

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Please provide a brief overview of the theories underpinning Asa Ram Bapu.**
- 2. Please provide a brief overview of the ashrams.**
- 3. Please provide any detail related to the deaths of children in these ashrams with a special focus on the ashram in District Gandhi Nagar Gujarat.**
- 4. Is there any evidence of followers of this Guru who have left and have then been threatened or harmed?**
- 5. Is there any evidence that this Guru has links with the mafia, local gangsters and that he is politically connected?**

RESPONSE

Note: Asa Ram Bapu is also spelt Asaram Bapu; Sri Asaramji Bapu; Asharam Bapu; Asarambapu.

1. Please provide a brief overview of the theories underpinning Asa Ram Bapu.

According to his own website, Asaram Bapu is a “self-realized saint”. An August 2008 *Hard News* article states that for millions of his devotees “he is a living god”. A *Rationalist International* article states: “Asaram Bapu, 68, former cycle shop boy, is one of the richest and most powerful Indian godmen...he counts some 20 million followers and his empire is estimated to be worth half a billion Rupees (more than 180 million Dollar).” An *Indo-Asian News Service* article states that he “is reported to wield strong political clout and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) is one of his prime supporters” (‘Puja Bapuji’s Life Sketch’ (undated), Sant Shri Asaramji Ashram website <http://www.ashram.org/newweb/TheGuru/theGuru.html> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 1; ‘A prophecy for Asaram Bapu’ 2008, *Hard News*,

August <http://www.hardnewsmedia.com/2008/08/2302> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 2; ‘Indian Godmen Under the Scanner: Asaram Babu’ 2008, *Rationalist International Bulletin*, no. 178, 27 September http://www.rationalistinternational.net/archive/en/rationalist_2008/20080927.html#3 – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 3; ‘Violent protests in Ahmedabad over deaths in Asaram Babu school’ 2008, *Indo-Asian News Service*, 20 July – Attachment 4).

An *India Times* undated article on the guru has the following information:

Param Pujya Sant Shri Asaramji Maharaj (endearingly called ‘Babu’) is a Self-Realised Soul. Babuji was born in Sindh (now in Pakistan) in 1942. His father, Seth Thaumal, was a *Nagar Seth* (a wealthy and respected nobleman of the town) and his mother, Mehangi-ba, was a pious lady.

Young Asumal (name given to Babuji by his parents) was different from other children of his age. Even as a child he was driven by the desire to realise the ultimate truth. This zeal to attain self-realisation amplified with time and even his marriage to the noble and pious Laxmidevi, could not draw him towards a mundane existence.

He performed intense penance and thereby attained many yogic powers. However he soon embarked on a journey all over India in his quest of a *Sat Guru* who could show him the way of self-realisation. Finally, it was at Nainital, in the Himalayas, that Babuji met Swami Lilashahji Maharaj, by whose grace and guidance Babuji’s spiritual journey culminated in self-realisation, at the young age of twenty-three.

He remained in complete seclusion for seven years and was engaged in Yoga Sadhna even after achieving the ultimate goal. Later on Babuji took upon his shoulders Lilashahji Maharaj’s task of uplifting the society by spreading the message of *Vedanta*, divine love, patience, simplicity, compassion and humility. In 1993, at the Parliament of World Religions, Swamiji was elected as a committee member of the assembly of Global Religions.

Today he wishes to share his spiritual experiences with others so that they too may attain bliss within. The young and the old, the rich and the poor, the atheist and the ardent, all find Babuji approachable. He easily conquers the hearts of even the most cynical people with his simple, welcoming and unassuming nature (‘Sant Shri Asaramji Ashram’ (undated), *India Times* <http://spirituality.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1666784884.cms> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 5).

Asaram’s official website has a life sketch for the “self-realized saint”, detailing his birth, early childhood, spiritual quest, various miracles he performed (including the resurrection of a cow) and establishment of his ashrams (‘Pujya Babuji’s Life Sketch’ (undated), Sant Shri Asaramji Ashram website <http://www.ashram.org/newweb/TheGuru/theguru.html> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 1).

An August 2008 *Hard News* article provides information from a somewhat different angle:

SOMETIME IN 1971 Asaram Babu, then a 30-year-old ‘seeker’, came to Motera to stay with Sadhashiv in his ashram. Today, Sadhashiv’s Ashram shares its boundary wall with Asaram’s sprawling, flourishing and prosperous ashram on the banks of Sabarmati river in Motera village, near Ahmedabad in Gujarat.

Not much is known about his background and activities. It is like a ‘dark zone,’ say old-timers in Motera village. Former sarpanch Bhikabhai Thakore, 76, is skeptical about Asaram’s “questionable background”. Locals talk contemptuously about his previous avatar

when Asaram was Aasumal Sirumalani. Like LK Advani, he was born in Sindh before Partition. Predictably, both share a warm rapport. Asaram, though 13 years younger to Advani, happens to be his 'spiritual guru'. He also is a 'sympathiser' of the BJP. This explains the State patronage that Asaram enjoys in Gujarat.

This also explains why the Narendra Modi government took 17 days to order an inquiry into the mysterious death of two boys – Deepesh and Abhishek. Students of the ashram's gurukul, their bodies were found near the Sabarmati river bank. Shantilal and Praful Vaghela, the victims' fathers, believe their sons were sacrificed as a part of some tantrik rituals, though police investigations claim that the boys died due to drowning. But the missing organs of one of the boys have given the deaths a bizarre twist. Was it a sinister plot, a grotesquely executed 'spiritual murder'?

