

**POLITICS OF CONVERSION IN INDIA: RECENT DEBATE ON
CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**Politics of Conversion in India: Recent Debate on Conversion to Christianity**” submitted by me for the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** is a bonafide work of mine, that has not been submitted in parts or full for any other degree of this university, or any other University and my own work.

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We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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TO

ALL THOSE

WHOSE LIFE AND THE ESSENCE OF LIFE HAVE
BEEN SPLINTERED BY THE 'POLITICS OF
CONVERSION'

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of all great religions is the spiritual salvation of human beings. Each spiritual tradition has sustained the hearts and minds of millions of people down the ages. Each of them has an individuality, and a message. All of them have enlightened humanity on the path of right conduct and have given solace in the face of suffering and death. If any religion claims a monopoly of truth and salvation or elevates itself over all other traditions ignoring the spiritual values of other religion, then religious conflict, scepticism and materialism become inevitable. In its most transparent meaning as a change of religion, conversion is arguably one of the most unsettling political events in the life of a society. This is irrespective of whether conversion involves a single individual or an entire community, whether it is forced or voluntary, or whether it is the result of proselytization or inner spiritual illumination.

Since Ashoka's adoption of Buddhism, arrival of Islam in India, the establishment of Catholicism in Goa and Protestantism in Calcutta, the issue of Conversion has been frequently attracting attentions. Considering the size of the country's long history, the outbursts of violence upon religious minorities were of rare occurrences. However in recent days, the unseemly rash of attacks on Christian minority has once again brought to the centre-stage the entire issues of "conversion" and "re-conversion". Significantly, it is not the cathedrals and the diocesan establishments that have been subjected to arson and violence by the right-wing extremists. Rather the homes and makeshift places of worship around which the Dalits and the tribals convert to Christianity and built their life world, have been attacked. Again, significantly it isn't the Archbishops or the Bishops in the metropolitan centres who have been attacked but the missionaries like Graham Staines and Arul Doss who had made their home in the outlying marches of civilization-individuals whose missions it has been to minister to the spiritual and corporal needs of human beings who have been abandoned by an insensitive society and an indifferent state. The violence between the Hindus and Christians have not yet taken the shape of a riot rather it has been reduced to the routinized forms of everyday terrorization and humiliation through spitting, slapping, insults, threats and damages to church property.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In the light of the above mentioned course of events, the questions and the issues that need to be addressed are as follows: What is conversion? Is it a mighty work of God? Or is it a human choice? Is it a dramatic emotional event in a person's life that fades as suddenly as it occurs? Or is it a gradual and growing conviction in one's mind that life's meaning and purpose lie in a particular direction? Is conversion always a dramatic encounter with spiritual reality or can it be the pressure of a community to ensure conformity with the group? Is conversion simply another word for one's institutional religious affiliation? Is conversion a Christian phenomena or is it also found within other religious traditions? Can one distinguish an authentic conversion from an inauthentic one? Can one speak about personal transformation, whatever their context or content, as conversions? Why freedom of conscience of every individual in this country needs to be defended? What are the push and pull factors in the debate over conversion and re-conversion? Can anti-conversion laws act as deterrents against conversion brought about by force, allurements or by fraudulent means? Is the change of religious faith by a person, a logical and reasonable effect of propagation of religion by another? Why are there an organized hate campaign against the Christian community? Are they now a challenge to the multicultural fabric of India after sharing an amicable relationship with other communities for a long time?

ORGANISATION OF THE WORK

In the first chapter, an attempt has been made to deal with the theoretical understandings of the issues concerning religious conversion. The chapter begins with the assessment of this multi-dimensional concept from the psychological, sociological and theological standpoint. However to explore the core of this concept, emphasis is given on the models, typologies and stages of religious conversion by taking into considerations, the thought provoking and the theoretical analysis of the works of Lewis Rambo, William James, R.E. Frykenberg, Karl Morrison, Albert Gordon, A.D.Nock and Karl Rahner etc. Even though, in this entire research work, the primary focus is on Christian minorities,

however, a holistic approach necessitates a comparative study of conversion in some of the major religious traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism etc. Accordingly, this chapter ends with an interpretative theoretical understanding of conversion in different religious traditions.

The second chapter centres around legal and constitutional dimension of the issues involving religious conversion in India. This chapter begins with the analysis of Constituent Assembly debates on propagation of religion and conversion. The culmination of this debate leads to the incorporation of the right to propagate religion in the Fundamental Rights. This is Article 25(1) of the Constitution, which says 'subject to public order, morality and health and to other provision of this part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion'. Even though propagation was made a Fundamental Right, there was no corresponding Article to stop conversion brought about by undue influence because the Constituent Assembly felt that the state legislature or the Parliament or both could make detailed laws to meet the situation. So to give a logical shape to this chapter, after the Constituent Assembly debates in the subsequent pages, an attempt has been made to do a critical assessment of the necessities and relevance of anti-conversion laws in India. This analysis has also shed light on the role of judiciary in handling this complex issue.

The third chapter focuses primarily on the stand taken by those who are against conversion, especially the analysis of the Hindutva ideologues and their systematic and logical refutations by the believer of Christian faith. An attempt has been made to present the critical estimation of both the positions. This analysis will give insights into the Christian faith, the services of Christians towards strengthening the Indian nation-state, the systematic persecution of Christian minorities, and the Christian response to it. This chapter, to a significant extent, attempts to address some of the crucial issues that are emerging in the contemporary debate like, why freedom of conscience of every individual in this country needs to be upheld? What are the push and pull factors in the debate over conversion and re-conversion? Why there is a systematic hate campaign against the Christian community? Is the terror unleashed justified? Are they now

becoming a threat to the unity and integrity of India after living peacefully for a long time?

**Religious Conversion: A
Theoretical Perspective.**

INTRODUCTION

With the march of civilization the role of religion in society has been multi-dimensional. From playing the most cohesive and significant role in the primitive societies, it has also traversed through controversies and debates. Religion is not a phenomenon of recent provenance. Its beginning is unknown. It is said that man from the earliest time has been incurably religious. Religion as a conceptual paradigm connotes a set of beliefs and rituals that relate human being to the extra-mundane or supernatural, spiritual forces. Some people believe in several kinds of forces and accordingly worship all. They are called polytheists. Some others believe in only one force, or the God, or the almighty. They consider Him omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. They worship Him in different ways. They are called monotheists. There is inter-dependence between man and the extraneous, otherworldly power. The human beings propitiate the so-called extra-mundane in various ways. At the same time, these powerful entities are presumed to carry out the duties like providing human being with support, security and other benefits. The inter-dependence between the human being and the otherworldly powers is expressed through the medium of rituals and myths. Religion considers some acts as righteous and sacred and encourages such act. It regards some other acts as sinful and profane and denounces such acts. Behaving in accordance with the religious codes or standard is righteous; going against them is considered sinful. The good or the righteous acts are believed to bring man good results, while the sinful acts result in disaster.

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

S. Yenger suggested that religion addresses the need to answer three things in life: mysteries, tragedies and circumstances. This definition presumes that whenever religious behavior occurs, it can be assumed that the religion is attempting to deal with life's mysteries, the meaning of life, the meaning of death tragedies, the disruptions of and the circumstances, the situations in which people find themselves. Mysteries refer to the overarching meaning of life. Tragedies refer to the losses, the disappointments and disruptions of life. Circumstances refer to the limiting and confining situations in which people find themselves. Religion provides both constructive and compensatory energy for life in the face of these imponderables. In

other words, religion will help make sense of those situations; it will also give the energy to supersede them. The conversion process begins with two predispositions:

1. An inclination to seek answers to the mysteries, tragedies and the circumstances of life through religion and
2. A sense of an enduring frustration that has not been met through one's present faith.

These feelings prompt individuals to become religious seekers. They are oriented towards the kind of answers that might come from a trans-empirical source. It's this mood that sets the disposing events and leads to religious conversion. A social encounter occurs in which seeking persons meet and interact with members of religious group who have already found the answers to the questions being asked. Their inner predisposing makes them susceptible to the external situational contingencies in a way that wouldn't be true of those not asking those questions. With the progress of conversion process, seekers were encouraged to engage in further study of groups approach and to cut off their contacts with those outside the group who might deplete their newfound approach. These actions solidified the groups understanding within the sequence of the experience of the seeker. Now at what point one could say that conversion has occurred is an unsettled issue. The question remains, at what point in the process could a person finally be said to be converted.¹

W.H.Clark defines religious conversion as that type of spiritual growth or development, which involves an appreciable change of direction concerning religious ideas and behaviors. Most clearly and typically, it denotes an emotional episode of illuminating suddenness, which may be deep or superficial, though it may also come about by the more gradual process. Clark identifies three basic stages in this type of experience.²

¹Joseph Mathew, *Contemporary Religious Conversions*, (New Delhi: Authors Press,2001), pp.40-43.

² W. H. Clark . *The Psychology of Religion: An Introduction to Religious Experience and Behavior*. (New York :Mac Millan,1956), p.191.

1. A period of unrest, conflict and mental struggle, including a sense of unworthiness, and for some others a conviction of sin.
2. The climax, involving surrender and relaxation and
3. A sense of peace, release and inner harmony in which the convert feels at one with god, his sins forgiven his problems solved and his miseries fled away.

Hefner, argues that studies of conversion have traditionally privileged psychology. In this perspective conversion is looked at in terms of a change in the individual's psychological disposition. Analyzing the conversion process William James opines that 'to be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self, hitherto divided and consciously wrong, inferior or unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.'³ In the analogy of A.D.Nock, conversion is, 'the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right. It is seen at its fullest in the positive response of a man to the choice set before him by the prophetic religions.... Such conversion is in its essence a coming away from a sense of present wrongness at least as much as a turning towards a positive ideal.'⁴

MODELS OF CONVERSION

Infact the terms for conversion in the western tradition tell us that it is some kind of turning but don't tell us a lot about the character of the turning. There have been two models used to interpret conversion. Both have to do with arguments about the nature of the human soul.

The first model, is based on the ideas of Plato and the neo-Platonic Augustine that the soul is something like a spiritual eye which attains perfection by turning away

³ Andrew Wingante, *The Church and Conversion: A Study of Recent Conversions to and from Christianity in the Tamil Area of South India*. (Delhi: ISPCK Publications, 1997), p.236.

⁴ Ibid. p.246.

from the images and shadows of temporal life, toward the eternal and unchanging realities ('Ideas', 'God'). This understanding of the soul lends itself to an interpretation of conversion as a sudden event and an escape from time. This model lies behind many accounts of being suddenly 'born again' and many psychological models of conversion as a climatic event resulting from some sort of life crisis.

The second model, follows Aristotle's and Thomas Aquinas's understanding that the soul is the principle of growth in all living things by which they attain completion and fruition. In this view all living things have souls. The soul is the life fulfilling meaning of time itself. Conversion in this light is not a sudden event but a turn toward the next stage in the cycle of growth; it is a process of ordered stages.

Both these models of conversion contain a partial truth. On the one hand, in the heat of the experience conversion seems, to subject and observer alike, a sudden turning away from one's past life and behavior, a momentous event marked by emotional upheaval and radical crisis in thinking, values and norms. On the other hand, conversion in the long stretch of a full life cycle seems a stage of growth toward maturity, a transition from one status to another, a turning toward a fuller and more complete commitment to the wholeness of life and its ultimate meaning.⁵

In the existing western literature, conversion is generally defined as spiritual regeneration, as the reorientation of the soul, or psychic transformation. But in India much of the incidence of conversion is group based as well as motivated by socio-economic consideration. In the case of mass conversion, religion is used as a device, perhaps a force to counter other forces. There are some qualitative differences between individual's change of faith and mass conversion. The following chart shows the differences in an ideal-typical sense.⁶

⁵Frank K. Flinn. "Conversion: Up from Evangelicalism or the Pentecostal and Charismatic Experience". in Christopher Lamb and Darrol M. Bryant. (ed), *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*. (London and New York : Cassel, 1999), pp.54-55.

⁶Sante de Sanctis, *Religious Conversion: A Bio-psychological Study*, translated by Helen Augur, (London:Kegan Paul, 1927), p.25.

TABLE 1.1.

Individual conversion	Mass conversion
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conversion is personal action done with the power of god. 2. Arises out of religious conviction. 3. It is a gradual process. 4. Here converts attains some spiritual satisfaction 5. Re-conversion doesn't take place. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mass Conversion is a collective action induced by some outside force. 2. Arises out of non-religious motives. 3. Mass Conversion erupts all on a sudden. 4. Converts attain some social satisfaction. 5. Re-conversion of the converts is possible.

SOCIOLOGICAL PROCESS

The psychological explanation of conversion focuses on the individual psyche and does not come to terms with the social and political content which shapes the process of conversion. As Geoffrey A. Oddie, maintains about psychological explanation of conversion, it is difficult to peep in to the recesses of a person's mind, particularly when one is dealing with the people who lived far back in history. However, one can identify some of those external empirical factors, which have led to the changes in the life of individuals and groups and which help to explain why some people have opted out of one religious community and joined another. For Durkheim an explanation of a social fact must be sought among the social facts preceding it and not among the states of the individual consciousness. A more comprehensive and convincing analysis requires that it be placed within its social and historical contexts.⁷

Many social scientists are saying that, in many cases, it is belief that follows practice and not practice that follows belief. The belief system is often something that people acquire much later, at least in its more sophisticated terms. More and more people who are studying the actual religious movement in question are coming to the

⁷Rowena Robinson. *Conversion, Continuity and Change: Lived Christianity in Southern Goa.* (New Delhi Thousand Oakes/ London : Sage Publications ,1998) ,p.33.

realization that most people who have become involved are in fact active agents and not passive victims. One of the few things that sociologists and psychologists agree upon is that almost without exception, changing to a new religious orientation takes place through what the sociologists call kinship and friendship networks of one sort or another. Sometimes they are minimal. In any case, people who convert or change religions usually do so through personal contacts and not through impersonal methods of communications, although that happens sometimes.⁸ When people become a member of the new religious movement they have a new perception of themselves that often empowers them to do things, to believe things and to feel things that they have not been able prior to that time.

There are some conversions in which one could argue that the convert has psychologically regressed. Now in some cases, converts temporarily regress, psychologically speaking but as they are involved in a group over a longer period of time, through new behavior and so forth, they shape a new personhood.⁹ Reiterating this multi-causal approach, Hefner opines that: 'Our accounts of conversion must be multi-causal rather than mono-causal.' 'Politics and social ethics are intrinsic to the psycho-cultural reality of conversion, informing an agent's commitment to an identity and the moral authority that commitment implies. From this perspective, rather than oppose psychological models of conversion against socio-political one, we should insist on and exploring their interpenetration.'¹⁰

THEOLOGICAL EXPLANATION

Earlier intellectual or theological explanations of conversion saw it primarily as a transformation in the religious beliefs of individuals that came about as a result of social developments that led them to compare contending sets of belief and choose one on the grounds of its superior explanatory force. Conversion was thus a result of the reasonable adjustment made by the people on the basis of the evaluation of rival religious beliefs.¹¹

⁸ Op.cit. .no.1. p.46.

⁹ Ibid., p.47.

¹⁰ Op. cit. no.3. p.255.

¹¹ op. cit..no.5.

Krailshemer, by stressing this multi-dimensional interpretations of conversion process, sees it as: normally following a period of emotional confusion and disturbance, often, but not always, accompanied by intellectual doubts. Often there have been difficult family circumstances and a sense of loneliness and isolation, even amongst friends. The conversion experience is hard to describe or analyse, but what is normal is a sense that they are no longer what they were, a discontinuity, where the words release from sin, forgiveness, acceptance, turning from self-love to love of God are found. Others notice a charisma and new spiritual aura. All were converted by love to love, they did not choose but were chosen.¹²

A good theory of conversion requires a heuristic typology that takes into account the diversity and complexity of conversion. Talking about types of conversion Lewis Rambo refers to five ideal types based on the question how far a person has to go in order to be consider a convert. These are:¹³

TYOLOGY OF CONVERSION

Traditional Transition: This refers to the movement of an individual or a group from one major religious tradition to another. Moving from one worldview, ritual system, symbolic universe, and lifestyle to another is a complex process that often takes place in a context of cross-cultural contact and conflict. Christianity and Islam are religions that have initiated and benefited from massive tradition transition.

Institutional Transition: This involves the change of an individual or a group from one community to another within a major tradition. An example is conversion from the Baptist to the Presbyterian Church in American Protestantism.

