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India: 'Bharatiya Samskruthi Utsava': Activists Take On Mega Sangh Parivar Event in Karnataka

Monday 10 March 2025, by [ARUN M.A.](#) (Date first published: 14 January 2025).

To counter this event, a coalition of over 50 progressive organisations is organising a three-day event named the 'Bahutva Samskruthi Utsava'.

Bengaluru: The Kottala Basaveshwara Education Society runs a dozen schools and colleges, including a tailoring class and a gym, in Kalaburagi district in northern Karnataka. The Society, a minor presence in the educational map of the district, is preparing to celebrate its golden jubilee late this month at a scale that has no precedence in the state.

The nine-day 'Bharatiya Samskruthi Utsava', scheduled to kick off on January 29, will be held over an area of 240 acres in Sedam. Organisers expect 25 lakh people to attend the event, including Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Union ministers, state ministers including the chief minister, and the likes of Sachin Tendulkar and Baba Ramdev.

There will be multiple pavilions to host different events and the main venue alone is slated to have 70,000 seats spread over 24 acres. There will be discussions and demonstrations on topics ranging from agriculture, employment and education to culture and living in harmony with nature.

The highlight of the event will be two lakh young mothers, who will be brought to the venue to feed their babies 'by hand' and set a Guinness world record.

Prabhakar Joshi, a spokesman for the Utsava, says 10,000 *swayamsevaks* of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have been working round the clock to organise the event, which has a budget of Rs 25 crore. "Not one paisa has been taken from the government," he says.

The scale of the Utsava and the people behind it has prompted activists of several progressive organisations to come together and launch a campaign to counter it. They say the actual spend on the Utsava is way above the officially given number.

"How can the Kottala Basaveshwara Society, which runs mostly low-budget schools and colleges, organise an event that costs many times over its total net worth?" asks Prabhu Khanpura, an activist based in Kalaburagi.

"To answer the question, you need to look at the man who helms the Society and is also the main organiser of the event: Basavaraj Patil Sedam," he adds.

Basavaraj Patil Sedam, 80, a former Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MP who uses the name of his hometown as a surname, has been a lifelong RSS *pracharak*. A Lingayat in a region dominated by Lingayats, he has been particularly effective in developing various Sangh *parivar* organisations in

the region.

Professor R.K. Hudgi of Kalaburagi says, “The Utsava is a proxy RSS event. With this, the RSS is kicking off its centenary celebrations, showing off its money power. The idea is to bring in people to innocuous-sounding events and expose them to their propaganda. People come to see Tendulkar, but will be made to listen to Chakravarty Sulibele.”

Sulibele, a Sangh parivar activist, is well-known for allegedly spreading fake news in Karnataka. On social media, his critics call him by the moniker ‘Heng Pung Li’, which roughly translates into ‘How do I lie’ in Kannada.

Joshi says the Utsava is being held along with organisations such as the Bharat Vikas Sangam, a foundation established by K.N. Govindacharya, an RSS ideologue. This is the seventh edition of the event, and this is not the first time an event of this scale is being organised, he says.

A ‘*Sahasra chandra darshana*’ programme will be held before the formal inauguration of the Utsava to mark Govindacharya turning 80, says Joshi.

Scholar and activist Meenakshi Baali says the RSS may have made money but still lacks legitimacy. They are forced to use a proxy as many people will become wary and not go to the Utsava if they label it an RSS event, she says.

“This event is being held behind a screen of deliberate deception. They have put names on the invitation cards without taking prior permission from the concerned individuals to claim that they have wide-ranging support,” she alleges.

In December, chief minister [Siddaramaiah](#) and minister [Priyank Kharge](#) issued statements saying they were not attending the Utsava and that their names had been printed on the invitation card without their approval.

In his statement, Siddaramaiah said, “I have noticed that my name is printed on the inauguration invitation of the Bharatiya Sanskriti Utsava. I have not received any official invitation for this event. After reviewing the background details of the organisation, I have decided not to participate.”

But speaking to this reporter, Joshi claimed Siddaramaiah had issued the statement under pressure and would attend the event as planned earlier.

Baali says the BJP has lost ground in the recent parliament and assembly elections in the Kalyana Karnataka region, where Sedam is located. The party hopes that events like this will turn its fortunes around, she says.

The Kalyana Karnataka region has a deep-rooted Sufi-Sharana syncretic tradition. The RSS has been persistently trying to break up Sufis and Sharanas and woo Lingayats, she says.

Sharanas are Lingayat saints who came from different castes, and preach an inclusive philosophy urging their followers to accept everyone as their own.

Baali says the RSS has singled out Lingayats for its propaganda. Last year, the Sangh parivar wrote a book titled *Vachana Darshana* to reinterpret and undermine reformer Basavanna’s inclusive teachings, she adds. The RSS brought in leaders like Dattatreya Hosabale and B.L. Santosh to release the book in a dozen cities.

After the book, a movie titled *Sharanara Shakti* was made by people close to Sangh ideology to

distort the history of the Sharanas, Baali says, adding that both these attempts failed miserably. This event is the third attempt by the same team to win over Lingayats ideologically, she also says.

Baali and 50 others were detained by the police when they tried to storm a *Vachana Darshana* book release event at Kalaburagi last August. She is also the author of a book *Vachana Nija Darshana*, which provides a point-by-point rebuttal of the Sangh book.

To counter the Utsava, over 50 progressive organisations have come under the banner 'Souharda Karnataka' and are organising a three-day event named the 'Bahutva Samskruthi Utsava' that is scheduled for January 17, 18 and 19.

"About 60 of us are campaigning in Kalaburagi and nearby villages to mobilise people. Several organisations representing Dalits, women, farmers and workers have joined hands. Four powerful Lingayat *swamijis* have agreed to take part. Members of the Jagatika Lingayata Mahasabha, a prominent Lingayat organisation, are campaigning with us," says Hudgi.

Jayadevi Gaekwad, a writer, says she is going to the event with her friends. "I have been reaching out to my friends and asking them to join me. The state's pluralistic way of life is at stake," she says.

The Bahutva Samskruthi Utsava is to have a bike rally, inter-faith meetings and discussions by leading intellectuals of the state. The bike rally will flag off the event by visiting temples, churches, dargahs and a prominent Basavanna statue in Kalaburagi.

"We expect 5,000-10,000 people to attend our event. Compared to the Sedam show, our event will be much smaller. But our delegates are influencers and can reach people further. But unlike the *Vachana Darshana* book release in August, we are not planning to confront the Sangh parivar. We will use the opportunity to create awareness," says Baali.

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