Locals refused to believe the police version and suspected foul play. Asaram is a hated figure in his own backyard. During Gurupurnima (July 18), lakhs of devotees congregated here for Asaram's discourse and 'darshan'. Ashram inmates clashed with the locals. Journalists were beaten up. This was an action-replay of similar violence unleashed by Asaram's followers in the past.

Asaram's ashrams in Surat, Godhra and Modasa are infamous for 'land grabbing' stories, confrontation with locals and legal disputes. In 1986, when Bhikabhai Thakore was the sarpanch of Motera village, Asaram's followers had attacked 'Sadashiv Ashram' to grab the land after the death of Sadashiv. It was this ashram which gave shelter and food to Asaram for two years before Sadashiv asked him to build a cottage nearby for 'meditation'. Thakore recalls that they resisted Asaram's followers who wanted to grab Sadashiv's ashram. They did not succeed, but Thakore and some villagers were framed in a false case – of assaulting a woman disciple. They were put behind bars. This further proves Asaram's clout and influence.

Asaram understands the importance of cultivating good relations with ministers and bureaucrats in the revenue and home department. Using the VHP, Asaram has always ensured that the home minister or the revenue minister pays obeisance to him in the presence of his devotees. Former home minister, the late Haren Pandya of BJP, dared to defy him, but Asaram, bragging about his popularity, publicly warned him not to underestimate his power.

In a similar incident in Surat, Asaram reportedly encroached upon farmers' land that the state government had acquired. Farmers who wanted their land back were thrashed by ashram inmates – even local reporters were beaten up as in Motera in July. The case is pending in the Gujarat High court since 1998.

DIG Vanzara, the suspended IPS officer accused of killing Sohrabuddin Shaikh in a fake encounter, now in jail, is among his high-profile disciples. Asaram, in his official website, claims to be a "self-realised saint", but for millions of his devotees, mostly from UP, Bihar and Orissa, he is a living god. In his ashrams, there is a concerted attempt to project him as a godman. His pictures adorn the walls everywhere along with that of Shiva and Vishnu. People talk about his therapeutic hypnotic powers, tantrik vidya, though ashram spokesman Uday Sangani strongly denies it. Asaram is a real spiritual master who has nothing to do with tantrik rituals, he says.

Asaram's 'holy and spiritual status' will always be debated; but what remains undisputed is the fact that his ashram is like a massive religious fortress cum business hub that can give many corporate houses a run for their money. Motera is reportedly one of the 225 existing ashrams of Asaram, including two in the US.

Asaram's political strength is transparent. Motera's ashram has over 800 registered voters. Three elected candidates from Ward No 6 of Motera Nagar Palika are ashram inmates. All three got elected on a BJP ticket.

Asaram's official website claims that after he embarked on his spiritual journey, "he went from place to place and at nights slept on the grass, homeless and alone. He did spiritual practices in dense forests, hills, caves and in various great temples. At Kedarnath, the priest blessed Asaram to become a millionaire."

For all you know, the priest might have made a correct prophecy ('A prophecy for Asaram Bapu' 2008, *Hard News*, August <http://www.hardnewsmedia.com/2008/08/2302> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 2).

2. Please provide a brief overview of the ashrams.

The number of Asaram's ashrams varies in different reports, but it is usually reported in recent media that there are over 200 throughout India and around 1200 meditation/prayer centres worldwide. According to an *Indo-Asian News Service* article, Asaram's ashrams are "involved in many philanthropic activities all over the country as it provides financial aid to poor people including food, shelter, education. It therefore has a mass appeal". There are a number of reports of various ashrams involved in alleged "land-grabbing" scandals. A *Hard News* article states that "Asaram's ashrams in Surat, Godhra and Modassa are infamous for 'land grabbing' stories, confrontation with locals and legal disputes". The article further states that "Asaram's 'holy and spiritual status' will always be debated; but what remains undisputed is the fact that his ashram is like a massive religious fortress cum business hub that can give many corporate houses a run for their money. Motera is reportedly one of the 225 existing ashrams of Asaram, including two in the US" ('Violent protests in Ahmedabad over deaths in Asaram Bapu school' 2008, *Indo-Asian News Service*, 20 July – Attachment 4; 'A prophecy for Asaram Bapu' 2008, *Hard News*, August <http://www.hardnewsmedia.com/2008/08/2302> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 2).

An undated *India Times* article on the guru has the following information about the ashrams:

The first Ashram was established, with his Divine Blessings at Ahmedabad, in Gujarat, on the banks of the river Sabarmati, in 1971. As of today there are about 111 Ashrams all over India and 450 meditation centers operating throughout the world. The Yoga – *Vedanta* Ashram in Matawan, NJ, USA is expanding fast. The Ahmedabad ashram organizes 495 spiritual, educational and social programs from Feb 1996 to Feb 1999 that included bhandaras for the poor and needy, blood donation camps, et al.

Pujya Bapuji conducts special Youth Shibir for the young children and students to help them learn concentration, meditation and *Brahmacharya* so that they become better citizens for tomorrow. There is a special for women in Ahmedabad. The women residing in this 'Mahila Ashram' devote their time to *Sadhna* (performing spiritual practices) and 'Seva' (doing service to the Ashram) under the guidance of the honourable mother Laxmidevi.

The aim of all Ashrams and Yoga Vedanta Samitis is to show the path of real peace & happiness to common man.

Shaktipata Shibir are organised in different Ashrams throughout the year. Bapuji bestows divine love through the Shaktipata (Transferral of Divine Energy), enabling the aspirant to

enter the mysterious world of Kundalini Yoga through meditation. The aspirants are also taught how to deal with the obstacles that they may encounter on the path of Yogic Spiritual Journey. The Ashrams have Maun Mandirs (Temple for Spiritual Practises), which provide willing aspirants to stay in complete seclusion and peace for seven days.