Affiliation: This is the movement of an individual or a group from no commitment or minimal commitment to involvement with an institution or community of faith. Affiliation has recently been viewed as controversial because of the allegation of manipulative and coercive recruitment strategies used by some new

¹² Op. cit. .no.3. p.243.

¹³ *Encyclopaedia of Religion, Vol-4*, pp.74-75; explanation of this typology can also be found, in, Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*,(New Haven and London: Yale, 1993), p.13.

religious movements and some fundamentalist groups. Many converts to new religious movements have little or no religious background, so that few countervailing forces act against the desire to affiliate.

Intensification: This is the revitalized commitment to a faith with which converts have had a previous affiliation, formal or informal. It occurs when nominal members of a religious institution make their belief and commitment a central focus in their lives, or when people deepen intensify involvement through profound religious experience and/or explosive new insights.

Apostasy/Defection: This is the repudiation of a religious tradition or its beliefs by previous members. This change does not involve acceptance of a new religious perspective but often indicates adoption of a nonreligious system of values. Deprogramming, an intensive method sometimes used to get people out of cults, may be seen as a form of forced de-conversion or apostasy. Apostasy is included in this typology because the dynamics of leaving a group or of loss of faith constitute an important form of change, both individually and collectively, in the contemporary setting.

S.Lofland and K.Skonovd have also attempted to categorize varieties of conversion in terms of what they call “conversion motifs”. It is an attempt to define different experiences, which make each type of conversion distinctive. According to them, varied perceptions and descriptions of conversions do not simply result from different theoretical orientations, and thus should involve descriptions of qualities that would indicate the substantial differences in conversion experiences. Lofland and Skonovd identify six conversion motifs:¹⁴

DISTINCT CONVERSION EXPERIENCES

Intellectual Conversion: Here an individual seeks knowledge about religious or spiritual matters through books, media, and other such means, which do not involve

¹⁴ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, (New Haven and London: Yale, 1993), pp.14-16.

any significant process of social contact with persons who may have access to such knowledge.

Mystical Conversion: To many, this kind of conversion is the proto typical conversion, which involves a sudden and traumatic burst of insight consequent to experiencing “visions,” “voices,” and other such phenomena.

Experimental Conversion: Here an individual actively explores available religious options prior to actual conversion. As Rambo points out, many groups encourage this process by adopting a quasi-scientific stand, where potential converts are encouraged to take nothing on faith, but on conviction. What is important to remember is that within this kind of paradigm numerous support systems, inclusive of literature, ritual and institutional networks would be in place to “convince” the potential convert.

Affectional Conversion: In affectional conversions, interpersonal bonds play an important role in the process of conversion. In this conversion process, it is imperative that an individual directly experience being loved, nurtured and affirmed by a group and its leaders.

Revivalism: In this kind of conversion, crowd conformity is used to induce certain kind of behavior. In other words, individuals are emotion ally aroused and new beliefs and behaviors are promoted by pressures exerted.

Coercive Conversion: S.Lofland and K.Skonovd believe that coercive conversion is relatively rare in the contemporary world. In terms of this conversion process, coerciveness can be determined by the intensity of pressures exerted upon a person to conform, participate and confess.

To have a comprehensive picture, two or more conversion experiences can be added here:

Conversion by Assimilation: In conversion by assimilation, the minority group adapts to the prevailing traditions of the majority, eventually adopting the new

cultural system as its own. In some cases, the smaller group actively pursued the transition. At other times, the conversion occurred as a matter of convenience. When a population lost contact with its original cultural authorities, as in the case of a Diaspora or migrant group, the traditions of the surrounding population were accepted to fill the gaps.

Conversion by Voluntary Association: It results when political, social, or economic advantages were the initial incentive to association. The original motives open the way for acceptance of additional aspects of the foreign culture. In pre-modern times, commerce and trade provided the most significant introduction of foreign influences by voluntary association. Merchants often established Diaspora communities, bringing religious and cultural traditions and support from their homelands. The usefulness of commercial alliances and the opportunity to exploit the trade networks of the foreigners often led elite to engage in close association with the traders. This close contact led to tolerance and acceptance of the traditions of the foreign culture.

One thing is obvious from the above mentioned conversion typology that the definitions overlap somewhat and all religious conversion occurs through varying combination of above mentioned eight conversion motifs. As presented by Lewis Rambo earlier, in S.lofland's and K.skonojd's conversion motifs too, there are situations of overlap and contradictions despite their ability to identify different conversion experiences as distinct experiential categories. For instance, many individuals who may have converted to a specific religion through what Lofland and skonojd have identified as intellectual conversion, in their own narratives may stress mystical conversion -- in the form of voices, revelations, dreams and so on.¹⁵

THE PHASES OF CONVERSION

Drawing together the many strands sketched above, we can now see that conversion is an extremely complex phenomenon. It is both an event and process. It is a state and a dialectical movement. That dialectic can be broken down into three

¹⁵ Sasanka. Parera. *New Evangelical Movements and Conflict in South Asia*, (SriLanka :Regional Centre for Strategic Studies,1998), p.17.

moments: (1) a turning away or separation; (2) a state of suspension; and (3) a turning towards revitalization. William James described these three basic parts of the conversion and modern Research was not improved on him. However modern study let us fill in specifics.

Turning Away

Those who experience a conversion seem to undergo something akin to 'spiritual dissonance'. The horizon that the person is living within is now perceived, for one reason or another, as limited and unfulfilling. This perception of a limited and unsatisfactory horizon is experienced on several distinct planes, which are nonetheless inter-connected. Psychologically the convert may appear to suffer from 'mental disturbances'. Such phenomena did not upset William James in the slightest. To James such disturbances signaled a shift of peripheral ideas to the centre of consciousness: 'To say that a man is "converted" means, in these terms that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy', Emotionally the about face can be described as 'losing one's grip'. Intellectually, conversion is akin to a 'radical clarification' that induces a paradigm shift such as the celebrated 'Copernican revolution' noted by Immanuel Kant in the Critique of pure Reason. From the viewpoint of religious experience, the turning away can be described as 'finding oneself a sinner' (Christianity) or as being 'entangled in the threads of existence' (Buddhism). Theologically, conversion can be described as the workings of the Holy Spirit on the affections. Morally, there may be 'pangs of conscience' experienced in the conflict between self-satisfaction and universal norms. Sociologically, the phenomenon may be perceived as a discrepancy between stated public ideals and the real status quo, leading to disillusionment and the formation of new religious groups such as the Quakers or Mormons. Politically, a group turning away can form the nucleus of a revolution leading to the formation of new groups such as the founding of the people of Israel by Moses or the establishment of new political orders. Infact this turning away is an about –face resulting from fundamental conflicts which are overcome only by an intellectual , moral religious or social conversion to a new set of ideas and behavioral norms that will make sense of the whole.¹⁶

¹⁶ Op. cit. .no.5. pp.57-58.

Suspension

The middle part in the conversion process is very difficult to describe. It has suffered from considerable inattention; mostly stemming from the view that conversion is an instantaneous event. This gap is now being filled. Frank K. Flinn used the term 'suspension', though this may not be the best term. This phase also can be described as a state of indecision, of a divided mind or of dwelling in what Plato called the 'in-between' or of standing on the threshold where the convert is not all the way out of one room and not all the way into the next. In sum, the transitional state of suspension can be compared to what L. S. Vygotsky called the 'zone of proximal development' during which the developmental process lags behind the learning process.¹⁷

Turning Towards

Many theories of conversion stop with *terminus a quo* of the conversion experience. The experiences accompanying the 'turning away' phase are often colorful, dramatic and even traumatic. The modern temper is well suited to finding causes and origin and less suited to tracking down ends and purposes. That conversions have long-term effects is without question. Moses turned away from the luxury of the Egyptian court and founded a people of faith. Gautam Buddha's abnegation of royal life led to the foundation of a monkhood and eventually one of the greatest missionary religions of all time. Augustine's conversion led to a lifetime as leader of the Catholic Church in North Africa and pre-eminent theologian of Western Christianity.

William James characterized the third phase of the conversion experience with terms like commitment, revitalization, renewal, regeneration, a sense of sanctification, and holiness of blessedness. The first two phases of the process can be said to be inner-directed by himself or herself to new ideals, new codes of behaviour, new spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting and meditation, works of charity or evangelization. The social impact of conversion is felt through the public expression

¹⁷ Ibid., pp.58-60.

of new modes of life. That impact is publicly felt even when the stated aim of the conversion is to 'withdraw from the world'.¹⁸

A STAGE MODEL OF CONVERSION

A heuristic stage model that seeks to integrate and elucidate the complex processes involved in Conversion is presented by Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadin. Although the model has been developed through empirical research, one should see it not as universal and invariant but as one attempt to organize systematically and lucidly the vast literature on conversion.

STAGE-1 Context: Dynamic Force Fields

It is the overall environment in which change takes place contextual factors either facilitate or constrain change. The context consists of three interconnected spheres: macro context, micro context and meso context. The macro context includes such large-scale domains as political systems, religious organizations, multinational corporation, relevant ecological considerations and economic systems. The micro context focuses upon the more personal world of the individual, such as family and friends, vocation, and other aspects of a person's thoughts, feelings and actions. Finally, the meso context includes those aspects of the context which mediate between the macro context and micro context, such as local government, regional politics and economics, and local religious institutions.¹⁹

STAGE-2 Crisis: Catalyst for Change

Crises are disordering and disrupting experience that call into question a person's or group's taken for granted world. Crises are triggered by the interaction of external and internal force. External influences may include, for example, colonial contact for the sake of exploration and trade and/or the imposition of military force, which involves coercion, manipulation or threat. On a personal level a crisis may be triggered by people (an evangelist, family member) or events (an illness, mystical

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.60-61.

¹⁹ Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E Farhadin, ,Op. cit. ,no.5, pp.24-25.

experience). Much of the human science literature has emphasized social disintegration, political oppression, or something very dramatic as instigating crises. Also important to keep in mind is that some cultures, societies, persons and religions are able to withstand a severe crisis and adapt to it in a productive manner. Others are more fragile, and may be rendered vulnerable and malleable to outside influence. Crucial features of the crisis stage to be considered are the intensity (degree of severity), duration (length of time), scope (degree of pervasiveness), and source (internal/external) of the crisis.²⁰

STAGE 3 Quest: Searching for Salvation

The quest stage encompasses different ways in which people respond to crises and / or the way in which people orient themselves to life, especially the religious life, three important factors are involved in the quest stage: response style, structural availability, and motivational patterns. Response style describes whether a person responds actively or passively to Conversion.

A significant factor in understanding the quest stage is the assessment of motivational structures. What motivated the individual to convert? Typically, human motivations are complex, involving emotional, intellectual and religious features. On a larger scale, in many countries, because of the presence of a powerful religious majority, persons seeking public office or position of economic power may be prevented from doing so if they do not share the religion of the majority. This can serve as a strong impetus for conversion —to obtain social rank. Sharing the religion of the powers-that-may enhance political or personal aspirations. Likewise, having a different religious perspective may preclude one's political, educational or social opportunities.²¹

The notion of quest begins with the assumption that people seek to maximize meaning and purposes in life. Under abnormal or crisis situations this active searching becomes more compelling: people look for resources for growth and development in

²⁰ Ibid., pp.25-26.

²¹ Ibid., p.27.

order to “fill the void” and /or enrich life. Quest is an ongoing process, but one that may intensify during times of crisis.²²

STAGE 4 Encounter: Engaging New Options

The encounter stage describes the contact between the potential convert and the advocate / proselytizer. It should be noted that this initial contact could precipitate the converting process, triggering a crisis, and fostering a quest for new solutions. Three major components of the encounter are the advocates, the potential converts, and the setting of the encounter. First, concerning the religious advocate, one should ask what his or her theory of conversion is. Is conversion central to their mission? What do they understand conversion to be? What is their personal experience of conversion? Does the advocate’s strategy for conversion focus on particular individuals within a society, for instance people on the margins of society, or does the advocate circulate widely within a community and seek to persuade large numbers of people, especially community leaders, with the intention of converting the entire community? Religious advocacy may include particular strategies such as encountering the potential convert publicly or privately, personally or impersonally. The second feature to consider in order to understand the encounter stage is the potential convert and what he or she perceives as the benefits of conversion. The type and degree of benefits will vary according to individual need and are usually mixed. Finally, the setting of the encounter provides the background for conversion. Religious group members may seek private encounters in a public setting--The use of huge public gatherings, by charismatic persons has the potential to create a sense of transcendence; the individual feels part of something much greater than himself or herself. On the other hand, private one-on-one encounters, typified by Mormon or Jehovah Witness mission strategy (i.e. going door-to-door) may provide the personal intimacy that enables the conversion process.²³

²² Op. cit., no.13. p.76.

²³ Op. cit. no.19. pp.28-29.

STAGE 5 Interaction: Creating New Identities

If an individual continues with the encounter, the interaction intensifies. Here the converting person or the group learns more about the teaching, lifestyle and expectation of the group, and is required to begin making a decision for commitment. Four features of interacting immerse the converting person or group into the new religious option: ritual, relationships, rhetoric, and roles. First, the development of personal relationships serves as networks of transformation. Generally, the closer the relationship between the advocate and potential Convert, the greater likelihood for religious change. Second, deep-level learning of the religious tradition is facilitated by participation in ritual practices. Rituals enable converting persons experience religion beyond the merely intellectual level. Third, the converting person or group begins to employ the specific rhetoric of the religious group, thereby incorporating into their life ways, and the language of transformation inherent to the particular group. Finally, converting persons learn the expected roles and conduct required before the deity / God and others.²⁴

STAGE 6 Commitment, Consolidating New Spiritual Orientations

At this stage a decision is required and, in many cases, some sort of public demonstration of the status change is expected. The potential convert has been confronted with choice between the way of life and the way of death. Converts experience a sense of surrender, a 'giving in' to the religious option, that often gives rise to feelings of relief and liberation. A common method for publicly displaying commitment is the personal testimony, a narrative of the convert's life before and after conversion. The testimony serves to reconstruct biographical information, integrating the convert's and religious community's story. The individual's commitment will be more conspicuous when the group requires public testimony from the new convert.

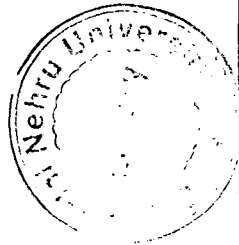
Another crucial set of expectations is the rituals in which the convert must participate. Rituals help consolidate a convert's beliefs and involvement in a group. In groups that demand total submission to the religious authority, converts may be

²⁴ Ibid., pp.30-31.

required to leave their residences in order to live communally with other group members in order to intensify commitment to the group and its ideal, and in some cases even giving up their lives in martyrdom.²⁵

STAGE 7 Consequences, Assessing The Effects Of Converting

The nature of the consequences is determined, in part, by intensity and duration of the conversion. How many aspects of life are affected by the conversion? How extensive are these changes? The effects of conversion can be described by comparing converts to what they were like prior to the conversion. Beyond such estimates, judgments about convert's progression or regression are fundamental value judgments; any evaluation of conversion derives from a particular viewpoint, never from pure scientific objectivity. Thus one's assumption about human nature and religion influence what one considers progressive and regressive. The consequences of conversion may be evaluated from many points of view. For example, does the religious tradition allow for growth and maturation after conversion, or does the group demand that converts remain fixed in some ideal state achieved by the conversion experience itself? To what extent are converts alienated from or reconciled to the wider world? No absolute standards can be used to judge conversion. The norms of the community to which people are converted may be made explicit and used as a standard.²⁶



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²⁵ Ibid., pp.31-32.

²⁶ Op. cit. .no.13, pp.77-78, for further explication of this stage-7 can be found in Christopher Lamb and Darrol M Bryant. (ed), *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, (London and New York : Cassel ,1999), pp.32-33.

