that consider conversion as part of rehabilitation activities. Since the USAID funds Christian NGOs in India and also since US trans-national Christian NGOs like World Vision and CARE are heavily involved in development initiatives in India, their role in evangelical activities is not a matter of conjecture.

It is, of course, another matter that USAID plays a vital role in intelligence gathering operations for the CIA. President John F Kennedy had established USAID, along with the Peace Corps and the Alliance for Progress, "all three designed in part to stem the spread of communism." The link between the CIA and Christian missionary groups is USAID. This is written in great detail in *Thy Will Be Done*. Here's a quote again: "...That June, President Nixon's director of (US) AID, John Hannah, had admitted publicly that AID had funded CIA operations in Laos, and subsequent revelations pointed to CIA-AID collaboration in Ecuador, Uruguay, Thailand and the Philippines." In fact, CIA-supported missionaries were embroiled in counter-insurgency operations, civil wars and were more often than not conduits for arms and armaments for Christian insurgent groups all over the world.

Under President Bush's fundamentalist Christian government, the era of CIA-USAID-Evangelicals partnership has come back with a roar. And a world caught up in "War on Terror" and the search for elusive weapons of mass destruction, has had no time to notice.

In any case, aid dispensed by USAID was hardly meant to spur development. During the Cold War, it was meant to keep the former Soviet Union at bay and to keep afloat, bloated, venal and corrupt regimes all over the world. Including Saddam's.

In a research paper titled 'Bush and Foreign Aid', for the journal *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2003), Steven Radelet, who was Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Treasury from January 2000 to June 2002 and is now a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development, wrote: "One of the greatest surprises of George W Bush's presidency so far has been his call to dramatically increase U.S. foreign aid...(in September 2002) Bush released his National Security Strategy, which gave prominence to development and aid alongside defense and diplomacy. Then came his State of the Union address, in which he called for \$10 billion in new funding (\$ 15 billion total) over the next five years to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean."

Radelet went on to reveal that US foreign aid increase from \$11 billion in 2002 to \$18 billion in 2006 is the largest increase in decades. This from a Republican president whose party has traditionally demonstrated antagonism toward foreign aid. USAID's change of fortune is nothing short of miraculous. In the 1990s it almost disappeared into oblivion because US assistance to poor countries declined by 25 percent. September 11 brought the issue of foreign aid back into limelight.

Nothing can illustrate this better than the example of Sudan. This oil rich country has for years been caught in a debilitating and destructive civil war that has pitted a Muslim government centred in the north against the southern Christians. But the recent discovery of oil in Sudan has changed the dynamics of the conflict and, as luck would have it, the oil was struck in the Islamic, northern Sudan. So human rights groups and Christian missionary organisations have been crying themselves hoarse over the "brutal anti-Christian campaign of the Muslim government" and the "persecution of the non-Muslims." In the same breath Christian fundamentalists like Rev Franklin Graham and Senator Sam Brownback have pressured Bush to assist the rebels. Pressure is also suddenly being mounted internationally and within the US for "diplomatic intervention" to "end the conflict and prevent a disastrous famine" in the country.

And guess who is making the loudest noises about Sudan? Christian Solidarity International. It is working overtime to influence the US Congress and British parliament. Over the last decade, USAID has spent \$1.2 billion, most of it to support the SPLA, the Christian rebel group in Southern Sudan. The CIA-USAID-Missionary partnership story in Sudan is completed when the last block of the jigsaw puzzle is put in place-Andrew S Natsios.

Natsios was appointed administrator of USAID on May 1, 2001. But President Bush gave him two other hats to wear as well-special coordinator for international disaster assistance and special humanitarian coordinator for Sudan. Ostensibly, Bush wants to ensure that aid reaches the people of Sudan as opposed to being stolen and misappropriated by the Sudanese government.

The fact that aid deliveries have for so long been stolen by the Christian rebel groups, of course, did not even merit a mention.

Natsios has earlier served in USAID from 1989 to 1993 heading two of its vital departments. It's a strange co-incidence that during the time when CIA backed American missionary agencies were receiving ethnographic data from "spying missions" set up by American evangelical organisations in India, Natsios was associated with World Vision, which, in turn, was involved in analysing the ethnographic data along with Wycliffe and the Southern Baptists.

Post-9/11 strategy

Under the Bush Presidency, the post-9/11 period has been marked by two key initiatives: support to "frontline countries" that are helping US in its "war on terror" and appear committed to development and humanitarian issues like HIV/AIDS, poverty, and economic inequality. What is striking, however, is that the Bush administration, in its efforts to project US as a "soft power" as opposed to a marauding military superpower, has relied and been influenced disproportionately by faith-based groups and institutions.

And given the fact that Bush administration officials regularly hold consultations with Church groups and leaders, it is not surprising that American evangelical missions have found a deep reservoir of support with the US government for their activities in India and elsewhere.