Pyramid-shaped Maun Mandirs in Ahmedabad, Indore and Agra Ashrams have rendered fantastic results to the aspirants who have taken advantage of this facility. Millions of people have been blessed by either attending one of the live *satsang* s regularly held at numerous cities in India and abroad or by listening to Bapuji's recorded satsang or his easily comprehensible preaching of the *Vedanta* , *Yoga*, *Bhakti* (devotion) and *mukti* (salvation) on television ('Sant Shri Asaramji Ashram' (undated), *India Times* <http://spirituality.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1666784884.cms> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 5).

Asaram Bapu's own website has information on ashram activities, charitable and educational activities and other programs organised by the ashrams ('About Ashram' (undated), Sant Shri Asaramji Ashram website <http://www.ashram.org/newweb/aboutashram.html> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 6).

The website has contact details for prayer groups India-wide, in the US, Canada, the UK, the Middle East, Singapore and Hong Kong: <http://www.ashram.org/newweb/MainAshram.html>.

An *Indo-Asian News Service* article states:

The Asaram Bapu ashram located near the banks of river Sabarmati is visited by his devotees for prayers, yoga and meditation. The Bapu, fondly called by his devotees as Sant Sri Asaramji, had set up the first of his many ashrams, numbering more than 200 worldwide, here in 1971. There is a special centre for women too at the place.

He has set up many ashrams the world over and also over 1,500 meditation centres. He is reported to wield strong political clout and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) is one of his prime supporters.

The ashram also is involved in many philanthropic activities all over the country as it provides financial aid to poor people including food, shelter, education. It therefore has a mass appeal ('Violent protests in Ahmedabad over deaths in Asaram Bapu school' 2008, *Indo-Asian News Service*, 20 July – Attachment 4).

An article in *People's Democracy* (Communist Party of India-Marxist media) states:

He has himself become a corporate by establishing an extensive network of factories, schools etc. For setting up these, he successfully acquired thousands of acres of land which was made available by the BJP governments either free of cost or at nominal rates. There is hardly any town in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat where there is no ashram of Asaram Bapu. After getting the land, he used to occupy neighboring lands as well, at his own terms. This is the reason why almost all ashrams of Asaram are embroiled in land disputes. One who refuses to be a timid disciple is considered as a person of obstruction and is dealt with accordingly. The government machinery eagerly comes forward to teach such a person a good lesson ('Killings At Asaram Ashram Expose Corporate Baba Badal Saroj' 2008, *People's Democracy*, vol. 32, no. 33, 24 August http://pd.cpim.org/2008/0824_pd/08242008_13.htm – Accessed 3 April 2009 – Attachment 7).

3. Please provide any detail related to the deaths of children in these ashrams with a special focus on the ashram in District Gandhi Nagar Gujarat.

The deaths of two children at the Gujarat ashram in 2008 is quite well documented, although some of the facts differ in various media reports. Sources concur that the incident involved two cousins who attended the *gurukul* (residential religious school) at the ashram in Motera village, which borders Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad in Gujarat. The two boys, aged around 10, went missing and their bodies reportedly turned up some days later on the banks of the nearby river. One or both allegedly had some of their organs missing. A *Times of India* article written at the time states: “According to the post-mortem report, the cause of death was drowning. Police said one of the bodies was preyed on by some animals”. The man who found the bodies, Sunil Banerji, allegedly went missing for several days, but turned up in Ahmedabad almost 8 days after the children’s bodies were recovered (*It’s IndiaTime*, 17 July 2008). Media articles report subsequent violent clashes between members of the ashram and local residents who were unhappy with police handling of the case. According to a 10 August 2008 *Express India* article, following the widespread agitation, the case was handed over to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). The fathers of the boys continue to allege that “black magic” practices were involved (*United News of India*, 3 March 2009). Recent reports, such as a March 2009 *Times of India* article, indicate that there has still not been much progress in solving the case, although some ashram employees have been questioned (‘Missing boys found dead’ 2008, *Times of India*, 7 July http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Ahmedabad/Missing_boys_found_dead/articleshow/3204519.cms – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 8; ‘Murder mystery in the Asaram Bapu ashram’ 2008, *It’s IndiaTime*, 17 July <http://www.indiatime.com/2008/07/17/murder-mystery-in-the-asaram-bapu-ashram/> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 9; ‘Violence after Asaram “war” cry’ 2008, *The Telegraph*, 19 July http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080719/jsp/nation/story_9571183.jsp – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 10; ‘Boys’ deaths: Asaram’s son under CID scanner’ 2008, *Express India*, 10 August <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/boys-deaths-asarams-son-under-cid-scanner/347069/> – Accessed 3 April 2009 – Attachment 11; ‘Application moved to summon Asaram Bapu for examination’ 2009, *United News of India*, 3 March – Attachment 21; ‘CID seeks narco tests in Motera gurukul deaths case’ 2009, *Times of India*, 14 March <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Ahmedabad/CID-seeks-narco-tests-in-Motera-gurukul-deaths-case/articleshow/4262303.cms> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 12).