TABLE 1.2. L. Rambo's Understanding Religious Conversion

Stage 1 Context	Stage 2 Crisis	Stage 3 Quest	Stage 4 Encounter	Stage 5 Interaction	Stage 6 Commitment	Stage 7 Consequences
<p>Macrocontext</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Systems of access and control <p>Microcontext</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Degree of integration and conflict Contours of context * Culture * Social * Personal * Religious Valence of dimension Contextual influences * Resistance and rejection * Enclaves * Paths of conversion * Congruence * Types of conversion Tradition transition Institutional transition Affiliation Intensification 11011 Apostasy * Motifs of conversion Intellectual Mystical Experimental Affectional Revivalism Coercive Normative: Proscriptions and Prescriptions 	<p>Nature of crisis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Intensity * Duration * Scope * Source: Internal/external Catalysts for Conversion * Mystical experiences * Near-death experience * Illness and healing * Is that all there is? * Desire for transcendence * Altered states of consciousness * Protean selfhood * Pathology * Apostasy * Externally stimulated crisis 	<p>Response style</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Active * Passive Structural availability * Emotional Intellectual * Religious Motivational structures * Experience pleasure and avoid pain Conceptual system * Enhance self-esteem * Establish and maintain relationships * Power * Transce 	<p>Advocate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Secular attributes ' Theory of convey sion * Inducements to conversion Advocate's strategy * Strategic style Diffuse Concentrated * Modes of contact Public/private Personal/impe rsonal Benefits of conversion * System of meaning * Emotional gratification * Techniques for living * Leadership * Power Advocate and Convert * Initial response * Resistance * Diffusion of innovation * Differential motivation and experiences Missionary adaptations Convert adaptations 	<p>Encapsulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sphere of Change \$ Physical * Socjal \$ Ideological Relationships * Kinship * Friendship * Leadership * Disciple/teacher Rituals-choreography of the soul * Deconstruction * Reconstruction Rhetoric-systems of interpretation * Attribution * Modes of understanding Roles-reciprocal expectations and conduct * Self and God * Self and others 	<p>Decision making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rituals * Separation * Transition * Incorporation Surrender \$ Desire * Conflict * "Giving in": relief and liberation * Sustaining surrender Testimony: biographical reconstruction integrating personal and community story Motivational reformulation * Multiple * Malleable * Interactive * Cumulative 	<p>Personal bias in assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature of consequences * Affective * Intellectual * Ethical * Religious * Social/political Socio-cultural and historical consequences of conversion Religious landscapes Unintended socio-cultural consequences Nationalism * Preservation of the vernacular * Secularization Psychological consequences * Progression * Regression * Stasis Stories of conversion Theological consequences

Sources: Lewis R. Rambo, 'Understanding Religious', New Haven and London, Yale (1993) P. 168, 169

A major theme of this stage model is that conversion is a process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic force field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations and experiences. It is assumed that conversion is always an ongoing process, rather than a single event. Conversion cannot be extricated from the fabric of relationships, processes and ideologies, which provide the matrix of religious change. Dimensions of the conversion process are multiple, interactive and cumulative.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CONVERSION IN MAJOR RELIGIOUS TRADITION

Proselytisation and conversion are two terms commonly used in India for the processes whereby people change their religious faith. Infact, there is a difference between these two terms. Proselytisation is generally understood as persuading the people of one religion to change their religious affiliation to another, by economic, social or political inducements and not because of the spiritual illumination. Proselytism is a change from one group to another without any necessary change in character and life. It is a change of label but not of life. Conversion on the other hand is a change in character in life followed by an outer change.²⁷

Religious change characterizes an enduring quality of the human predicament. Whether it entails converting from one religious tradition to another, changing from one group to another within a tradition, or the intensifying of religious beliefs and practices, instances of conversion can be found in many cultures, historical periods, economic conditions and social categories. Although 'conversion', as a theological word, is used most often within the Christian tradition, it has come to refer to the general notion of religious change. Because definitions of conversion abound, the phenomenon of conversion continues to be an elusive concept. Like the word 'religion' we think, we know what it means but when we come to define it we have

²⁷ E. Stanley Jones, *Conversion*, (Great Britain: Me Mlic, Hodden Se Stoughton Ltd., 1960), p.5.

difficulty. And the same applies to 'conversion'. It simply means so many things that we have difficulty in pinning it down.²⁸

The word conversion could mean a number of things in different situations. According to Lewis Rambo, the use of the word could mean 'simple change from the absence of a faith system to a faith commitment, from religious affiliation from one faith system to another, or from one orientation to another within a single faith system'.²⁹ In the analogy of Gandhiji, it is self-purification and self-realization. William James defines it as the 'The self, hitherto divided and consciously wrong, inferior or unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. Albert Gordon while analyzing ecclesiastical conversion depict it as a formal act of identifying oneself with a religious faith which has a set of values, attitudes, beliefs and practices other than those originally adhered to a complete shift of allegiance to another and different faith. Karl Rahner dubs it as a fundamental decision not wholly accessible to analytical reflection. Morrison suggests the word 'affiliation', for conversion which can have two meanings:

- a) 'A person embraced a creed, submitted to an institution that taught the creed, and passed through thick and thin, living out the consequences of his acceptance and submission.'
- b) 'A process of redemption, that was initiated, sustained and completed, if at all, by God's action. This involves empathy and identification with all fellow believers in Christ.' A. D Nock typifies this process as 'the reorientation of the soul of an individual- a turning away from a sense of present wrongness at least as much as turning towards a positive ideal. R. E. Frykenberg describes it as a change (either an event or a process) from one view of life to another; from one set of beliefs or opinions to another; from one party, religion or "spiritual" state to another.'³⁰

T.M.P. Mahadevan says that 'real conversion is vertical, i.e., from the lower to higher conception of God, and not horizontal, i.e, from one formal faith to another and

²⁸ Donald. Taylor, "Conversion: Inward, Outward and Awkward" in Christopher Lamb and Darrol M. Bryant (ed). *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, (London and New York : Cassel.1999), p.35.

²⁹ Op. cit. ,no.14, p.2.

³⁰ Op. cit. ,no.3, p.271.

he holds that the spiritual growth is from the crude forms of worship to the highest contemplation of God'.³¹ Andrew Wingate was of the opinion that conversion is a process, including a personal decision, taken alone or as part of a group to centre one's religious life on a new focus, which one believes is more liberating, in every aspect of that word, and closer to truth. This involves a change of identification within oneself and, normally, to a change of outward affiliation to a new community, which will affect one's life at various levels, "body, heart, mind and soul", and to tangible changes of behavior and religious practice.³²

All these definitions bear ample testimony to the fact that religious conversion is a much used hat whose original shape, no one can define, It was Wittgenstein who suggested that the meaning of a word was to be found in its use.³³ Thus it seems pertinent to make an incisive analysis of the use of the word conversion in different religious traditions.

Conversion in Judeo-Christian Tradition

The word 'conversion' is derived from the Latin word *convertere*, which means 'to revolve, turn around', or 'head in a different direction'. In the Old Testament, we are dealing with 'conversion' largely within the people of God. The Hebrew word is '*shub*', and it is usually used as a verb, 'to turn'. It is about turning to God or returning to God. The return involves both a spiritual renewal of relationship to God in covenant and a moral change toward upright living. It implies a restored life in community with the people of God. The New Testament takes up this viewpoint while expanding it. In the New Testament, the main words involved are '*metanoein*', '*metanoia*', and '*epistrophein*'. It involves an act of faith, trust and obedience, and of accompanying action.³⁴ Here Conversion is given a special meaning by its linkage to Jesus 'kingdom teaching. all are called to repent, to re-orient their outlook in the light of the arriving rule of God in Jesus and his work. Even the pious in Israel must convert to this new reality that Jesus brings. This is the ground for the universal call to

³¹ Quoted from Brojendra Nath Banerjee, *Religious Conversions in India*, (New Delhi: Harnam Publications, 1982), p.17.

³² Op. cit., no.3, p.272.

³³ Op. cit., no.28.

³⁴ Explication of this conceptualization can be found in, Op. cit., no.5, pp.51-52.

conversion that the church directs to people of every religious persuasion. Since the kingdom is identified with the person and work of Jesus the Christ, the call to convert (repent and believe) becomes a call to identify with Jesus Christ and to follow him. Repentance is the principal word in the New Testament to express the human decision to leave the old sinful life and to embrace the way of Jesus. Other concepts such as regeneration, new birth, new creation, justification, and sanctification speak of the divine work to effectuate and empower the new life in the believer. Conversion in the biblical sense is not just an inward, spiritual religious event; it is an event of exodus from an old life in a fallen social order into a new life in a renewed social order, which is the church. The entire person is involved in the change at the intellectual, volitional, affective, and behavioral levels.

Conversion in Islam

There is no word in Arabic for ‘conversion’ per se. Rather, there is the idea of ‘becoming a Muslim’, for which the verb *aslama* (literally, ‘to submit’) is used. It is from this verb that the word ‘Muslim’, which is, grammatically, the active participle and means ‘one who submits, a submitter’, and ‘Islam’, which is the verbal noun — equivalent to the gerund in English — and means ‘submitting, submission’, are derived. Thus it could be said that to understand conversion to Islam, one need go no further than understanding the name ‘Islam’ itself.³⁵ Since the word Islam is, grammatically speaking, a verbal noun, it has a distinct verbal force behind it. Thus ‘Islam’ is not simply the name of a religion in the way that, for example, ‘Christianity’, ‘Hinduism’ and ‘Buddhism’ are, but actually denotes an action — in this case predominantly of the heart, although also of the limbs — that should be the hallmark of this religion, namely, ‘submission’.

In historical terms, becoming a Muslim meant — and still means today — accepting God as Lord and accepting the Prophet Muhammad as the final prophet and messenger of this Lord. This two-fold acceptance is enshrined in the double declaration of faith, ‘I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness

³⁵ Yasin, Dutton, “Conversion to Islam: The Quranic Paradigm” in Christopher Lamb and Darrol M. Bryant (ed), *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, (London and New York : Cassel ,1999), p.151.

that Muhammad is the Messenger of God', which, when said in front of witnesses, marks the formal entry of someone into the community of Muslims. (A fuller definition of this acceptance would include the six elements of belief, namely, revealed books, the prophets, the Last Day, and the Decree, both the sweet of it and the bitter of it.) From the earliest period until now there has been discussion as to whether this declaration is enough as a sign of genuine belief or whether it should also be accompanied by the correct outward practices detailed by Islamic law that form part and parcel of the practice of Islam. Reports from the Prophet indicate that as long as one makes this declaration with sincerity, one is promised at least eventual entry into the Garden (the Muslim term for Paradise) regardless of one's wrong actions — for which one may or may not be punished — as long as one is not guilty of having associated anyone or anything else with God.³⁶ Islamic social science divides the world in two parts.

i) Darul Harb: The nation of infidels (kafirs), is that place where people have not yet accepted Islam.

ii) Darul Islam: Meaning that nation where people have adopted Islam. To convert the entire world into Darul Islam (area of peace) is the declared aim of Islam. Instructions have been issued for carrying out relentless struggle for achieving the establishment of the Islamic rule wherever it has not been set up yet. It means that Muslims living in non-Muslim countries will not settle in peace by cooperating with the local basic society, its culture and traditions. They will remain active in their search for establishing Darul Islam.³⁷

Conversion In Buddhism And Jainism

To become a Buddhist first one has to take refuge in the three treasures the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha*, both internally and externally which is also known as triple Gem. To take refuge in the Buddha means, not taking refuge in him as a person, but taking refuge in the fact of his Awakening. The Dhamma, in the external level, refers to the path of practice the Buddha taught to his followers.

³⁶ Ibid., pp.153-54.

³⁷ Op. cit., no.1. p.130.

The word Sangha, in its ideal sense, consists of all people, lay or ordained, who have practiced the Dhamma to the point of gaining at least a glimpse of the Deathless. In a conventional sense, Sangha denotes the communities of ordained monks and nuns. On the internal level the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are the skillful qualities that we develop in our own minds in imitation of our external models. After recitation of the refuge formula a person may seek to establish himself as an upasanka (male) or Upasika (female) by vowing to observe the five precepts³⁸ refrain from killing, refrain from stealing, refrain from lying, refrain from adultery, refrain from consumption of intoxicants.

It was Ashoka who internationalised Buddhism and Kaniska made it popular in central Asia. Kumar Jiva was the first to introduce Buddhism in China and Padma Sambhaba in Tibet. Mynander, the greatest of the Indo-Greek scholar was converted into Buddhism by Nagasena. Harshavardhana was converted to Buddhism by Huentsang. Buddhism disappeared from India, with the Turkish invasion, particularly under the Delhi Sultanat. Buddhism migrated to Nepal.

However, the Jaina ideas were already being circulated in the seventh century B.C by Parsava, to whom four fundamental principal of Jainism are ascribed. They are taking no life (ahimsa), taking no property from others, possessing no property of one's own and truthfulness. Mahavira added celibacy to this list.³⁹ To become a Jaina one has to follow these five vows in both letter and spirit. The theory of “Syadavada” is an essential ingredient of Jain philosophy. It states that no absolute and final affirmation or denial is possible, because knowledge is relative.⁴⁰

Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Maurya dynasty was converted to Jainism by Bhadrabahu and performed Sallekana Brata at Sravanabelagola. Samprapti, one of the later Mauryas also followed Jainism and was called Jain Ashoka. Kharavela, the greatest of the Chedi dynasty that ruled Kalinga promoted 'Digambar Jainism'. Siddhiraj and Kumarpala promoted Svetambara Jainism in Saurashtra region

³⁸ Ibid, p.54.

³⁹ D.N. Jha. *Ancient India: In Historical Outline*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributor, 1998), p.70.

⁴⁰ Ibid.. p.71.

of Gujarat. Amogha varsha, the greatest of the Rastrakuta was the last greatest patron of Jainism. Some Mughal emperors such as Akbar, honoured Jain Munis and forbade killing of animals during the Jain festivals in those areas where the Jains lived. In the course of history, Rajput ruler too patronized followers of Jainism. Furthermore, during the period of the East India Company Janis like Jagat Seth had great influence on the company officials.⁴¹

Conversion in the Sikh Tradition

Sikhism is not a religion known for its proselytizing activities. It has primarily been understood and presented as a regional faith, originating in northern India and transplanted to virtually all areas of the globe by its adherents. Guru Nanak, the first Guru in the lineage of ten Gurus preached a message of *interiority*, stressing that the route to liberation was not by way of ritual, pilgrimage, temple or icon, but through meditation on the Name and devotion to the Guru.⁴²

A major shift in the development of Sikh identity came after the annexation of Punjab by the British in 1849. Following the conversion of a number of Sikh youths to Christianity and fearing a continued loss in numbers Sikh males who had access to British education organize themselves into a reform group called the *Singh Sabha* and began a through process of re-evaluating their religious beliefs and practices. Nonetheless, despite the efforts of the Singh Sabha reforms to construct a homogeneous Sikh identity, it is still extremely problematic to clearly delineate 'who is a Sikh' to this very day. While the injunction known as the "Five Ks" are followed by some, many don't view these identity markers as essential to their being 'good' Sikhs. While orthodox Sikhism views the Guru lineage as ending with Guru Gobind Singh, numerous group who count themselves as within the Sikh fold follow the teachings of a living guru as well as the tenets and rituals of Sikhism.⁴³

⁴¹ Xavier Pinto and E.G .Myall, *Glimpses of History*, Part I(New Delhi:Frank Bros & Co Ltd.,1998), p.31.

⁴² Doris R. Jakobsh, "Conversion in the Sikh Tradition", in Op. cit.,no.5, pp.166-167.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 169.

Conversion in Hinduism

Hinduism in a pure textual sense doesn't believe in conversion. one can become a Hindu only by conviction and following any or all of the beliefs like Law of Karma, which states that whatever we sow by our actions, comes back to us;⁴⁴ the concept of divine avatars which embodies that wherever there is a decay of righteousness, and rise of unrighteousness, God, manifest itself indifferent forms for firmly re-establishing dharmas, and concept of non-violence. However to formally identify as Hindu by others, one needs to have a Hindu name as well as become familiar with Hindu tradition. The inflow of converts into Hinduism is very little. First of all Hindu society has the inherent weakness of caste system and apart from those the propagation of Hindu religion is weak. Moreover since from the beginning the leaders of Hindu organizations take effort to prevent conversion but very little effort is made to purify Hinduism and propagation of faith

ASSESSMENT

When we look at the phenomenon of conversion across the realm of different religious traditions, we can see that the substance of conversion varies. And so do the formal conditions for the acceptance of a convert. Those conditions can be extremely stringent, less so, or completely non-existent. Conversion is not just a moment in a person's life, but involves a complex set of factors that are at once social, psychological and spiritual.

Conversion is understood differently in different religious and social contexts. What Christians call conversion or metanoia, Muslims would probably call 'submission' and Buddhists would speak of 'going for refuge'. In some countries law forbids 'conversion', while in other societies we encounter active and hectic conversion drive by the missionaries. These diverse meanings and understanding of conversion pose difficulties for the theorists of conversion.

