

DANGI LANGUAGE GRAMMAR RELEASED WITH MUCH CELEBRATION

Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ

SHAMGAHAN (Dangs Dist) – (SAR News)

King Suryavanshi Dhanarajsinh Chandrasinh, one of the five kings of Dangs District released Dangi Bhashanu Vyakaran (Grammar of Dangi Language) in a special function held in the premises St. Xavier's School here at Shamgahan on June 26, 2011. More than 1000 people attended the function including 400 boys and girls of the school.

"It was not a mere book releasing function but a celebration of Dangi life and culture" said Fr. Shekhar Manickam, SJ who traveled from Ahmedabad to attend the function together with his Assistant and a veteran Missionary of 24 years in Dangs and in South Gujarat Fr. Ashok Macwan, SJ. With plenty of music and dances Fr. Macwan qualified the book releasing function as "Dangi cultural festival".

The book dedication function started with welcoming chief guests with Dangi dance and music and with the inauguration of an exhibition "Dangi cultural life" by King Suryavanshi Dhanarajsinh Chandrasinh of Vasurna. The King of Pimpri, Tirmakrao Sahebrav Pawar and the King of Gavdi, Suryavanshi Kiransinh also visited the exhibition and attended the function.

The Collector of Dangs District P. K. Solanki could not come to inaugurate the exhibition and attend the function due to ill-health.

A number of leaders from Dangs spoke on the occasion appreciating Fr. Raymund Chauhan's Herculean task of writing and publishing Dangi Language Grammar – a bulky volume of 560 pages plus 32 pages multi-colour photos.

"This book-releasing function is a historical event. We dedicate it not only to Dangi people but to the whole Gujarat," said Fr. Ishwan Gamit, the Superior and Manager of St. Xavier's School.

Fr. Gamit said that Fr. Chauhan's scholarly work of writing the Dangi Language Grammar is very much in the tradition of Jesuit missionaries who have pioneered in learning new local languages and producing scholarly works like the Belgian missionary Fr. Camil Bulke whose thesis on Ramayana has become text book in colleges and universities in North India and like the German missionary Fr. John-Baptist Hoffmann who wrote encyclopedia Mundarica (16 volumes) and Mundari Grammar.

Fr. Gamit said that Dangi is a rich spoken language but without much written literature. Writing in Dangi language started only 3 decades back with parts and then the whole New Testament published in Dangi. He appreciated Fr. Chauhan for working in South Gujarat for the last 25 years and writing 8 books in Gamit including Gamit Language Grammar before venturing into Dangi and producing Dangi Language Grammar.

Dahyabhai Vadu in his speech said that when a language is lost everything is lost. He thanked Fr. Raymund Chauhan, a non-Dangi for his meticulous work in writing Dangi Language Grammar. "It is a great achievement for Dangi language and culture", he said.

Girish Chaudhari in his speech appreciated Fr. Chauhan's Herculean task in writing the Dangi Language Grammar. "Through the book Fr. Chauhan has preserved our culture" he said. He ended his speech reciting a poem written by him on youth. Through the poem he said that God has blessed Dangi youth with everything and they should make the best of it with good education.

Speaking in the occasion a teacher and principal of a government primary school at Shamgahan Mr. Gulab Saheb said that through Dangi Language Grammar Fr. Chauhan has put Dangi at the level of world languages. He said that pioneer Jesuit missionary Fathers and Sisters like Fr Jose-Maria Navarro have brought revolutionary changes in Dangs district through their education and other services. "When missionaries go to a village people flock to them, while government officials visit, they have to gather the people with much effort and difficulty," Principal Gulab said.

Prof. Anand Vasava of Gujarat University and the Editor of "Adilok", a tribal magazine spoke about the tribal languages of South Gujarat in the context of Dangi Language Grammar. Quoting Fr. Carlos Valles he said, "If a language is lost then the whole culture is lost with it." He said that the tribal people who form 15% of Gujarat population should love their languages. "Some people may say that the effort of the missionaries to promote the language and culture of tribal people is another way of religious conversion. Culture is our mother and those who promote culture are welcome as they truly serve us", Vasava said. He said that he dreamed that Fr. Chauhan now would study Vasavi (another tribal language) and produce a Vasavi Language Grammar.

Speaking briefly the two veteran Jesuit missionaries in the Dangs Fr. Raphael Chakkumpidy and Fr. Anthony Mailadumparayil appreciated greatly the hard and dedicated works of Fr. Chauhan. Then, Fr. Anthony Mailadumparayil said a beautiful concluding prayer of blessing. The audience appreciated that both the missionaries spoke in good Dangi language.

Speaking at the end, the author of Dangi Language Grammar Fr. Raymund Chauhan, SJ thanked profusely the Dangi kings, invited guests, the organizers of the function, the artists and all the participants in the function.

Students of St. Xavier's School and Dangi artists made the whole programme a cultural festival with their dances and music in between the speeches. A special attraction was the musical story of Dangi Language Grammar and its author Fr. Raymund Chauhan by Bagubhai Gamit with a tribal musical instrument "Talisar".

Prof. Hemalata Jivanbhai Konkani compeered the whole programme with competence.