Two more boys (aged four and five) died not long after at the Chhindwara ashram in Madhya Pradesh. Ashram authorities originally contended that the boys slipped and drowned in a bucket of water in the bathroom. A 14 year old boy later confessed to murdering them. There were allegations this was a cover-up, as reported in the *People’s Democracy* article (‘Asaram Bapu ashram deaths – child sacrifices or an incredible coincidence?’ 2008, *It’s India Time*, 1 August <http://www.indiatime.com/2008/08/01/asaram-bapu-ashram-deaths-child-sacrifices-or-incredible-coincidence/> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 19; Khan, R. 2008, ‘Another mystery death in Asaram centre’ NDTV.com, 30 July <http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/story.aspx?id=NEWEN20080059422&ch=7/30/2008%2010:16:00%20PM> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 13; ‘Another boy found dead in Bapu Asaram’s Ashram’ 2008, *Punjab Newslines*, 31 July <http://www.punjabnewslines.com/content/view/11454/93/> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 14; ‘Class 9 student killed mates at Asaram school: Cops’ 2008, *Rediff*, 3 August <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/aug/03asa.htm> – Accessed 3 April 2009 – Attachment 15; ‘Killings At Asaram Ashram Expose Corporate Baba Badal Saroj’ 2008, *People’s*

Democracy, vol. 32, no. 33, 24 August http://pd.cpim.org/2008/0824_pd/08242008_13.htm – Accessed 3 April 2009 – Attachment 7).

Bapu alleges he is being framed ('A pre-planned conspiracy against the Hindu Society and Bapu's Ashram' 2008, Sant Shri Asaramji Ashram website, 29 July http://www.ashram.org/newweb/Home/facts_eng.jpg – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 16). He alleges it is part of a conspiracy to tarnish his image ('Gurukul boys were murdered' 2009, *DNA*, 23 January – Attachment 17). He took out full-page advertisements in local media maintaining that the boys died in an accident, and that the ashram school neither believes in nor practices black magic ('The two drowned to death, claims full page ad in local dailies' 2008, *Express India*, 21 July <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/The-two-drowned-to-death-claims-full-page-ad-in-local-dailies/338087/> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 18).

There were allegations that Asaram's son, Narayan Sai, was involved in the murders ('Boys' deaths: Asaram's son under CID scanner' 2008, *Express India*, 10 August <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/boys-deaths-asarams-son-under-cid-scanner/347069/> – Accessed 3 April 2009 – Attachment 11).

The following articles contain some details on the deaths and the aftermath.

The *Hard News* article states:

...the Narendra Modi government took 17 days to order an inquiry into the mysterious death of two boys – Deepesh and Abhishek. Students of the ashram's gurukul, their bodies were found near the Sabarmati river bank. Shantilal and Praful Vaghela, the victims' fathers, believe their sons were sacrificed as a part of some tantrik rituals, though police investigations claim that the boys died due to drowning. But the missing organs of one of the boys have given the deaths a bizarre twist. Was it a sinister plot, a grotesquely executed 'spiritual murder'?

Locals refused to believe the police version and suspected foul play. Asaram is a hated figure in his own backyard. During Gurupurnima (July 18), lakhs of devotees congregated here for Asaram's discourse and 'darshan'. Ashram inmates clashed with the locals. Journalists were beaten up. This was an action-replay of similar violence unleashed by Asaram's followers in the past ('A prophecy for Asaram Bapu' 2008, *Hard News*, August <http://www.hardnewsmedia.com/2008/08/2302> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 2).

An August 2008 article in *It's India Times* reports on the deaths of the four children:

Yet another child has now died at yet another Asaram Bapu ashram. This is the 4th such death at the Asaram Bapu Ashram in less than a month. Second such death in less than 2 days at the Chhindwara (Madhya Pradesh) ashram. Earlier this month, Dipesh and Abhishek Vaghela, two boys who studied at Asaram Bapu's *gurukul* in Gujarat, were found dead along the banks of the Sabarmati river. Day before, 4-year old Ram Krishna Yadav was found dead in a bathroom at the Chhindwara ashram. Yesterday, 5-year old Vedant was found dead in an adjoining bathroom, with his head in a bucketful of water.

Weeks ago, Asaram Bapu and his spokesmen tried to explain away the tragic deaths of the Vaghela brothers as accidents, washing their hands away of any responsibility or accountability. Day before, the Chhindwara ashram explained away Ram Krishna Yadav's death as an accident, contending that the 4-year old had slipped in the bathroom. Now,

Asaram Babu and his spokesmen are at it again, explaining away a 4th mysterious death in their ashram as an accident.

What is most astonishing is that the authorities seem to be giving Asaram Babu and his ashram an extraordinarily generous benefit of doubt. The ashram doctors seem to be bending backwards to explain how the deaths in all 4 cases, were mere accidents. In the meantime, Asaram Babu's website has completely ignored the tragedies, the deaths of their own 4 young innocent disciples. The latest news section of the ashram website shows six updates in the month of July, but not a single mention of any of the tragedies. So much for showing affection to you own dead disciples.

When 4 little children die mysteriously in a secretive religious outfit that has been going way overboard to protect its establishment than offer justice to 4 young victims, one can be sure that something fishy is going on here. Little kids don't slip as old people do. Little kids don't get heart attacks or cardiac arrests as old people do. Little kids don't venture alone in the middle of the night for a stroll along the banks of nearby rivers.

Something's going on in these ashrams and unless one of the residents soon comes forward and blows a whistle on the dark and abhorrent practices going on inside the closed doors, some more innocent kids may lose their lives in the next few days or weeks. For a man who calls himself a self-realized and god-realized saint, it is time to realize that little kids cannot continue to die under his roof. Only time will tell whether all these deaths were just incredibly coincidental or if they were part of a series of child sacrifices in the name of one of humanity's oldest religions. Until then, somebody needs to make sure that every child in the confines of these so-called ashrams is safe and out of harm's way ('Asaram Babu ashram deaths – child sacrifices or an incredible coincidence?' 2008, *It's India Time*, 1 August <http://www.indiatime.com/2008/08/01/asaram-bapu-ashram-deaths-child-sacrifices-or-incredible-coincidence/> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 19).