⁴⁴ M.D. Chaturvedi, *Hinduism: The Eastern Religion, It's Fundamentals, Believes and Traditions*. (Bombay: Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, 1992), pp.106-07.

**Constituent Assembly Debates
and The Anti-conversion Laws in
India.**

INTRODUCTION

In the Indian religious discourse, the incidence of conversion has never been relegated to the background. But the virulent attacks on the Christian minority, the Prime Minister's call for a national debate on conversion and the very recent legislation in Tamil Nadu, prohibiting religious conversion have raised eyebrows amongst secular and democratic intelligentsia. In this chapter, I propose to deal with the Constituent Assembly debates on religious conversion and the Anti – Conversion Laws in India.

A look at Assembly proceeding shows that barring a few exceptions, Congress members in the Assembly, most of them Hindu, were overwhelmingly in favour of a secular Constitution. Having seen the macabre consequences of religious fanaticism that resulted in the country's partition, they were determined to ensure that religion remained a private activity. They had no desire to grant either their co-religionists or others any special religion-related rights and this included the right to religious propagation. But Christians, who comprised just 1.5 percent of the population, were insistent. Their representatives in the Assembly argued that the right to propagate must be a Fundamental Right because it was part of their religious tenets. Finally, in the backroom discussions, a compromise emerged. The Hindu members agreed to concede the Christian demand, provided there was another countervailing Article in the Constitution, which explicitly banned religious conversion, brought about by coercion or undue influence.

However, when the Constitution was finally drafted, the Article dealing with conversions was dropped because of insurmountable technical problems. But the Christians had their way and acquired the right to propagate religion. This is now Article 25(1) of the Constitution, which says, "subject to public order, morality, health and to other provisions of this part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion". However this right is not an absolute right. This article has been cautiously framed so that it could be enjoyed within the necessary limits. As the Supreme Court held in the case of *Gopalan vs Madras*

(1950), 'there cannot be such a thing as absolute or uncontrolled liberty wholly freed from restraint, for that will lead to anarchy and disorder.' This is why Art 25 has expressly imposed some necessary limitations on the religious right. The right to profess, practice and propagate religion is, as mentioned earlier, limited by public order, morality and health and to the other provisions mentioned by the Constitution. So, if and when an attempt to propagate religion or to convert others creates a problem of public order or implies immorality or affects general health, the government can step in and it is the judiciary, which is entitled to see whether or not such damages have actually been done. ¹

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY DEBATES ON CONVERSION

The Experts Committee, appointed to prepare the substances for the Constituent Assembly, decided in 1946 that there should be a resolution outlining the objectives of the Assembly. This resolution, adopted in January 1947, contained a statement that the future Constitution should guarantee freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship.² Prior to this, in December 1946, K.T.Shah, a member of the Fundamental Rights Sub-committee, sent a note on Fundamental Rights to the Assembly President. Included in the note was an Article insisting on the "right to freedom of conscience, which included freedom of belief, worship, or profession of any religion, faith, or doctrine, as well as the negation of any such belief."³ This, along with the resolution of January 1947, set the stage for the debates on religious freedom in the Constituent Assembly. Interesting enough was the fact that all members, including the Christian representatives spoke as if propagation was almost identical with conversion. Infact the discussion on the right to free expression on profession of any religion along with right to practice did warrant the fact that the framers of the Indian Constitution were very much aware of the connection between the two viz, expression or profession and the chances of conversion. The draft article presented by the members of the Sub-Committee on Fundamental Rights during March 1947 signaled this connection.

¹ Nirmalendu Bikash Rakshit, "Right to Propagate Religion: Constitutional Provisions", *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 30, 2000, pp. 3564.

² The framing of India's Constitution, Select documents, vol II (New Delhi, 1967) pp 3-4.

³ Ibid., p. 50.

So, the Fundamental Rights Sub-Committee adopted two important provisions in Article 22 and Article 23. The former declared: “ No person under the age of 18 shall be converted to any religion other than the one in which he was born or we initiated into the religious order involving a loss of civil status”. And, Article 23 said, “conversion from one religion to another brought about by coercion or under influence shall not be recognized by law and the exercise of such conversion or undue influence shall be an offence”. The Minorities Sub-Committee, however, introduced some changes and made two recommendations: (1) no person under the age of 18 shall be made to join or profess any religion other than one in which he was born, except when his parents themselves have been converted and the child does not choose to adhere to his original faith, nor shall such person be initiated into any religious order involving a loss of civil status; and (2) no conversion shall be recognized unless a change of faith is attested by a magistrate after a due enquiry.⁴ Significantly, the Minorities Sub-Committee did not find it necessary to make coercion or fraud in conversion a cognizable offence, though it intended to empower a magistrate to make an enquiry into such an affair.

‘The Advisory Committee on Minorities and Fundamental Rights’ in reviewing the draft and recommendations of the Sub-Committee on Minorities paid considerable attention to the word ‘propagation’. The clause related to barring conversion of minors was dropped and the interim report submitted by the Advisory Committee headed by Sardar Patel to the Constituent Assembly in April, 1947 suggested the inclusion of two clauses in the chapter on justiceable fundamental right: -

1. All person are equally entitled to freedom of conscience, and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion subject to public order, morality of health, and to the other provisions of this chapter.
2. Conversion from one religion to another brought about by coercion or undue influence shall not be recognized by law.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 208-09

When the Assembly discussed these clauses on May 1, 1947, the first clause granting every citizen the right to “profess, practise and propagate religion” was passed swiftly without much debate but the clause pertaining to conversions ran into a hitch. K.M. Munshi, for example, proposed that ‘freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess and practice religion be subject to “public order, morality or health” and that persons under eighteen should not be free to change religion without parental consent, and that conversion brought about by coercion, undue influence, or material inducement be punishable by law’.⁵ Munshi’s proposal generated a mixed response with some members wholeheartedly welcoming it and several others, especially Christian members, strongly opposing the move to ban conversion of minors. They said such an Article would wreck the family. Dr B. R. Ambedkar too opposed a blanket ban on conversion of minors. The best course, he said, was for the Constituent Assembly to abandon the idea of having an Article in the Constitution to ban conversions. In his view it would be better instead to leave the matter to the legislature. He said there could be no bar on the legislature from moving any law to regulate the matter of conversion.

F.R. Anthony also severely criticized Munshi’s proposed amendment. In his words, ‘if you place an absolute embargo on the conversion of a minor, you will place an embargo absolutely on the right of conversion... Not a single adult who is a parent, however deeply he may be convinced, will; ever adopt Christianity, because by this clause you will be cutting off that parent from his children’.⁶ Rev. J. J.M. Nichols Ray also opposed the amendment. He placed emphasis on the spiritual motive behind conversion by depicting his own personal experience. In his version, ‘why should a youth that has such a call of God be prevented by law from changing his religion and calling himself by another name when he feels before God that he is influenced by the spirit of God to do that and is ready even to sacrifice his life for that’.⁷

Several arguments were put forwarded in favour of Munshi’s amendment proposal. Notable amongst them were Purushottam Das Tandon, P.P. Thakur, Algu Rai Shastri, M. Ananthasayanam Ayangar, R. V. Dhulekar etc. Purushottam Das broadly took

⁵ Ibid., P.76.

⁶ *Constituent Assembly of India*, Vol. III, 1947, pp.489-90

⁷ Ibid.. p.491

the position that conversions in any context shouldn't be encouraged and that in case of minors, they are improper for two reasons. A minor is easily persuaded. If a minor is not recognized by law to be able to transact transfer of deeds, the law shouldn't recognize the conversion of minors. The conversion of minors he argued, is coercion and undue influence in all circumstances.⁸ Algu Rai Shastri did question the very nature of missionary activities. In his analysis, 'the consequence is that grown-up people in castes such as the Bhangies and Chamars are converted, and with them their children also go into the fold of the new religion. They should be affectionately asked to live as brothers. Instead of doing that we are in search of opportunities to indulge in underhand dealings. Thus everybody can realize how all-possible unfair means have been adopted to trample the majority community.'⁹

On Sardar Patel's suggestion, the Assembly agreed to refer back the conversion clause to the Committee once again. When the Advisory Committee brought back the unchanged clause dealing with coercion and undue influence on August 30, 1947, Shri Anathasayanam Ayangar and Shri R. V. Dhulekar vehemently pointed out the inherent danger in the policy of conversion. Shri Ayangar appealed to the concept of secularism. He was of the opinion that 'our minorities are communal minorities for which we have made provision... Do you want an opportunity to be given for numbers to be increased for the purpose of getting more seats in the Legislatures?... All people have come to the same opinion that there should be a secular State here; so we should not allow conversion from one community to another.'¹⁰

R.V. Dhulekar asserted that conversion leads to separatist tendencies and diminishes the numerical strength of Hindus and other communities. He went so far as to imply that all conversions of Hindus to Islam had been conversions by fraud or coercion and not conversions based on reason.¹¹ Since the clause was removed from the Fundamental Rights section, it effectively died at this point, as far as the Constitution was concerned. Thus, on technical grounds, the Constituent Assembly kept the clause on

⁸ Ibid., p 492.

⁹ Ibid., pp 498.

¹⁰ *Constituent Assembly of India*, Vol. v, 1947, pp. 364..

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 364-365.

conversion out from the Chapter of Fundamental Rights in the fond hope that the State Legislatures and Parliament in this regard would frame necessary legislation. The conversion controversy arose once again in the constituent assembly on December 3 and 6, 1948, during the discussion on Act 19 (now Act-25) when Tajamul Hussain said, 'supposing I honestly believe that I will attain salvation according to my way of thinking, and according to my religion, and you, Sir, honestly believe that you will attain salvation according to your way, then why should I ask you to attain salvation according to my way, or why should you ask me to attain salvation according to your way? If you accept this proposition, the, why propagate religion? As I said, religion is between oneself and his God. Thus honestly profess religion and practice it at home. Do not demonstrate it for the sake of propagating... If you start propagating you will become a nuisance to others. So far it has been a nuisance.'¹²

Lokanath Mishra while opposing the incorporation of propagation of religion in fundamental right was of the opinion that, 'to me Vedic culture excludes nothing. Every philosophy and culture has its place but now the cry of religions is a dangerous cry. It denominates, it divides people to warring ways. In the present context, what can this word 'propagation' in Article 19 mean? It can only mean paving the way for the complete annihilation of Hindu culture, the Hindu way of life and manners.. Hinduism is just an integrated vision and a philosophy of life and cosmos...But Hindu generosity has been misused and politics has overrun Hindu culture.'¹³

After a prolonged debate over the issue, it was finally a victory for those who had been more vociferous in demanding the inclusion of propagation of religion in Fundamental Rights. Because the Constituent Assembly couldn't finally accept any proposal designed to curtail or remove the right to propagate. According to K. Santhanam, the right to propagate religion should be read with Art 13 (now Art-19), which had already granted freedom of speech and expression to the individual. The right to speech and expression, he pointed out obviously included the right to propagate one's religion with a view to convert others. As such, a denial of right to propagate religion

¹² *Constituent Assembly of India*, vol. vii, 1948, pp. 817-818.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p 824

would be tantamount to the negation of the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 13.¹⁴ Infact, he impressed upon others that the right to propagate could be safely granted, because there was ample opportunity to keep it within legal limit.

Several other influential members like L.K.Maitra, L.Krishanaswami Bharti, T.T. Krishnamachari etc, reiterated same views. In the words of L.K. Maitra, the Indian Christian community happens to be the most inoffensive community in the whole of India. He argued that if India is to fulfill her mission to provide the world with the spiritual culture that is India's heritage, the right to propagate must be seen to be inherent.¹⁵

L.Krishanaswami Bharti went as far as to suggest that a 'Hindu ought to practice propagation in order to educate people in the religious tenets and doctrines of Hinduism. Other communities should emulate the Christian community for in the end "it is all God, though under different names".¹⁶ T.T.Krishnamachari was even more explicit in pointing out that since members of the majority community were already propagating, the issue should not be the elimination of propagation but appropriate propagation. In his version, 'It is perfectly open to the Hindus and the Arya Samajists to carry on their Suddhi propaganda, as it is open to the Christians, the Muslims, the Jains and the Buddhist and to every other religionist, so long as he does it is subject to public order, morality and the other conditions that have to be observed in my civilized government'.¹⁷

So finally propagation of religion was added in the Indian Constitution as a Fundamental Right. Thus, while the Christians got the right to "propagate", there was no corresponding Article to stop conversions brought about by coercion or undue influence because the Constituent Assembly felt that the State Legislatures or the Parliament or both could make detailed laws to meet the situation.

¹⁴ Op.cit ,no.1, p.3564.

¹⁵ Op .cit ,no.12, p.832.

¹⁶ Ibid., p .833.

¹⁷ Ibid., p 836.

ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS OF THE STATES IN POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA

Most States found it convenient to ignore the issue and didn't draft any laws for banning conversions. However, at the state level Orissa was the first state to enact such laws to ban religious conversion in 1967 under the rubric of "Orissa Freedom of Religion Act". Infact, maladjustment and law and order problems were the basis, which prompted Orissa government to enact such laws. If we make a realistic analysis of the text of the law then we will find that even though the law appears to be directed simply to conversions by force, fraud, material inducement, and exploitation, the punishments make it clear that the law makers had in mind conversions of minors and others who were thought to need special protection. The penalty for unlawful conversion of a minor, a woman and a member of schedule caste was much more severe than the penalty for the unlawful conversion of an adult. A similar Act passed by the Madhya Pradesh Legislature in 1968, is popularly known as the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swantanrya Adhiniyam. Again, in the interests of public order and concern for threat to community life, conversions by "force or allurement or by fraudulent means, and matters incidental thereto" were prohibited. In addition, the Act also required registering conversions with the District Magistrate.

CREATION OF THE NIYOGI COMMITTEE

The Madhya Pradesh Act appears to be the culmination of two previous events, the appointment of the Niyogi Commission in 1954 to enquire into Christian missionary activities in Madhya Pradesh and the Madhya Pradesh Conversion Bill of 1963, a Private Member's Bill, which raised some of the concerns expressed in the Niyogi Commission Report. The Niyogi Committee is a landmark as it had created a basis for the entry of Hindutva organizations into tribal areas without any competition and hindrance. It had also opened the floodgates of legislation that facilitated the expansion Hindu fundamentalism. In this area, the Christians whether missionaries or laymen, having nothing to hide or be ashamed of would have welcomed the committee provided it consisted of fair-minded and impartial men. Infact they had doubts about the credential

ties of the committee members and their intentions. Dr. Niyogi, an ex-chief Justice of Nagpur High Court was a man deeply prejudiced against the foreign missionaries and had indulged in a public diatribe against the Christians at the very time of his appointment. A leading member of the committee was G. S. Gupta, an Aryan Samaj leader. As every one knows, the Arya Samaj came into existence with the definite objective of combating Christian missionary activities in India. To add insult to injury, the government appointed a Christians representative on the Committee, S. K. George, a writer who in his books has denied the divinity of Christ and shown deep animus against Christian churches and missionaries endeavor, though nothing was known about the prejudices of remaining members of the committee, the fact that they had no qualms to sign the report, carries its own tale. The only man on the committee who might have carried the confidence of the Christians, Seth Govind Das, a Member of Parliament, resigned early and is not a signatory of the report.¹⁸

JUDICIARY AND THE ISSUES OF CONVERSION

However, both these Acts provoked scathing criticism from the Christian communities across the states. The editor of the National Christian Council Review responded to the concept of conversion raised in the Acts by saying that conversion is wider than the issue of changing one's religion, it is about freedom of individual choice, which is fundamental to human nature and closely related to the "right for the search for Truth".¹⁹ Christian objections justifiably concentrated on the following issues: although it was stated that the acts were meant to prohibit conversion by undesirable means, it is clear in the Orissa Act that conversion itself was regarded as objectionable since it was said to undermine another's faith. Therefore, it is quite clear that, in spite of Hindu claim of there not being any objection to "genuine conversion", the acts were intended to regulate or limit not only conversion done by undesirable means but also conversion in general. It should also be remembered that in Orissa, the Swatantra Party government passed this law. Even in that time also Rajaji, the president of the Swatantra Party, wrote

¹⁸ A. Soares, *Truth Shall Prevail: Reply to Niyogi Committee*, for and behalf of Catholic Association of Bombay. Excerpts from the Introduction, pp VI, VII.

¹⁹ *National Christian Council Review*, XXXVIII/3 (March 1968) pp.120-122

a letter to the Chief Minister of Orissa, saying, ‘ don’t disturb Christians. If you disturb them, they will grow’.²⁰ The fact that the definition of the terms used in the Acts was wide and open to abusive interpretation led to serious fears among Christians about what they regarded as a personal matter would be under the scrutiny of government officials without sufficient safeguards against the abuse. Probably the strongest case against the Acts from the Christian point of view was that, as Jawaharlal Nehru warned, the Acts could create more problems than they solved.²¹ Further, the Christian community was more apprehensive about the Madhya Pradesh law as it was aimed to regulate the activity of the instigator of conversion, rather than the one who him/herself converts to another religion.

However, both these acts were challenged in their respective High Courts. In their decision on 24 October 1972, the Orissa High Court acknowledged on the basis of the petitioners arguments, that ‘it is the religious duty of Christian to propagate his religion’ and as far as the scope of Article 25(1) of the Constitution is concerned, “conversion into one’s own religion has to be included in the fundamental right so far as a Christian citizen is concerned”. They, therefore, concluded that the Act was *ultravires* of the constitution, that the term “inducement” was vague. And that the state legislature had no power to enact it since only Parliament could act in matters related to religion.²² Rev. Stanislaus of Raipur, Madhya Pradesh had chosen to challenge the Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam through refusing to register conversions. In his arguments, before the High Court, he had challenged the Act on two points. The first was that Parliament, and not the Madhya Pradesh Legislature had the power to make the law. The second was that the Act attacked Article 25 of the Constitution.²³ However, Chief Justice of Madhya Pradesh High Court P.K.Tare delivered his final verdict on 23 April 1974, which was in contradiction to the Orissa High Court judgment. Here the High Court by upholding the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act reiterated that, ‘what is penalized is conversion by force, fraud or by allurements. The other element is that every person has the right to profess his own religion and to act according to it. Any other interference with that right of the person by

²⁰ *The Hindu* (New Delhi), 24th Oct, 2002

²¹ *Lok Sabha Debates* 2/9 (2 Dec 1955), pp.1093-119

²² *All India Reporter*, 1973, Orissa, pp. 116-23

²³ Rev. Stainislaus Vs M.P., 1977, *All India Reporter*, Supreme Court, pp. 909.

resorting to conversion by force, fraud or allurement cannot, in our opinion, be said to contravene Article 25(b) of the constitution of India as the Article guarantees religious freedom subject to public health. As such we do not find that the provisions of the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam, 1968 is a violation of Article 25(1) of the Constitution of India. On the other hand, it guarantees that religious freedom to one and all including those who might be amenable to conversion by force, fraud or allurement”.²⁴

The contradictions in the verdict of the Orissa High Court and the Madhya Pradesh High Court inevitably led to the case being brought before the Supreme Court, which gave its final verdict on 17th January 1977. This was to uphold the decision of the Madhya Pradesh High Court. On the matter of the charge that the acts violated Article 25(1) of the constitution, Chief Justice A. N. Ray argued thus, ‘what the Article grants is not the right to convert another person to one’s own religion, but to transmit or spread of one’s religion by an exposition of its tenets. It has to be remembered that Article 25(1) guarantees Freedom of Conscience to every citizen, and not merely to the followers of one particular religion and that, in turn, postulates that there is no fundamental right to convert another person to one’s own religion because if a person purposely undertakes the conversion of another person of his religion, as distinguished from his effort to transmit or spread the tenets of his religion, that would impinge on the “freedom of conscience” guaranteed to all the citizens of the country alike.’²⁵

In his judgment Justice Ray referred to the judgment delivered by Justice Mukherjee in ‘Ratilal vs State of Bombay’, (1954) in which he had stated that individuals have the right to propagation “for the edification of others.” Presumably Ray’s judgment is an expansion of the idea that conversion is for the purpose of edification only, for it attempts to make a distinction between propagation and conversion. One has the right to propagate, but not to propagate in order to convert another person. The issue from justice Ray’s perspective is not simply law and order but freedom of conscience. Intent to convert

²⁴ Ibid., p. 910.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 911.

impinges on this freedom. If freedom of conscience is to be observed in equal measure for all, then conversion cannot be claimed as a right in the view of the Justice.²⁶

Jurist H.M. Seeravai thought that Justice Ray had overstated the case on presuming that deliberate attempts at conversion interfere with freedom of conscience guaranteed by Article 25. However, other experts such as Durga Das Basu have argued that the State is constitutionally enjoined to maintain public order that the Orissa and Madhya Pradesh legislation are directed at preventing the breach of public peace which would follow if conversion by force, fraud or inducement / allurement are allowed to pass unhindered. In spite of repeated Christian questioning of the legitimacy of the verdict on the basis that it was delivered in the midst of the Emergency, in India, at least in legal terms, there is no fundamental right to seek the conversion of others. In other words, Christians as citizens of a democratic nation, have to accept the fact that propagation aimed at conversion is not guaranteed as a fundamental right in the constitution but is under the discretion of the local legislature.

Following the Supreme Court verdict in the Stainislaus case, Arunachal Pradesh in 1978 also passed a law on conversion which was originally known as Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Indigenous Faith Bill but later changed to Freedom of Religion Act on the advice of the President who recommended that the protection sought by the bill be afforded to persons of any faith. Even though this law is almost identical with Orissa and Madhya Pradesh anti-conversion laws, but its special emphasis was on conversion from “indigenous faith”. According to this law, conversion means renouncing an original faith and adopting another faith or religion. This original faith is defined as such religious beliefs and practices including rites, rituals, festivals, observances, performances, abstinence, customs as have been found sanctioned, approved, performed by the indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh from the time these communities have been known and includes Buddhism... Vaishnavism... and Nature worship...No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from

²⁶ Ronald W. Neufeldt, “To Convert or Not To Convert: Legal and Political Dimensions of Conversion in Independent India”. in Robert D. Baird (ed), *Religion and Law in Independent India*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1993), p.330.

indigenous faith by use of force or by inducement or any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion.²⁷

As per the law, force includes “show of force or a threat of divine displeasure or social ex-communication.”²⁸ Further, the Act also required that conversions from indigenous faith be registered with the District Deputy Commissioner by the person doing the converting.²⁹ However, the brain behind the Act justified it on the ground of maintaining public order, morality and health. They were of the opinion that: ‘The problem of conversion from one indigenous faith to any other faith or religion by use of force or by inducement or by fraudulent means has been creating unhealthy and undesirable friction in the unsophisticated and simple tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh threatening social peace and public order’.³⁰

However, in tune with the laws of these three states, Tamil Nadu Assembly passed Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Bill on 31 October 2002. Before the opening of the Tamil Nadu Assembly session on 24 Oct 2002, the bill was in the form of an ordinance, which received governor’s assent on October 5, 2002. Many see this as a reaction to the incident of mass conversions in Madurai where 250 Dalits adopted Christianity at the instance of the Seventh Day Adventist Pastor , a Protestant Baptist group working on the fringes of the mainstream Christian church an a little later due to the open threat by 59 Dalit families of Koothirambakam in Kancheepuram district to embrace islam.³¹ The architects of this law argued that the law only seeks to legislate a long pending demand to streamline the act of conversion that has been going on in the state. As early as in 1986, Justice Venugopal Commission of Inquiry recommended a ban on conversion by fraudulent and foul means. The AIADMK government headed by M.G.Ramchandran accepted the recommendations but it was given up after his death. However, the votaries of this law are of the opinion that the Dalits, estranged from their parental religion – are inclined towards conversion because they are not on any

²⁷ Brojendra Nath Banerjee, *Religious Conversions in India*, (New Delhi: Harnam Publications, 1982), p.262.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 263.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Radha Venkatesan, “Stifling Dissent”, *The Hindu* (New Delhi), Oct 20, 2002.

intellectual or theological quest. The bill precisely seeks to remedy this. The Bill only prevents specially foreign-funded religious institutions from resorting to conversion by use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means. Here again, the axe will fall on those resorting to such malpractice and not on the converted by these means. In no way does the bill impinge on the right “freely to profess, practise and propagate religion as guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. It is a gross misreading of the Constitution to assume that the right to propagate a religion includes the right to forcibly convert. Such an assumption is plainly untrue. Such conversions will bring religion to the market place and will also result in continuing social disharmony at an exponential rate. Nobody in Tamil Nadu at least wants such a calamitous situation to develop.³²In India, religion is not personal. By making religious freedom a fundamental right, we have made a personal matter a state matter. So when the Jayalalitha Government makes a law banning “forcible conversion”, why should we regard it as an attack on personal freedom? Apprehension about the misuse of political power may be correct. But if there is any dispute, religious or otherwise, and if it affects governance, the state has every right to deal with it constitutionally. That is what the Constitution, the judiciary and the executive are meant for. According to the statement under Rule 168 of the TamilNadu Legislative Assembly Rules, the legislation aim at serving three objectives. First, it will act as a deterrent against anti-social and vested interest groups exploiting the innocent people belonging to depressed classes. Second, it will nip in the bud the attempts of certain religious fundamentalist and subversive forces to create communal tension under the garb of religious conversions. Third, it may also be useful to maintain public order.³³

However, this anti-conversion law provoked severe minority condemnation and raised eyebrows about the intention of the Jayalalitha government. When the Ordinance was presented to the Governor of Tamil Nadu, P.Ramamohan Rao, for signature on October 5, 2002, he advised Jayalalitha that the Assembly was due to meet in three weeks on October 24 and it should be discussed there. But the issue is what prompted Jayalalitha to hurriedly promulgate such an Ordinance? Is the Madurai conversion so

³² *The Hindu* (New Delhi), Nov 6, 2002.

³³ Devdutt, “Conversions in Tamil Nadu in a Perspective”, *Alpjan*, A Chronicle of Minorities, vol-11, no. 4, July-Sept 2002, p.11.

menacing as to call for the promulgation of an ordinance? Did the law and order enforcing agencies or the state suggest banning conversion? If reports had been received by the Government, knowing fully well that it owed its existence to the people, the least that it could have done was not being secretive about them, confirm their veracity, and append to its ordinance these reports and the nature and magnitude of their perceived and real consequences for secular democratic governance of a pluralist and multi-religious society as mandated by the Constitution. If legislation was the remedy, the introduction in the Assembly on October 30 of the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Bill, 2002, in less than a month after the ordinance, and its adoption the next day with barely three hours' debate, not only called the Government's bluff on the urgency of the ordinance, but, more importantly, confirmed that the Assembly was indeed in the throes of systematic subversion by political manoeuvres³⁴ This law like other anti-conversion laws uses words like force, allurement, fraud etc. It is astonishing that such a law was enacted without verifying the reports of the so called "fraud conversions". The government's failure to cite even a single instance of forcible conversion lends credence to the accusation that the Bill was passed to appease the Hindutva brigade. The most dangerous part of the law is that it prescribes sterner punishments if the converted person is a minor, a woman, or the Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe. But Dalits, tribals and women are not children; they recognize force, fear and fraud within the caste system and patriarchy and not from the missionaries! Tamil Nadu has a bad record of atrocities against Dalits: as many as 191 villages have been officially declared as prone to atrocities against Dalits.³⁵ In Tamilnadu itself restaurants continue to use the casteist two-tumbler system, forcing Dalits to use separate glasses and utensils. But Jayalalitha refuses to punish or eliminate this kind of barbaric unsociability. Instead, by this law, she is now attacking the rights of the Dalits to reject discrimination and choose to live with social dignity. The law says any priest or person who converts must inform the District Magistrate or face imprisonment. By allowing the state to interfere and police the individual's choice of religion, which should be a private matter, this clause blatantly violates the constitutional right to freedom of religion. This will also give police and district administration a license to harass minorities and demand bribes to allow

³⁴ P. Radhakrishanan, "Conversion Politics -1", Nov 6, 2002, *The Hindu* (New Delhi).

³⁵ Op.cit. ,no.31.

conversions. Fear of police harassment will deter people from converting. Political analysts see the Tamil Nadu legislation as one more political signal from the AIADMK chief, Jayalalitha, that she is willing and able to “come closer” to the ruling BJP at the Centre to dislodge her rivals in the DMK as the favorites in New Delhi. Naturally, as expected, the BJP, and of course the Sangh-Parivar as a whole, have applauded the Act.

In Bihar and Rajasthan, Bills on the issue of religious conversion were introduced but were not passed. Only recently Gujarat Legislature has adopted Freedom of Religion Bill, ostensibly aimed at putting an end to religious conversion accomplished by force, allurements and fraudulent means. Infact this Gujarat freedom of Religion bill is both in spirit and content similar to the law enacted by the AIADMK government in TamilNadu. Since the creation of Chhatisgarh, there has been a growing demand among the anti-conversion lobby for the enactment of an anti-conversion law in line with the Madhya Pradesh freedom of religion Act. Infact, two laws of the Madhya Pradesh Government on conversions, viz, Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1968 and Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Regulations, 1969 would have been applicable in Chhatisgarh but the Ajit Jogi government didn't adopt them. The states re-organization Act clearly mentioned that, the applicability of the laws to the newborn states would automatically collapse after two years.³⁶ Accordingly, since October 31, 2002, there was no restriction on religious conversion in Chhatisgarh.

STATE REGULATION OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

From the above analysis, one shouldn't draw the conclusion that before independence, there was no such kind of laws. Infact, prior to Independence number of states had promulgated anti-conversion laws. The Raja of the native state of Rajgarh stated that the Christian missionaries were indulging in conversions that had fanned communal frenzy. Therefore, he enacted the Rajgarh State Conversion Act of 1936 that banned the preaching of Christianity and prohibited the entry of missionaries into former

³⁶ *The Times of India* (New Delhi), Oct 13,2002.

states of Rajgarh, Jashpur and Sarguja. Earlier to this enactment the restrictions of missionary activities already prevailed as the preachers were only allowed into tribal areas four times a year and that also only for 48 hours at a time. Following this, the states of Surguja enacted the Sarguja State Hindu apostasy Act of 1945 where tribals were declared as Hindus. Finally, just before independence another native state enacted the Udaipur State Conversion Act, 1946 which stated that a fair number of tribals had changed their religion and that this was disturbing the peace of the region. It also declared that tribals or Adivasis were Hindus and all Hindus were to register themselves with the state if they wanted to change their religion from Hinduism to Christianity.³⁷

CENTRAL LEGISLATION ON RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

After Independence, attempts were made to secure a central law but this proved to be unsuccessful. In 1954, Jethalal Joshi, a Member of Parliament from the Congress Party moved the Indian Converts (Regulation and Registration) Bill. In the Parliament proposing compulsory licensing of missionaries and registration of conversions, the Bill was however dropped at the behest of Jawaharlal Nehru.³⁸ Prakash Vir Shastri of the Swatantra Party moved the Backward communities (Religious Protection) Bill aimed at regulating conversions from backward communities to Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism in 1978. O.P.Tyagi, a member of Parliament of the Janata Party, introduced the Freedom of religion Bill designed to prohibit conversions of force, inducement, or fraud in order to protect scheduled castes, tribes, minors, and women. The bill had 8 sections of which the first two dealt with definitions. The other relevant sections were as under;

Section 3. No person shall covert or attempt to covert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by use of force or by inducement or by deceit or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversions.

³⁷ Archana Prasad. "Religion and the Tribal Question: Reflections on the Debate in Central India ", in *Alpjan: A Chronicle of Minorities*, vol-11, No-4, July-Sep 2002, p.38.

³⁸ William Loundayyan, *Conversion Debate and The Holocaust*, (Madurai, 1999), p.117.

Section 4. Any person contravening the provisions in section 3 shall without prejudice to any civil liability, be punishable with imprisonment of either description which may extend to one year or with fine which may extend to three thousand rupees or both. Provided that in case the offence is committed in respect of a minor, woman, or a person belonging to the scheduled caste or scheduled tribes, the punishment shall be imprisonment to the extent of two years and a fine up to five thousands rupees.

Section 5. An offence under this act shall be cognizable and shall not be investigated by an officer below the rank of an Inspector of police.