Rationalist International also reports on the deaths of the four children:

A five-year-old boy was found dead – his head in a bucket with water – in a toilet of an ashram school run by godman Asaram Babu in Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh. Just three days before, another boy had died under similar circumstances. And in early July, the bodies of two boys, 9 and 10, studying in the godman's ashram school in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, were found in a dried up river bed. From one, liver and sternum were missing; the other had no more ears – a fact that seemed to indicate that they had become victims of a human sacrifice. When the police tried to hush up the cases and supporters of the godman started violent agitation in his defense, attacking investigating journalists, infuriated people of the neighborhood went on a rampage.

...Meantime, the police claim the murderer in the Chhindwara ashram was a 14-year-old student, but skepticism remains. In Ahmedabad, Praful Varghese, father of one of the dead boys, went on a hunger strike to press for an independent investigation. The chief minister promised one – but so far there are no results ('Indian Godmen Under the Scanner: Asaram Babu' 2008, *Rationalist International Bulletin*, no. 178, 27 September http://www.rationalistinternational.net/archive/en/rationalist_2008/20080927.html#3 – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 3).

An article dated 18 July 2009 reports on the clashes between Asaram's followers and local residents:

Ahmedabad, July 18: The ashram of Asaram Babu, the spiritual guru of Narendra Modi and L.K. Advani, was the epicentre of violent clashes between his followers and the residents of

the neighbourhood who have been fuming over the deaths of two students of a campus gurukul.

Residents of Motera village, Chand Keda and nearby areas, who not long ago were diehard followers of Asaram, set ablaze ashram buses and trucks and attacked disciples who had gathered for Guru Purnima.

The residents' action followed a sudden burst of violence by supporters of the guru, who asked them to hit back at those who "malign you".

The flare-up followed days of tension after the bodies of two gurukul students, Dipesh Vaghela, 10, and his cousin, Abhishek Vaghela, 11, were found on July 6 on the riverbed near the ashram at Motera on the outskirts of the city. One of the bodies was mutilated with some organs missing and the heads were tonsured.

Unhappy with the way police handled the investigation and gave a clean chit to ashram authorities, local residents along with traders' organisations had called a bandh in the area today.

Trouble began around 6 in the morning, when Asaram visited the house of Praful Vaghela, the father of Dipesh, to console the grieving family. Vaghela has been on *maun vrat* (vow of silence) for the past few days to protest the death of his son and nephew for which he blames the ashram authorities. Vaghela believes the boys were murdered as part of some ritual carried out at the ashram.

Vaghela refused to speak to Asaram and just held his son's picture in his hand. Sensing the tension, Asaram left the house in just around three minutes but could not get to his car, which had been surrounded by angry residents. He and his aides had to trudge back to the ashram, around a kilometre away.

Once in the ashram, the television evangelist who has a huge audience sought to equate himself with the Prophet Mohammed, who had been wrongly maligned, and Rajesh Talwar, freed of the taint of murdering daughter Aarushi.

Addressing his devotees, Asaram said he had gone to console the parents of the boys but was attacked by "vested interests". He then told his followers to retaliate and fight if somebody "maligns and hits you".

"I have just come to know that some anti-social elements have entered the ashram premises where our women sadhaks reside," he said over the microphone.

His overzealous army of followers took it as a call for direct action. Grabbing whatever they could lay their hands on — iron rods, sticks — they came out, chased journalists and attacked them and their vehicles and hurled stones, prompting the police to use teargas. One reporter of a TV channel was admitted to hospital with serious injuries.

In retaliation, local residents torched ashram buses in Chandkeda and other areas. Ashram spokesman Uday Sanghani was unable to put a figure on the number of buses set ablaze. "They are torching our buses parked in different places," he said.

The police had to arrange special buses to evacuate those stranded at the ashram. The devotees had come from far-flung places and were scheduled to stay for another couple of days, but were asked to board the buses and ferried to the railway station.

Joint police commissioner Atul Karnwal said the situation was uncontrollable on Motera Road where the local people are dead against the ashram. "To avoid any untoward incident, we are asking Bapu's followers to leave," he said.

This is not the first time the controversial guru has been in the news. A number of court cases pertaining to land grabbing are pending against him in Surat, Godhra and Modasa ('Violence after Asaram "war" cry' 2008, *The Telegraph*, 19 July http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080719/jsp/nation/story_9571183.jsp – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 10).

More recent articles indicate that there is still no evidence in the case.

According to an *Express India* article, dated 25 March 2009, the Congress party are using the issue as part of their pre-election campaign in Gujarat, criticizing "the Modi government for not taking concrete step against Asaram Bapu following the mysterious deaths of two gurukul students" (Ahmed, S. 2009, 'It's time now to pack a punch', *Express India*, 25 March <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/its-time-now-to-pack-a-punch/438781/> – Accessed 3 April 2009 – Attachment 20).

A 14 March 2009 *Times of India* article states that: "Even after eight months of investigation, CID (crime) seems to have no evidence in the mysterious death of two kids Dipesh and Abhishek at Asaram Bapu's Gurukul in Motera". Further:

The investigating agency has sought the court's permission to perform narco analysis on three other ashram employees to probe the case. Chief metropolitan magistrate DM Patel, on Friday, issued notices to Vikas Khemka, Meen Patra and Uday Sanghani asking them to remain present in court on March 27, as investigating agency wanted to conduct truth serum test on them.

Meanwhile, the issue on whether narco test can be performed on an accused without his consent is pending in the apex court, and plea by two ashram officials objecting to lower court's decision allowing narco test on them are pending in Gujarat High Court.