Section 8. The central Government may make rules for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Act.³⁹

Mother Teresa, being highly critical of this proposed legislation wrote a letter to Prime Minister Morarji Desai on March 25, 1979. Even though the text of the letter is not available, but its substance came out in the reply which Desai wrote to her on April 21, 1979. She appears to have protested against the Bill as a hurdle in the way of charitable and philanthropic activities of the Christian missions. She seems to have pointed out at the same time that the Roman Catholics were always engaged in praying, fasts and celebrations of sacrifice made in the interests of peace, communal amity and religious freedom. Desai wrote back, if charity and philanthropy is not connected with any ulterior motive, they are beneficial. But charity and conversions cannot go together. Religion prospers only when charity and philanthropy are undertaken without any motive. The Bill you have mentioned does not affect adversely the propagation of religion. In fact, the Bill is an attempt to see that the poor and illiterate may enjoy religious freedom without any fear. We have to be particularly vigilant about the Scheduled Tribes whose protection is not only guaranteed by the laws of the land but is also enshrined in the constitution. It is our duty to preserve every aspect of their way of life along with their religion and ways of worship. No group belonging to any creed should interfere with their religion and rituals. Other organizations are also engaged in the philanthropic work, which you claim. But that work can be helpful only when it is done without any ulterior motive. It is my

³⁹ Sita Ramgoel, *Vindicated By Time: The Niyogi Committee Report on Christian Missionary Activities*, (New Delhi : Voice of India, 1980) , p.40.

opinion that you should revise your attitude to O.P. Tyagi's Bill in the light of what I have stated ⁴⁰

In 1981 two further Bills were introduced in the Parliament, both of which received scathing criticism. On September 4, 1981, B. V. Desai, member from Raichur, introduced a Bill to prohibit all foreign missionaries from functioning in India on a religious basis. Clause 3 of the Bill aimed specially at; 'Preaching of all religions and helping in conversion of the poor from one religion to another shall be banned'. On December 11, 1981, Vasant Kumar Pandit, member from Rajgarh introduced a Bill asking for compulsory registration of conversions. Eduardo Falerio compared the requirements of the Bill as analogous to Hitler's requirements that the Jews display the Star of David. G. M. Banatwalla, member from Ponani, argued that the requirement to register a conversion and the requirement of a subsequent memorandum to the community from which the person was converting, would be an invitation to anti-social elements to create disorder. He also accused the mover of engaging in speculation about foreign money and doubtful conversions. ⁴¹

On July 27, 2001, Anant Gangaram Geete moved a Private Member's Bill in the Lok Sabha. He represents the Ratnagiri constituency of Maharashtra, and was elected on the ticket of the Shiv Sena, an ally of the Bhartiya Janata Party in the National Democratic Alliance. The Bill seeks a ban on religious conversions and details extremely harsh punishment of up to ten years of imprisonment for those violating the proposed law. The Bill provoked an immediate protest from the opposition parties. They saw in it another attempt by the Hindutva Parivar to mount pressure on India's already beleaguered minorities, specially the Christian community which runs tens of thousands of schools and medical institutions in the country, many of them cater to the poorest of the poor in rural areas. It has been noted that apart from the ban on conversion, the bill also seeks to curb on the finances of individuals and groups who may come within the purview of the proposed legislation. The Government's solitary statement was to point out that the Bill allows voluntary conversions.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.40-41.

⁴¹ Op.cit..no.26, pp. 325-326.

ASSESSMENT

As the developments discussed in this chapter and more recent events would indicate, conversion remains a troublesome issue for India legally and politically. In the wisdom of the framers of the Constitution, it was eventually seen as unnecessary to include clauses dealing with conversions brought about by coercion, fraud, or undue influence and the conversion of minors, largely on arguments that existing laws were adequate to handle such issues. While, from time to time, members of the Lok Sabha have, through private members Bills, attempted to reintroduce such Clauses, these attempts have met with failure. Such attempts have, however, been quite successful at the State level, particularly in the form of the three Freedom of Religion Acts discussed in dissertation. The success has been achieved largely through appeals to public peace and law and order. Apparently, what is good for the states is not good for the whole of the country.

The outcome is problematic at a number of levels. First, there is a considerable confusion over the purpose of propagation. The makers of the Constitution seem to recognize an obvious link between propagation and conversion. The arguments that win the day are the arguments that recognize conversion as a primary object of propagation. By implication, at least, conversion is a right. Justice Kailasam recognized this connection explicitly in *Public Prosecutor vs. Ramaswami* case, 1964, speaking for the High Court in Madras. Pertinent Supreme Court decisions, however, seem to run in another direction. That is, the primary purpose of propagation is edification, not conversion. As Justice Ray argued in *Rev. Stainislaus Vs Madhya Pradesh*. This leads to the second observation. On the levels of the Supreme Court and the State Acts it is, in my view, the majority view on conversion and not the minority view, which is being upheld. In other words, the majority community will be much more comfortable with the ideal of propagation for the sake of edification than it will be with propagation for the sake of conversion. Third, at least in the arena of the state Acts, the majority community only enjoys rights not accorded to the minorities, or in the case of Arunachal Pradesh, the non-

indigenous religions. Specifically, there appear to be no limitations placed on re-conversion to Hinduism or on Hindu missionary activity. Indeed, Hindu missionary activity was already recognized as a fact at the time of the framing of the Constitution. Finally, it could be argued, as Christians did in the case of the State Acts, the limitations placed on propagation in the State Acts and upheld by the Supreme Court, are stretched beyond what was intended by the framers of the Constitutions, or beyond the obvious and natural meanings of the words. This is the position taken by the High Court of Orissa with respect to the definition of inducement in the Orissa Act. The same case might be made for the definition of force, and fraud in the State Acts, and for the understanding of the intent of freedom of conscience in Chief Justice Ray's decision to overturn the judgment of the High Court of Orissa.

**Debates on Conversion to
Christianity in India.**

INTRODUCTION

“ Nuns brutally attacked and raped”, “ Christian pastor beaten up severely”, “Church building demolished and burnt”, Hospital being run for the tribals in a remote village ransacked and staff assaulted”, “Bonfires made of Bibles”, “Christian educational institution threatened”, these and many more. The list of savagery is growing-numerically and geographically. No state in India can boast of exclusion from the list. The chain of events does not suggest, by any stretch of imagination, a spontaneous reaction of the local populace but instead a well-planned out and carefully crafted violent campaign with the surreptitious motive to malign and discredit a community.

PRIME MINISTER’S CALL FOR NATIONAL DEBATE ON CONVERSION

One of the fallouts of these happenings is the renewal of the debate on conversion. The Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, after visiting the troubled “Dangs” district in Gujarat incurred serious international condemnation, opposition outrage, minority fears and the Sangh-Parivar wrath as well. He pondered over a while, paused and then announced the need for a national debate on religious conversions.¹ Never has a political chief executive of the Indian nation-state encouraged an all India public debate on conversion in the midst of a tense relationship between the two religious communities. Without clearly spelling out the parameters, the purpose of the debate and the forum for conducting the formal debate, how it was expected that the debate will bear fruit? The Prime Minister even didn’t wait for the report of the National Commission for Minorities, which had conducted on the spot enquiries of violence in Dangs. What will this debate achieve except bitterness? The result will be an exposure of inequalities in Hindu society. The Congress Party dismissed this as a “clumsy attempt to divert attention from the atrocities against the Christians by the Sangh-Parivar of which BJP is an affiliate. However, a national debate over conversions has already taken place in the Constituent Assembly when the right to propagate once religion was explicitly included in the Fundamental Right because the Christian community has specifically stated that propagation of the religion was a sacred duty enjoined in the community by their faith.

¹ “Politics by Other Means”, *India Today*, Jan 25, 1999, p. 28.

Furthermore, Prime Minister's call for national debate on conversions was primarily about conversion from Hinduism, not converting to Hinduism.

National debate on conversion can take place only in an appropriate atmosphere when minority community doesn't feel insecure or threatened.² It was also argued that there is a need for caution, as the subject of a debate could easily become a debatable subject. And with the next semantic twist, a debatable subject becomes a controversial subject. It was argued not long ago that after all a place of worship in Ayodhya was described as a disputed structure, thus, diluting the inhibition in demolishing it. The freedom to do something will be seriously compromised, once it is projected as debatable.³ In this liberalised world, it seems absurd that a government should inquire about the religion that a citizen professes practices and propagates at a given point of time and whether he sticks to the religion of his/her birth or changes it in accordance with the call of his conscience.

STAND OF THE SANGH-PARIVAR

The incidences of violence are sought to be rationalized by the anti-conversionists as a legitimate nationalist reaction to the persisting proselytizing tendency of the church in India. These ideas received a fresh push in the late October 1999, when the Shankaracharya of Puri-Govardhan Peeth, Swami Nischilanada Saraswati opined that the visit of Pope John Paul – II to India would be a victory for the forces aiming to convert India into a Christian nation by the end of 2000 A.D.⁴ Further, from the soil of Hindu majority India, the Pope gave a call for evangelizing Asia. As the first millennium witnessed the Christianisation of Europe and the second the evangelization of Africa, the Pope hoped that there would be a harvest of faith in Asia in the coming millennium.

The Hindutva ideologues reiterate the fact that the tribals are originally Hindus who have been induced to convert to Christianity by Christian missionaries either by

² Achin Vanaik, "Step back, Christian Soldier", *Telegraph* (Calcutta), 8th Nov. 1999..

³ Rev. Valson Thampu "Debate Not Now", *The Hindu*. January 26, 1999.

⁴ Dilip Disouza, "Poverty in Conversion Debate", *Seminar* 485, January 2000, p.42.

force or by fraudulent means. In other words, most of the converts have been victims of threats, allurements, financial stringency, ignorance, deception and persecution. The Christian missionaries propagated that the tribals have distinct animistic faith different from Hinduism and are going to be devoured by majoritarian Hinduism are deliberately made to inject a sense of fear and hatred in the minds of tribals for the Hindus. According to the Sangha-Parivar, to legitimise their stand, Christian missionaries have invented theories like Aryan-Dravidian controversy. It was due to malicious propaganda of the missionaries that the Britishers accepted the logic of their viewpoint as was reflected in the directives to census commissioners in 1881 (first census) to enlist the tribals as separate religious community from the Hindus due to their animistic faith. However interestingly the reactions of some of the census commissioners put a nail to the lie of such assertions. To quote S. A. Banes, the census commissioner in 1891: 'The distinction between the tribal people who were Hinduised and those who followed their tribal form of religion is futile because every stratum of Indian Society is saturated with animistic conception but little raised above those which predominate in the early state of religious development'.⁵ The Hindus who had gladly given asylum to the Jewish wanderers, the exiled Parsis and persecuted Christians found themselves victims of proselytisation by Christians. A BJP Rajya Sabha member, Dilip Singh Judeo – a great believer in Christian Conspiracy thesis claimed that 4.5 lakhs Hindus are being converted to Christianity each year.⁶

Very often Sangh-Parivar ideologues juxtapose the names of Gandhiji, Swami Vivekananda, and Mother Teresa etc. to buttress their stand. Gandhiji once opined 'if I had power and could legislate, I should certainly stop them proselytising'.⁷ For a believer of a Christian conspiracy thesis, Christian charity is conditional. This thing was also endorsed by Niyogi report in Madhya Pradesh. Any charity that is based on condition is not a charity in the real sense of the term. Recently the Vatican City has moved to canonise Mother Teresa by recognising a miracle in which a cancer victim Monica Besra was cured at the 'Missionaries of Charity' order after a picture of Mother Teresa was

⁵ *Census of India Report 1891*, Vol.1, p.158.

⁶ B.K. Roy Burman, "The Other Side of Conversion", *Mainstream*, February 13, 1999 p.7.

⁷ *Harijan*, May 11.1935.

placed on her abdomen.⁸ But the fact was that she had been receiving treatment in Government Hospitals. Supporting the Doctors, the former health Minister of West Bengal Partho Dey, during his tenure the woman was treated, said Besra was medically cured. Coinciding to this, another controversy has erupted with the nomination of a Polish missionary Marian Zelazek, the Puri-based Father, for the Nobel peace prize. The Hindutva ideologue started criticising the nefarious intention of the western Christian world for nominating Puri-based Father. They are of the opinion that how a person working for leprosy patients on a very limited scale can foster world peace and is nominated for Nobel peace prize. So the time has come to reject the award of Nobel on persons not working in their own soil.

Hindutva ideologues are of the view that there is no reason for the Christian missionaries to come to poor India when at home there are millions of deprived and destitute Christian brothers. They should not be so much concerned about caste discrimination in India while uncaring for Black and Red Indian Christians being discriminated on the basis of race in their own countries. Here the motive is nothing but conversion via deceitful propagation of their religious tenets. Jesus Christ didn't want to find a new religion. He wanted to expunge the excrescence in Judaism. A few hundred years after his death, a creed, a cult and a church were built around him to be known as Christianity. It made little headway until the fourth century when the Roman emperor Constantine was converted to it in return for which he was conferred by the Church, the divine right to rule. Thus was forged an official relationship between the Christian religion and royalty. Broadly speaking for an on-looker Christian institutions are the embodiment of sympathy, love and selfless service for humanity. But all that glitters are not gold.

For the votaries of Hindutva, conversion may pose a threat to national security. Recent example is that of East Timor. The tribals in that area were first converted to Christianity, then encouraged to demand and fight for secession and have now been encouraged to secede. In the same light, they see the formation of Nagaland. For them

⁸ *Guardian*, October 2, 2002.

Christian missionaries engineer all the violence that is going on in Naga Hills. Behind the demand for the formation of the Jharkhand state in Bihar, the desecration of ancient Hindu temples in Kerala, the problem created at the Vivekananda Rock memorial premises in Kanyakumari, etc, the corruptive role of Christian missionary can hardly be belittled.

According to S. R. Goel, the element of militancy is inbuilt in the psychology of the Church, which signifies the organised form of Christianity. The term Church has its origin in the Greek word '*kuros*' which means mighty. It is to be further noted that even this Greek word has been derived from the Sanskrit word '*shoora*' which means 'a warrior'.⁹ After making a critical examination of the activities of the Church over a period of time, Dr. J.C.Kumarappa, an eminent Christian and a reputed Gandhian economist once opined that 'the western army has four arms-the Infantry, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Church'. Joseph Stalin was of the opinion that Church has an invisible Army which acted as 'sappers and miners' of the Western power blocs.¹⁰ To say that the Christian missionaries are not involved in politics is far from truth. This was proved way back in 1962, on the eve of third general election when 16 Bishops and Archbishops of Kerala issued a pastoral letter to their followers to oppose Communists. Criticising this letter, the then Prime minister of India, Pandit Nehru depicted that the recent pastoral letter on elections was dangerously near interference in politics. Before this "Ecumenical study conference for East Asia" which was held in Lucknow in 1952 gave a clarion call to the Church not to involve in political matters. The third assembly of "World Council of Churches" held in 1961 at Delhi, amended the definition of the freedom of Religion as enshrined in Article-25 of Indian Constitution. Their definition was as follows- 'It includes freedom to practice religion or belief, whether by performance of acts of Mercy or by the expression in word or deed of the implications of belief in social, economic and political matter, both domestic and international.'¹¹

⁹ S.R.Goyal, "Genesis and History of Politics of Conversion", in D.Swarup(ed) *Politics of conversion*, (Delhi, : Deen Dayal Research Institute ,1986), p. 50.

¹⁰ B. P. Shukla. *What Ails India's North -East*, (Delhi: Suruchi Sahitya, 1999), p.27,34.

¹¹ Ibid., p.67.