HC doesn't seem to be in a hurry to decide before Supreme Court concludes on the issue. Therefore, the high court has stayed lower court's orders permitting truth serum test on Yogesh Bhati and Pankaj Saxena, the two other ashram office bearers whom CID (crime) wanted to put under truth serum.

In such circumstances, CID (crime) sleuths have come up with three other potential witnesses, and with almost similar arguments they had forwarded in Bhati's and Saxena's cases a few months ago. In its application, the IO contended that while recording their statements and conducting lie detection tests on them at Gandhinagar FSL, it was found out that they were trying to hide facts and were lying to the investigating agency with regards to the crime. Hence, to find out truth about the death of the kids and black magic being practised on the Ashram campus, narco test was required.

The kids' death led to widespread agitation in the city in July last year when people demanded thorough investigation in the case. The state government had handed over the probe to CID (crime) and had also appointed a commission for judicial inquiry ('CID seeks narco tests in Motera gurukul deaths case' 2009, *Times of India*, 14 March <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Ahmedabad/CID-seeks-narco-tests-in-Motera-gurukul-deaths-case/articleshow/4262303.cms> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 12).

A 3 March 2009 *United News of India* article reports demands by the boys' parents that Asaram Bapu be summoned for examination:

The parents of Dipesh Vaghela and Abhishek Vaghela, the two minor children who were found dead in mysterious circumstances in the ashram school run by **Asaram Bapu**, today demanded to summon the spiritual leader for examination. The boys were found dead in the Sabarmati river bed near ashram on July 5 last year after they went missing from the ashram on the night of July 3. The parents of the children have maintained that the two had fallen prey to sorcery practised by the ashram authorities. In a joint application filed before Justice D K Trivedi, who is leading a Commission of Enquiry into the mysterious deaths of the two children, Prafulbhai Vaghela and Shantilal Vaghela, through their advocate S H Iyer, have demanded to summon **Asaram Bapu** before the Commission in connection with their children's death. The Commission has reserved its decision for further hearing on the matter to March 9.

In their application, the fathers of the children have contended that their children had unfortunately died in mysterious circumstances and this Commission has been appointed by the Gujarat government to find out the truth leading to the tragic death of the children. The applicants have also made their affidavits to the Commission regarding the facts and events that took place from July 3, 2008 onwards. The applicants have stated in their affidavit that the officials of Gurukul -- Uday Sangani, Ketanbhai, Pankajbhai and Vikasbhai -- had told them that they had received telephonic instructions from **Asaram Bapu** to reverse the clothes of the children (Dipesh and Abhishek), pick up seven stones from the cross road and start boiling them in a hot water pan. The entire ritual was performed by one Sushilaben, an employee of Gurukul. It is submitted that it was only after performance of the aforesaid rituals and puja, the dead bodies of Dipesh and Abhishek were found from the river bed. They further submitted that **Asaram Bapu** is the highest authority of the Gurukul and he holds total command and control over the entire administration of the place, staff and disciples. All the activities of the Gurukul are performed under the instructions and orders of Bapu. Hence, it is necessary to ascertain true facts regarding the activities of the spiritual leader and Gurukul. It is, therefore, necessary in the interest of justice to summon **Asaram Bapu** to appear before this Commission, the applicants submitted ('Application moved to summon Asaram Bapu for examination' 2009, *United News of India*, 3 March – Attachment 21).

A January 2009 article states:

After recording the statement of **Asaram Bapu** in the case pertaining to the mysterious deaths of two boys at his ashram in Motera, the CID has recorded the statement of PH Parmar who has filed a public interest litigation (PIL) in the Gujarat high court claiming that two boys were murdered.

The CID recorded Parmar's statement on Wednesday. In his statement, Parmar, who is the managing trustee of Vishwakarma Vidyapeeth, has claimed that the deaths of the two boys were not accidental.

In his PIL in the high court, Parmar has claimed that Dipesh and Abhishek Vagehla were killed by Ashram sadhaks as part of tantrik rituals.

In a statement, Parmar also said that the saffron party may bring political pressure to save the Asaram Ashram sadhaks who may be involved in the killing. He also claimed that the inquiry committee set up to look into the matter was "a drama to hush up the matter."

The two boys who studied at the gurukul died in July last year.

Their bodies were found from the Sabarmati river bed near the ashram one day after they disappeared.

The deaths led to a public outcry and the parents had staged a dharna demanding that the state government must find the truth and punish the guilty.

Investigating officer H B Rajput said narco and lie detection tests of three sadhaks from the ashram – Ketan Patra, Uday Sanghani and Vikas Khambata – who were suspected to be involved in the case, had been conducted on Thursday.

“Once the test reports are received, we will be able to find the truth behind the whole episode,” said Rajput.

CID officials recorded the statement of **Asaram Bapu** in the case on January 16.

Asaram Bapu denied all allegations levelled against him and his ashram and said that this was part of a conspiracy to tarnish his image (‘Gurukul boys were murdered’ 2009, *DNA*, 23 January – Attachment 17).

4. Is there any evidence of followers of this Guru who have left and have then been threatened or harmed?

In mainstream media a few articles were found of allegations against Asaram by ex-members of his ashrams. One article was found alleging that he had organised to have a number of people killed (through black magic), including former ashram members. A number of “web-logs” were found detailing allegations against Asaram of violence against numerous people, including ex-followers. Some of the information on these web-logs is somewhat incoherent.

Mainstream media

A *Times of India* article reports allegations that Asaram contracted an “aghorī sadhu”¹ to have a number of people killed (through black magic), including former ashram members:

In a startling development , an aghorī sadhu from Madhya Pradesh, Oghad Sukharam, has alleged that Asaram had allegedly contracted him to kill at least six persons through black magic, including managing director of Sandesh group Parthiv Falgun Patel and managing editor of Gujarat Samachar, Shreyans Shah.

Oghad, who is from the Mahakali temple of Dewas near Indore, made the allegation in the Sandesh office on Monday before many witnesses. He also filed an affidavit before a notary, listing all his allegations. Among other names that Oghad claims on the hitlist, are ayurved practitioner from Vadodara Amrut Prajapati, who was once a member of Asaram’s ashram in Surat, former companion of Asaram from Delhi Chandrashekar, Asaram’s former secretary Kaushik Patel and Asaram’s former driver Dinesh.

Oghad alleged that Asaram asked him to kill these people in a telephone call made on his cell phone on August 10. He claimed to have recorded the conversation and was ready to provide all details to police or state government . He was also ready for a forensic test. Oghad claimed that Asaram asked him to forget the rest of the persons on his hitlist for the time being and concentrate on Parthiv.

¹ “sect of Hindu ascetics who eat corpses in the belief that ingesting dead flesh will make them ageless and give them supernatural powers” (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9842124/from/RL.4/>)

According to Oghad, he was offered Rs 1.5 lakh and the management of any one of 300 of Asaram's ashrams in the country if he completed the job. He claimed that the first call was made by a man named Mishra from Asaram's ashram in Delhi on August 7, followed by a number of calls on August 10. During one of these calls on August 10, Asaram spoke to him.

He also alleged that he was given Rs 5,000 by one of Asaram's sadhaks to buy the necessary material to perform the rites, which was apparently taped by a national TV channel.

The aghori sadhu said that he was impressed by Asaram's speeches and had come to know both him and his son Narayan Sai five months ago, while on the way to Kota from Madhya Pradesh. He claimed they talked to each other frequently ('Aghori sadhu alleges Asaram asked him to kill 6 persons' 2008, *Times of India*, 26 August <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/3405352.cms> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 22).

A *Times of India* article reports on allegations against Asaram's son, Narayan Sai, by ex-inmates of the ashram:

The Virar police have registered a case against Narayan Sai, the son of spiritual guru Asaram Babu, on Friday, for forgery and criminal intimidation.

At present, 35-year-old Narayan lives at Sabarmati in Gujarat. No arrests have been made so far.

The case is three years old. The complainant, Mahendra Chawla, is an insurance advisor. He used to live at Asaram Babu's ashram in Virar between May 1998 and August 2005.

Chawla told the police that in July 2005, he along with other inmates had objected to Narayan's activities at the ashram. Consequently, Narayan had allegedly forced him to sign on five blank documents.

"After receiving threats, I decided to leave the ashram," Chawla told TOI. But when asked why it took him three years to file an FIR, Chawla could not come up with an answer.

The FIR also includes the names of two other men Kaushalya Thakur and Rajendra Singh who work with Narayan. Sections 323, 465, 468, 504, 506, 507 and 34 of the Indian Penal Code have been applied to him for forgery and criminal intimidation ('Asaram Babu's son booked for forgery' 2008, *Times of India*, 20 August <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/3382495.cms> – Accessed 3 April 2009 – Attachment 23).

An *Express India* article reports that the "Asaram Ashram has strongly refuted charges levelled against Sant Asaram by former inmates and said that the accusations are fabricated and baseless and have been done with monetary motives".

Ashram authorities said it was really surprising that they had kept mum for all these years and had witnessed the alleged misdeeds and come out with the allegations only now. It was also difficult to fathom how persons making such allegations could live at the Ashram if they indeed had such a bad experience there, they said.

Ashram authorities said ex-inmate Mahendra Chawla was coercing and inciting inmates to supply the letterheads and speak against the Ashram. Once Chawla abused an Ashram inmate,

Hanuman, over the phone. “Only Hanuman was presented before the media,” the Ashram said in a release.

The Ashram authorities also refuted Chawla’s allegations that the Ashram people had forced him to sign on blank papers. “Did the papers ever exist at all and if they were kept for so long, why were they not misused till now?” the release said, adding that Chawla had also threatened a devotee Krishna, who had started an Ashram at Harda, in a similar manner for not being keen to rebel against the Ashram. The Ashram also attributed a shady past to Rajesh Solanki, another former inmate. The release said that Solanki had been convicted of impersonating as the collector of Godhra district and had tried to extort Rs 70,000 from residents of a nearby village.

The Ashram alleged that Solanki used to torture his wife Bakula. The statement by the Ashram also denied the charge that Asaram’s son Narayan Swami alias Narayan Sai had brainwashed Bakula to sacrifice Dipesh and Abhishek Vaghela, the two young devotees at the Ashram run gurukul in Ahmedabad the previous month.

The Ashram also produced an affidavit by one Vinod Jethanand Harpalani, purported to be the nephew of Asaram Babu, who claimed that the outburst against his uncle on TV channels were made under the influence of liquor that miscreants had forced him to consume. The Ashram also produced an affidavit by Vinod’s sister Nirmala alias Pooja Magnani, a resident of Godhra, refuting earlier charges that Narayan Sai had caused the death of her father Jethanand Harpalani by removing the oxygen mask when he was being taken to the Ashram to fulfil his wish to be with his brother.

On Avin Varma, who had lived in the Gambhoi Ashram, the statement said that she had left because the disciplined environment of the Ashram did not suit her independent and carefree attitude.