The Hindutva ideologues argue that since a deep-rooted conspiracy is in vogue against the Hindus, the need of the hour is (i) debate on this matter. One needs to examine the activities of Christian missionaries more closely. Hindutva organisations endorse this idea by saying if the Christian missionaries have nothing to hide then, why are they so apprehensive about the debate? (ii) The converts those who have “gone astray” must be brought back to their home that’s to Hinduism. This “Home-Coming” or the “Renaissance of Conscience’ will help in restoring the pure Hindu essence devoid of “alien elements” or the non-Indic religions or from the communities having extraterritorial loyalties.¹²

Thus it seems pertinent to deduce the following conclusion from the arguments mentioned above by the votaries of Hindutva ideology:-

1. Tribals with their animistic faith are originally Hindus because Hinduism itself was animism more or less transformed by philosophy-that no sharp line of demarcation could be made between Hinduism and Animism as the one shaded away insensibly into the other.
2. Christianity in India is figured out as an alien culture whose sole motive is proselytization either by the use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means. This appears to be a part of their uniform world policy to revive Christendom for reestablishing Western supremacy.
3. Huge amount of foreign money is coming to our country for Missionary work, comprising educational, medical and evangelical activities. It was out of such funds received from abroad that Christian missionaries are luring the innocent, ignorant and poverty-stricken masses.
4. Christianity in India is apprehended to be relying heavily on the Western Christian countries for their ideological orientation and future course of action.
5. Indian Christians are largely conceived as the new converts from the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.
6. By deliberately and systematically launching vile propaganda against the Hindus, Christian missionaries are trying to cultivate the thought of a separate nationality

¹² .Ranjit Hoskote. “Conversion and Inversion: The paradox of India’s Present”, *Seminar*-475, March 1999, p.65.

in the minds of the vulnerable sections of the society thereby instigating them to take recourse to all kinds of means to achieve their ends.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE CLAIMS OF HINDUTVA

For a believer of Christian faith, a close and careful analysis of the aforesaid arguments reveals the problematic nature of the premises upon which the arguments of right-wing extremists rest. Tribals are originally Hindus is patently erroneous as one is clearly defined in an early description of the “Geography of India”. The Adivasis are animists who have for centuries enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with nature. They are tolerant people, respectful and reverential towards other religions. So a great deal of lifestyles and practices are borrowed from their non-tribal neighbours and assimilated quite quickly. However this shouldn't be confused with mainstream religion that is Hinduism. For instance consider the fact that the deity at the famous ‘Bhadrachalan temple’ in Andhra Pradesh is called Kodandarama. It is a black figure and as legend has it was the local presiding deity of the ‘Koya’ tribe who still inhabit in this forest region. Over centuries it has assimilated itself into Hindu religions and is now considered a version of Lord Rama. Similar interpretations abound regarding various other deities who are considered central to the Hindu believers including lord Jagannath of Puri.

Since the first Census of independent India in 1951, all those whose religion was designated as “animism”, “naturism” or “tribal” in the British Indian Census till 1931 became Hindus at one stroke. Infact, aborigines can't be considered as Hindus until they themselves acknowledge that they are Hindus and that they are willing to be considered members of the Hindu society. Arbitrary manipulation of census figures can't by itself convert tribals into Hindus. Acceptance of a few Hindu social and religious customs in certain places, unless they are accepted as a part of a Hindu law doesn't imply the acknowledgement by those aborigines that they have become Hindus. Even though G.S.Ghurye was of the opinion that the so-called animists or aborigines are best described as ‘Backward Hindus’ but it is an undisputed fact of modern physical

anthropology that the aborigines of India are racially different from the 'Aryan-Hindus' and the 'Aryan-non-Aryan-Hybrid-Hindus'. There are also some Christian leaders who claim that the tribals are close to Christianity. The Pope John Paul II has said, 'My thoughts turn immediately to the lands of the east. Synod was an affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ. So that Church in Asia might become more worthy of grace offered by the God. Amongst these lands India has special place... all the primitive religions... the animistic religions... are particularly close to Christianity... There is nothing strange that African and Asian animists would become believers in Christ more easily than the followers of great religions of the far-east.'¹³

The Hindu religion, according to Ranjit Hoskote, which manifests itself in the life-world of tribal Indians is the ritual mongering hypocrisy of traders, timber merchants, money lenders, the labour contractors.¹⁴ In the North-East, the process on Hinduisation of tribals, which had started in the 16th century, engulfed the Manipuri and Assamese tribals. By the mid-19 century, the thrust had begun towards the remaining North-Eastern tribes which were attempting to maintain their identity against the ones' taught for Hinduisation. Most tribals rejected outrightly this interference with their religion, culture, economy and society.¹⁵

Forced conversions are a rarity. Laws like that of Madhya Pradesh, convictions under the "State Freedom of Religion Act" are few. It is unimaginable that any person in these days, which committed to a religious belief, can be forced to accept another religion. We have to strain our imagination to conjure a picture of a hapless target of a fierce proselytiser being physically confined, possibly chained, and force-fed his daily dose of new religion. It is undeniable that there have been forced conversions in the past. Leaders of almost every religion have resorted to it, not only leaders of proselytizing religions like Christianity and Islam but also Hinduism. Buddhists and Jains were suppressed by Hindu kings between the sixth and ninth centuries. Buddhists temples were assaulted by Hindu kings and turned into Hindu temple. There is an inbuilt limit to

¹³ Devdutt, "Conversions in Tamil Nadu in a Perspective", in *Alpjan*, A Chronicle of minorities, vol.11, no.4, July-September 2002, p.22.

¹⁴ Op.cit.,no.12, p.67.

¹⁵ Joseph Mathew, *Contemporary Religious Conversions*, (New Delhi : Authors Press, 2001), p.163.

forcible conversions. The historical experience is that neither threat nor blandishment nor banishment nor torture has de-Hinduised the people who profess Hinduism.

Through out the ages, whatever their religion, India has taught the ruler the lesson that religious intolerance leads to political upheaval and religious tolerance to political consolidation. That is why the wise Muslim ruler through a thousand years of history was the one who placed Islamic conversion on the back burner. The British also burnt their fingers through the missionary, which is why the Bible-carrying activities of missionaries act was officially placed on the back-burner, certainly after 1857.¹⁶ The Supreme Court has clarified that if the state has any evidence of forcible conversion, then the state has a legal obligation to undo such conversion through the courts. Indeed, now even individuals and Non-Governmental Organisations have the right to file Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in this regard. What no one has the right to do is to terrorise or assault Christians or anyone else to forcibly keep them within the religion to which they were born.¹⁷ When thousands of Dalit rallyists were braving police repressions and risking their lives by defying the ban, conversion can hardly be called forced.

As for allurements, it is an insult to even the poorest that they should happily forsake the faith of their fathers for the sake of some material gains. Let us assume, for the purposes of argument that Christian missionaries are indeed using a variety of inducements (development assistance, healthcare, education, and sanitation, even chicanery) to win converts for their faith. So what! If a citizen of India feels that his faith hasn't helped him to find peace of mind and material fulfillment, why should he not have the option of trying a different item on the spiritual menu? ¹⁸ Surely, freedom of belief is his/her fundamental right, however ill founded his/her belief might be. And if Hindutva organisations suspect that the conversion was fraudulently obtained, why do they not offer counter – inducements rather than violence. If there are Indians so miserably poor

¹⁶ Op.cit.,no.13, p.19.

¹⁷ Vishal Mangalwadi-Vijay Martis – M.B. Desai – Babu K. Vergese-Radha Samuel, *Burnt Alive, The Staines and the God they loved: Missionaries, Murdered in Manoharpur*, (Mumbai: GLS Publishing, 1999),p. 175.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.191.

and illiterate that handing them a small token of gift is enough to persuade them to profess Christianity, then what is the greater crime? the conversion or the poverty.

According to Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the conversion of Hindus through “force” or “inducements” had increased since Sonia Gandhi became the Congress President because of her Christian identity and foreign origin. But “Mahurkar and Ravel” report shows on the contrary the vigorous re-conversion drive launched by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh since around 1979, among the tribals to fight the Christian missionaries. In 1961, 89.39 per cent of the tribals got themselves returned as Hindus, in 1971, the percentage come down to 87.21 but in 1981, it went up to 87.37 per cent.¹⁹ Further, if at all conversion is taking place either by force or by inducement under the tutelage of miniature sections of Christian community but equating all the Christians with these small fringes is insulting. It will tantamount equating all Hindus with the Sangh-Parivar or expecting all Hindu to be blamed for Babri Masjid demolition

In the analysis of Kalpana Sharma, ‘how can a religious or cultural tradition be described as tolerant (Hindu religion) when it has for centuries as a matter of religious doctrine and social practices legitimized the inhuman oppression and disempowerment of the groups at the base of the “Caste Pyramid”?.... Let Hinduism declare that if and when the Ram Temple will be built, a Dalit will be a priest..... Under Hinduism, a barber’s job is considered unclean and no priest would be seen removing hair from other persons.’²⁰ Why does Hinduism deny the dignity of labour? There is no reason why a single Dalit should still remain a Hindu. What has Hinduism done for them except to cripple and handicap them in every conceivable way. Recently, Shankaracharya of Puri-Govardhan Peeth had promised to build “Swasthika Temples” for lower castes (Sanskritization) and tribals (Hinduisation) who’ll be re-converted to Hinduism.²¹ Since it is the true nature of “home”, it is little wonder that the deprived are always open to models of emancipation. The socio-economic development of the untouchables was not the only or even the major concern of the missionaries when they came to India. Their major concern was the propagation of religion. However their social philosophy and the

¹⁹ Op.cit.,no.6, p.7.

²⁰ Kalpana Sharma, “They have only their Chains to loose”, *The Hindu* (New Delhi) November 11,2001.

²¹ “Keep the Faith”. *The Times of India* (New Delhi) June 7, 2000.

religious convictions soon made the missionaries to involve themselves seriously in a socio-religious criticism of Indian society and in initiating programmes for the upliftment of the most depressed groups in the society--an involvement which became at once an inspiration and a threat to Hindu leaders.²²

Another major area of discrimination is the denial of the reservation status to the Dalits Christians. It is estimated that around 2/3rd of the Indian Christians could be described as Dalits. This community has never been recognised by Indian law as scheduled caste, and therefore being denied access to reservations and also to constitutional protection against caste related atrocities extended to Dalits recognised as Scheduled Castes. In May 1990, the National Front Government amended the "Constitution (Scheduled Caste) order 1950" to include neo-Buddhists in the category of Scheduled Castes. This measure effectively recognised the right to scheduled caste status of those Dalits who had followed Ambedkar's example by converting to Buddhism.²³ Not only this even those scheduled castes who have converted to Sikhism also entitled to preserve their scheduled caste status. It was possible largely due to the revision of paragraph-3 of the constitution (Scheduled Caste order) 1950 arising out of the pressure from the Sikh community. However at that time since the Christian community as a whole had generously given up their claim for political reservation, the matter of reservation for the Christians or Scheduled Castes origin didn't arise.²⁴ As a result of representation and agitation, in those states where the number of Dalits converts to Christianity was politically significant, the state government granted state aids to the converts to Christianity on par with the state aid granted to scheduled castes (Hindus). These states are TamilNadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala etc.

Freedom of faith has always meant freedom to propagate it. Hindus celebrate when Ram Krishna Mission opens branches in the west, we even approve of young

²² Jose Kanaikil, *Christians of Scheduled Castes Origin*, (New Delhi : Indian Social Institute, 1983), p.9.

²³ John Zavas, "Conversion and Assertive Margins: An analysis of Hindu Nationalist Discourse and The Recent Attacks On Indian Christians", *South Asia*, Volume- XXIV, no.2 (2001),p.86 .

²⁴ Op.cit.,no.22, p.15.

westerners joining Hare Krishna Movement, but we don't want Christian missionaries to carry on their work. These organizations are to be found not only in countries where substantial numbers of Hindus reside like Nepal, Trinidad – Tobago, Fiji, Mauritius or South Africa but also in Europe and America. Today, Non Resident Indians have carried Hinduism all over the world. The Christian world has permitted them to practice and profess their faith, by building temples, mosques and gurudwaras, which serve as places of worship. They have also allowed “propagation”, since Swami Vivekananda spoke at the World Parliament of Religions. The ashrams of our better-known god men are full of foreigners, rather than Indians.²⁵

The Sangh-Parivar is using the names of Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagat Singh etc. to buttress their claims. But this was objected to. The objection is not to the use of Vivekananda or Gandhiji, or Bhagat Singh. The point is, that if someone makes a selective use of someone's writing then there is an objection. The objection is to taking passages out of contexts and quoting those as the case may be. The demand is that these passages should be given in contexts and not taken out of contexts. Even Vivekananda once opined –Jesus Christ is not a stranger to us. He belongs to the Eastern world, which is ours. Only India of the East can really understand the Ahimsa-Dharma (Non-violence) of Jesus Christ. Gandhiji has also once opined, he has endeavoured to study the Bible. He considers it as a part of his scriptures. The spirit of the Sermon on the Mount competes almost on equal terms with the Bhagvat Gita for the domination of his heart”. According to Aurobindo: ‘Jesus was the child of the Divine Mother’.²⁶

Since early sixties, sweeping reforms overtook the Catholic Church particularly at the time of Second Vatican Council. Churches embarked on a dialogue with other religions viz. Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism etc. Specific Commissions were set up for a better understanding and interactions with other religions. On 12th March 2000, during a long ceremony full of symbolism at Vatican City, Pope John Paul-II publicly

²⁵Louella Lobo Prabhu, “ Myth and Reality”, *Alpjan*, A Chronicle of Minorities, Vol.II, No.4, July-September 2002. p.31.

²⁶ Op.cit.,no.17. p.205.

acknowledged the church's mistakes. In a historic act of repentance he said, 'we asked forgiveness for the division among Christians, for the use of violence that some Christians used in the service of the truth and for the behaviour of mistrust and hostility sometimes used with regards to followers of other religions'. In their analogy they have the courage to speak the reality. But what about the Hindus? They have been doing injustices over their people since time immemorial and skillfully hiding the reality. Perhaps to err is human but to lie is secular. Though wounded in her soul by the barbarity inflicted on her husband and children, Mrs. Staines refused to allow her mind to be tainted by hate. Her willingness to spontaneously forgive the killers and her prayer that God may touch and liberate their hearts through love has proved incomparably stronger than the forces of hate that consumed her husband and sons.²⁷ Her 13 year old daughter Esther thanked God for her father's love, for the people he treated – people affiliated with leprosy and for finding him worthy to die for Christ.

Even after such terrible trauma, Mrs. Staines is keen to stay on and continue to the work of her husband rather than returning to safety and comfort of life in Australia. It is a mark of the Staine's family's total identification with the local people that they could speak "Santhali". What a refreshing contrast to the ways of Hindu elite who are eager to leave this country for greener pastures and who stash away their wealth in foreign banks. So as a matter of fact, if the question will be of banning the conversions, then the first on the agenda of our cultural police should be to ban the conversion of one's nationality. Even though it was doubtful that Graham Staines, the Australian missionary, who was burnt alive with his two sons was involved in religious conversions but one thing he definitely did he converted the leprosy patients into human beings, for the treatment meted out to them even by their rear and dear ones was worse than that given to animals. If the right-wing extremists are against the work of the missionaries they should create at least one "Mother Teresa" or a "Graham Staines" from among their followers.²⁸ Infact the course for the right-wing extremists to follow is "introspection" and "self reflection".

²⁷ *The Times of India* (New Delhi) April 2, 1999.

²⁸ Op.cit.,no.17, p.177.

To make a sweeping statement that Christian Indians are un-Indian and unpatriotic is to betray insensitivity towards a community, which knows no homeland other than India. In the state of Kerala where Christians received their faith around 52 A.D. from one of Christ's follower St. Thomas, they have been maintaining their Indian heritage for close to two Millennia. Even if, the visit of St. Thomas to the Malabar Coast is contested, there is historical evidence of Christian settlement in third century Kerala. Infact, after thoroughly examining different standpoints with regards to the arrival of St. Thomas to India, A.M.Mundadan opines that 'St. Thomas, the apostle preached, died and was buried in South India.'²⁹ Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru aptly described this missionary Christian is as old as Christianity itself. As for the other charge of being un-patriotic, it is an undisputed fact that Christians never asked for a separate homeland. They gave up the idea of a separate electorates at the time that the constitution was being written and their contributions in the fields of education, sport, social service, health care and the country's defence is overwhelmingly greater their numbers warranted on the demographic map of the country.

As per the data, although Christians account for 2% of our total population, they are directly involved in 20% of our primary education, over 25% of the existing care of orphans and widows; some 30% of all work with the handicapped, AIDS patients and lepers.³⁰ The greatest Indian academic philosopher of this century, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan is a product of the Madras Christian College from where he graduated in 1906. In South India even the most devout Hindus remember with profound gratitude scholars like Rev. Robert Caldwell (1814-1891) for his magnificent 'comparative grammar of the Dravidian of South-Indian family of languages' and Rev. G.U. Pope (1820-1903) for his edition of the "Kural" and of "Tiruvacgam".³¹ In Bengal we remember the literary work of the Baptist missionary William Carey (1761-1834). In the fight for Independence there were many outstanding Christians in the nationalist ranks. Many eminent Christians made an effective contribution to the Constitution. Among them H.C. Mukherjee who was the Vice-President of the Constituent Assembly, M.

²⁹ A.M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India: From the Beginning up to the Middle of the 16th Century*, Vol.I, (. Bangalor: Theological Publications in India,1984) p.64.

³⁰ Ibid., p.180.

³¹ Ibid., p.204.