On Veena Chauhan, the statement said the ashram at Vasai near Mumbai was built on unauthorised land meant for pasture at Shirgao village on survey number 354. The Maharashtra government had ordered its demolition and the local residents were up in arms against the activities going on at the premises. As such, the “allegations by such persons cannot be accepted as trustworthy,” it said (‘Bugged by “ex” factor, Asaram Ashram goes on an offensive against former inmates’ 2008, *Express India*, 18 August <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/bugged-by-ex-factor-asaram-ashram-goes-on-an-offensive-against-former-inmates/350519/> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 24).

Other media

Rationalist International states that Asaram:

...reigns with terror and violence. Devotees are scared and beaten into absolute submission. Equalling himself with Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, he threatens to destroy anybody with his curse who would question and criticize him. In his book *Gurubhakti*, he orders his devotees to use violence against critics, even to cut out their tongues!” (‘Indian Godmen Under the Scanner: Asaram Babu’ 2008, *Rationalist International Bulletin*, no. 178, 27 September http://www.rationalistinternational.net/archive/en/rationalist_2008/20080927.html#3 – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 3).

An article in *People’s Democracy* states:

One who refuses to be a timid disciple is considered as a person of obstruction and is dealt with accordingly. The government machinery eagerly comes forward to teach such a person a good lesson (‘Killings At Asaram Ashram Expose Corporate Baba Badal Saroj’ 2008,

People's Democracy, vol. 32, no. 33, 24 August
http://pd.cpim.org/2008/0824_pd/08242008_13.htm – Accessed 3 April 2009 – Attachment 7).

Blogs

The following blogs contain various allegations against Asaram, including that followers who have left have been threatened and/or harmed. The blogs also detail various allegations regarding Asaram's criminal activities. As mentioned above, some of the information is quite incoherent.

- 'Asaram Babu lies exposed' 2008, Target web-log, 18 November <http://target8.blogspot.com/2008/11/asaram-babu-lies-exposed.html> – Accessed 3 April 2009 – Attachment 25;
- 'Asaram babu drinks blood after murdering and have sex with dead bodies too' 2009, indiarss.net, 8 January <http://indiarss.net/story.php?title=asaram-babu-drinks-blood-after-murdering-and-have-sex-with-dead-bodies-too> – Accessed 3 April 2009 – Attachment 26;
- 'Asaram Babu busted by court for land fraud' 2008, eCharcha.com, last updated 25 September <http://www.echarcha.com/forum/showthread.php?t=25370> – Accessed 3 April 2009 – Attachment 27;
- 'How Asaram babu exploits and cheats people in the name of religion' 2006, Rediff Blogs, 30 July <http://shaitanbanabhagwan.rediffblogs.com/> – Accessed 3 April 2009 – Attachment 28;
- The Slave Cult website has numerous (sometimes somewhat incoherent) entries detailing allegations against Asaram Babu. See: <http://asaram.wordpress.com/>.

5. Is there any evidence that this Guru has links with the mafia, local gangsters and that he is politically connected.

According to the sources found, Asaram is politically connected. A *Telegraph* article calls Asaram "the spiritual guru of Narendra Modi [Gujarat Chief Minister] and L.K. Advani [BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate]" ('Violence after Asaram "war" cry' 2008, *The Telegraph*, 19 July http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080719/jsp/nation/story_9571183.jsp – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 10).

A *Hard News* article also calls Asaram the "spiritual guru" of LK Advani. According to this article, Asaram enjoys state patronage in Gujarat and therefore the Modi government allegedly delayed the investigation into the boys deaths. The article further states that "[t]hree elected candidates from Ward No 6 of Motera Nagar Palika are ashram inmates. All three got elected on a BJP ticket":

Like LK Advani, he was born in Sindh before Partition. Predictably, both share a warm rapport. Asaram, though 13 years younger to Advani, happens to be his 'spiritual guru'. He also is a 'sympathiser' of the BJP. This explains the State patronage that Asaram enjoys in Gujarat.

This also explains why the Narendra Modi government took 17 days to order an inquiry into the mysterious death of two boys.

...Asaram understands the importance of cultivating good relations with ministers and bureaucrats in the revenue and home department. Using the VHP, Asaram has always ensured that the home minister or the revenue minister pays obeisance to him in the presence of his devotees. Former home minister, the late Haren Pandya of BJP, dared to defy him, but Asaram, bragging about his popularity, publicly warned him not to underestimate his power. In a similar incident in Surat, Asaram reportedly encroached upon farmers' land that the state government had acquired. Farmers who wanted their land back were thrashed by ashram inmates -- even local reporters were beaten up as in Motera in July. The case is pending in the Gujarat High court since 1998.

DIG Vanzara, the suspended IPS officer accused of killing Sohrabuddin Shaikh in a fake encounter, now in jail, is among his high-profile disciples.

... Asaram's political strength is transparent. Motera's ashram has over 800 registered voters. Three elected candidates from Ward No 6 of Motera Nagar Palika are ashram inmates. All three got elected on a BJP ticket ('A prophecy for Asaram Babu' 2008, *Hard News*, August <http://www.hardnewsmedia.com/2008/08/2302> – Accessed 2 April 2009 – Attachment 2).

An *Indo-Asian News Service* article states that Asaram "is reported to wield strong political clout and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) is one of his prime supporters" ('Violent protests in Ahmedabad over deaths in Asaram Babu school' 2008, *Indo-Asian News Service*, 20 July – Attachment 4).

There are devotees of Asaram from other parties as well. A March 2009 article reports that "Mumbai Regional Congress chief Kripa Shankar Singh is known to be a devotee of Asaram Babu" ('Of politicians, superstitions and elections' 2009, *Times of India*, 13 March <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Cities/Of-politicians-superstitions-and-elections/articleshow/4257700.cms> – Accessed 3 April 2009 – Attachment 29).

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