Ruthuswami, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, the Jesuit priest Jerome D'Souza, Alvas, Joachim and Violet were prominent members . To brand any community as alien or having “extra-territorial loyalty” we are actually abrogating the section 153(B) of the Indian Penal Code which says, ‘who ever by words either spoken or written makes any imputation that any class of people can’t by reason of their being members of any religious group, bear true faith and allegiance to the constitution of India ... shall be punished with imprisonment to 3 years or fine or both’.³²

However, there is also an allegation against the Christian missionaries by the supporters of the Hindutva ideology for engineering tribal rebellion in the North- East. T.K. Oommen and Hunter P.Mabry, however, say these charges are not factually correct. For example, the Nagas and Mizos are predominantly Christian, the Manipuris are largely Hindu and the Arunachalis are mainly Buddhists and Vaishnava Hindu. Yet, greater political autonomy has gained currency among all of them.³³ Another contention of Hindutva ideologue that the missionaries were fuelling separatist tendencies in central India were proved factually fallacious when two tribal states viz, Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh were created under the aegis of the BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the Centre. If the Jharkhand movement was a conspiracy hatched by the missionaries, why did BJP agree to its formation?³⁴ Infact, the political position of the Parivar smacks of electoral opportunism in an area that had earlier been dominated by the RJD. Further if the Sangh Parivar is so bothered about Hindu unity, why is, that its government in Jharkhand has made domicile policy that creates serious cleavages between the tribals and the non-tribals?

In 1960s, thousands of Hindus adopted the Baha’I faith in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. This also sparked furore in Indian society. They came to India as refugee to escape religious persecution at home. They counted only four lakhs at the peak of their expansion. Baha’I can’t be a threat to Hindus or Indians by any stretch of imagination and yet conversion to that faith was not acceptable. In 1981, entire Dalit

³² Op.cit.,no.4. p.43.

³³ T.K.Oommen and Hunter P. Mabry, *The Christian Clergy in India: Social Structure and Social Roles*, Vol.1, (Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2000), p.54.

³⁴, Archana Prasad, “Religion and the Tribal Question: Reflections on the Debate in Central India,” *Alpjan*, A Chronicle of Minorities, Vol.II, No.4, July- September 2002, p.42.

families converted to Islam in a Tamil Nadu village, Meenakshipuram. There was a hue and cry about it which reverberated through the entire country. The Dalits in Meenakshipuram adopted Islam only because of their social situation and because of maltreatment at the hands of the 'Thevars' who are landlords in the area. Yet, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad maintained that Petro-dollars had a hand in these conversions. There was absolutely no evidence available to that effect.³⁵ Apparently frustrated by the inability to get respect and dignity within the Hindu fold, a month later, Uttarkosamangai village in Ramanathapuram metamorphosed into Mohammadiapuram after 150 dalit families converted to Islam.³⁶ Several reasons were put forward by those who protested against this. First, Muslims are a substantial minority. A further increase in their population poses a threat to the nation. Secondly, Muslims are congenital enemies of Hindus because they were responsible for the vivisection or the "Bharat Mata". Third, the presence of the two Muslim states in India's neighborhood poses a threat particularly because one of them is overtly hostile. Most of these factors are not relevant for Christians.

In 1971, India had 14.2 million Christians (2.6% of the population). In 1981, 16.2 million Christians (2.43%), in 1991, 19.6 million (2.3%), 2.18% in 2001 Census-thereby rejecting the claim of Rajendra K. Chaddha that the Christian population had grown

TABLE 3.1 Population Ratio of Different Religions in India

Religion	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991
Hindus	84.98	83.50	82.74	82.65	82.0
Muslims	9.91	10.70	11.2	11.37	2.1
Christians	2.35	2.44	2.60	2.43	2.3
Sikhs	1.74	1.79	1.89	1.97	2.0
Buddhists	0.05	.74	0.70	0.71	0.8
Jains	0.45	0.46	0.47	0.48	0.4
Others	0.52	0.7	.41	0.41	0.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Sources: The Department of Census, Govt. of India

³⁵ Op.cit.,no.15. p.183.

³⁶ *The Hindu*, (New Delhi), October 20,2002.

from 2.53% of the total population of India in 1981 to 2.61% of the total population.³⁷ In any case the Census of India is more reliable than the unofficial observation and reporting. Natural reproduction plus conversion together have not been able to stall that.³⁸ Further, if you make a realistic assessment of the demographic profile of our country shows that, we will find North and West India together comprises 60% of India's populations. But unfortunately as a sorry state of affairs these regions host only 1% of India's Christian population. This inevitably alienates from cultural mainstream. This miniscule population is not crucial as a vote-bank in the world's largest democracy that is India. Even if, it is significant in marginal constituencies, but their electoral advantages are minor as they are eroded by divisions and dissension. Further this small population doesn't in anyway pose a threat to majority status of Hindus.³⁹

This view was further reiterated by T.K.Oommen. To him, Christians in India are not organised into a political party because of two factors. Firstly, their socio-cultural fragmentation based on denomination and language. Secondly, their conscious rejection of separate electorate initially and the subsequent non-communal approach they seem to have adopted in political affairs. Thirdly, their small size and physical dispersion does not equip them to acquire any political clout except in certain regional contexts such as in Kerala and NorthEast.⁴⁰ Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra, pointed out that, the Indian Christian community happens to be the most inoffensive community in the whole of India. For their education, for their medical care, for their religious ministrations and for most of their petty needs, they don't look to government rather they look to the missions. If they were dependent upon the government, they would be required to mobilise, to agitate, educate and organize their masses for effective political action. For without such organization, no government would care to attend to their needs & requirements. If this is the scenario, then why and how conversion is threatening for certain sections of the

³⁷ *Organiser*, October 31, 1999.

³⁸ *Op.cit.*, no.4, p.42.

³⁹ Reviewing of the book "Disputed Mission-Jesuit Experiments and Brahminical knowledge in 17th Century India", by Alban Couto, published in *The Hindu*, November 4, 2001. This portion was extracted from the concluding part of the article.

⁴⁰ For an explication of this thing see: T.K.Oommen and Hunter P. Mabry, " *The Christian Clergy in India: Social Structure and Social Roles*, Vol. I, (Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd, 2000), p.54.

society? Why there is a hate campaign against Christians ? It is threatening for certain groups' because-

Day by day, they are loosing their hold over the civil society, which was earlier their exclusive prerogative.

Their deeply held believes are subject to questions and rejection by insiders. Missionary activity now a days is raising awareness among Dalits, Tribals as well as among the women of their rights, and identity and enabling them to acquire the political power. This threatens to undermine ancient arrangement in which power was conserved with a select upper-caste group.⁴¹

From the economic angle, the untouchables had for a long time served as a cheap labour force in the rural areas as agricultural labourers and menial servants. Large-scale education and economic improvement among the untouchable could lead to social dislocation and demand important changes in the existing social structure and social institutions.⁴²

Despite being a tiny minority, the Parsis are a proud, confident community that has displayed leadership and won applauses in every walk of life. So too the Sikhs. On the contrary large sections of the Sangh- Parivar suffer a sense of insecurity and lack of self assurance which has created in them a minority complex⁴³ The Sinhala majority in Srilanka suffers from a similar complex vis-à-vis the Tamils, who confront them not only in the north and east of the island but in TamilNadu, Malaysia and Singapore as well.

A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

An impartial and unbiased examination of the claims of the Sangh Parivar and the Catholic Church would show that both are religio-political organizations, each trying to

⁴¹ Suguna Ramanathan, "Impact of Conversions on Dalit Identity", in *Social Action*, January- March 2000, Vol.50, no.1, p.53.

⁴² Op.cit.,no.22. p.11.

⁴³ B.G. Verghese. "Question of Conversion", *Politics India*, Vol.III, No.11, May 1999, p.14 .

propagate aggressively its ideology. ⁴⁴ However, critical analysis of both the positions will be meaningless without citing the tabular representation presented by Andrew Wingate where in he has lucidly depicted some of the factors like push, pull and the blocks (which restricts conversion) in Hindu- Christian conversion debate.

⁴⁴ P.B.Menon, "Church of India", *The Hindu* (Open Page), November 14, 2000.

TABLE 3.2. Some Factors in Hindu-Christian Conversion

	Religious/ Theological	Cultural/ Social	Personal/ Psychological	Political, Economic, Institutional
P U S H	Disillusionment with Hindu religion, idol worship etc. openness-lack of commitment. Longing for "peace", not found in rituals. Intellectual quest	Caste oppression. Dislike of Caste system. Wish not to be "left out" as others convert. Oppressiveness of extended family and cultural norms.	Revolt of youth. Dis-ease with life. Loneliness. Fear, guilt, Longing for liberation, a new start. Longing for better future for children. Wish to "be born again" moving to a city, becoming a student.	Economic disability, landlessness, low status. Bonded labour status. Desire for protection
B L O C K S	Power of religion to enforce conformity. Diversity of Hinduism-able to absorb everything.	Family. Decline of marriage prospects. Fear of not being able to take part in funeral rituals. Hinduism as whole way of life. Importance of festivals and life cycle events.	Vast step involved seems too much. Isolation feared.	Losing of economic and educational benefits given to Hindus. Power of local land lords. Caste solidarity, for high castes especially.
P U L L	The person of Jesus "as perfect man" or "God". Centrality of Love. Christian ethics. Healing, dream, religious experience. The bible in general, or a particular passage. Eucharist, baptism. Worship+singing+fellowship+quiet of church. God of Justice.	Social significance of congregation. Wish to marry a Christian. Relatives, fellow caste people, majority in village having become Christian. Egalitarian ideology.	Assurance of forgiveness. Friendship of a leading Christian or pastor. Charismatic leader. Self-lessness of "saintly" Christians, giving a model to follow.	Church schools. Hospitals. Employment opportunities in Christian institutions. Foreign connections. Mission money. Protection of church, bishops, leaders.
B L O C K S	Exclusivity of Christianity. Baptism as deculturisation. The Church in its politics and corruption. Having to give up religious symbols.	Meat eating, alcohol consumption. Westernization of Christianity. Caste in the church. The distinctiveness of "church culture" and language and "customs". Lack of Christian festivals. "Low religion" image of Christianity	Pastor who does not care. Unfriendly and unwelcoming church. Suspicion of 'convert'. Length of training required	Link with "colonialism" "Betraying the nation".

Source: Andrew Wingate, *The Church and Conversion: A study of Recent Conversions to and from Christianity in the Tamil area of South India*; ISPCCK Publication, Delhi (1997), p. 266.

It should also be borne in mind that no civilized country can allow the practice of buying souls by a loaf of bread. Its ethically, morally and legally wrong. It is legally

wrong because Supreme Court in the "Stainislaus case" gave a verdict that propagation of religion doesn't mean right to convert another person to one's religion but to transmit or spread one's religion by an exposition of its tenets. But if everybody has the right to propagate his religion, to spread the word and to communicate it to other human beings, then, it is natural that a person or his audience may change his faith, despite the socio-cultural and sometimes even the familial breaks that it may entail. Change of faith by a person is a logical and reasonable effect of propagation of faith by another. Further, we shouldn't forget that if a loaf of bread is enough to persuade some one to convert to other religion then, the major problem here is poverty and illiteracy, which are needed to be addressed first. It is true that forced conversions are a rarity. But even in these days also forced conversion is taking place. This was proved recently when the Pondichery government has ordered an inquiry into the alleged forced conversion of prisoners into Christianity by the Jail Superintendent of central prison P. David. The prisoners alleged that P. David forced prisoners to convert and allowed propagandist free access to the prison. Those who had agreed to the conversions are said to have received special favour in the prison, a bureaucrat of the state government said ⁴⁵

Moreover, to brand any religion as intolerant just because of the fact that inequality is rampant and caste based oppressions are going on will be erroneous. In reality caste like groupings can also be found in Christianity. In India we find, there are Brahmin Christians and non-Brahmin Christians. Among the non-Brahmin Christians, there are Maratha Christians, Mahar Christians, Bhangi Christians etc. Similarly in the south, there are Pariah Christians, Malla Christians Madiga Christians. They wouldn't inter-marry, they wouldn't inter-dine. In this context Dr. Ambedkar has written that: 'Indian Christians, like all other Indians are divided by race, by language and by caste. Their religion has not been a sufficiently strong unifying force as to make difference of language, race and caste as though they were mere distinctions. On the contrary, their religion that is there only cement is infected with denominational differences. The result is that Indian Christians are too disjointed to have a common aim, to have a common mind and to put a common endeavour'.⁴⁶ Not only India but in most advanced countries

⁴⁵ *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), April 1, 2002.

⁴⁶ D.C. Ahir, *Dr. Ambedkar on Christianity in India*, (New Delhi : Blumoon Books ,1995), p.66.

like the US, people are victims of discrimination. White Americans exploit blacks because Jesus Christ was white. They have noticed Jesus' outer appearance only but have totally forgotten his teachings, which says that helping a human being is the true worship of God.

According to Ambedkar, a true religion is that which consists of the following four characteristics (I) religion must foster morality (II) religion must be in accord with reason and science (III) religion as a code of social morality, must recognise the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity (IV) religion mustn't sanctify of ennobled poverty. After laying down the criteria, Dr. Ambedkar says: is there any religion, which satisfies all these tests? So far as I know, the only religion that satisfies all these tests is "Buddhism". In view of recent conversion to Buddhism, the role of Udit Raj (formerly Ram Raj) can hardly be belittled. But to his critics the real politics behind his role in conversion are needed to be unearthed. His hidden motive is to join in politics after gaining popularity. This was proved to certain extent when UditRaj, the chairman of 'The All India Confederation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has said that the proposed political parties would contest 75 seats in Gujarat Assembly elections, 2002 under the banner of "Save India Front". Addressing a press conference Udit Raj said he was willing to enter into an electoral alliance with the Congress and other like-minded parties in the state.⁴⁷

It is true that the percentage of Christian population is decreasing as per the Census Report, however, this official Report can not be claimed as totally authentic, primarily, for two reasons: Firstly, Census enumerators usually record the religion of the respondents as stated by them. The converts from scheduled caste background often try to report Hinduism as their religion and concealed their Christian identity to continue enjoying the special privileges extended to them on the basis of their Schedule Caste background. Secondly, if a Schedule Tribe or a section of it is not exclusively known to be converted to one of the living religions i.e. Christianity, Islam or Buddhism, Census enumerators invariably list them as Hindu in the Census records.

⁴⁷ *The Hindu* (New Delhi), November 2002.

Another major question that crops up in this debate is whether Christianity has been able to save the converts from the suffering and the ignominy which is the misfortune of the convert for taking birth in his/her previous religion. In reality, in social life the converted Dalits don't get social status equal to the higher caste converts. They are even referred to as Dalit Christian the term if used to refer to them in the Hindu religion, would be considered unpleasant and even objectionable. A look at matrimonial advertisements would show that a converted person of certain caste wanting a spouse of the same caste converted even in the new religion.⁴⁸ The conversion process is not able to bring equality which was promised to the converted Scheduled Castes is obvious when the demands of the Christian leaders that because there are Dalits among them despite centuries of conversion, they too should be entitled to reservations given to Dalits who were subjected to caste-based discrimination in the past in Hinduism. Infact, a change in the social status of the convert can be the result of a twofold change. There must be a change in the attitude of Hindus. Secondly, there must be a change in the mentality of the converts. Despite having distinct religious affiliation, Dalits don't give up their original practices, rituals etc. wholesale but retain selectively as mentioned by Rowena Robinson. Status is a dual matter, a matter inter se between two persons and unless both move from their old positions, there can be no change. Further reformatory steps should be taken at quickly in case of Dalit converts, because passage of time will only create impatience of the Dalits in their new religion with the prejudiced treatment continuing and even getting strengthened as had happened in Hinduism in the course of past centuries of years. But from this we should not deduce the conclusion that for the Church outside the evangelical goals, the Dalit was a non-issue. When the Indian government was determined to block the efforts of the Dalit leaders who wanted to include casteism as racism in the Durban conference, it was the Christian leadership, Church and Christian NGOs who backed the move to include caste in the agenda. Those Christians who supported the Dalits at Durban for equality in India were not seeking any rewards from the Dalits like joining the

⁴⁸ T.R. Anandan, "Is the space of Hinduism Shrinking", *The Hindu* (Open Page) February 26, 2002.

Church but were ready to support them even as they plan to embrace Buddhism.⁴⁹ The denial of reservation to the Dalit Christians is not the issue of Dalit Christians alone rather it is to be considered as an issue of the 300 million Dalits of India.

Untouchability is a very gross form of social disparity in Indian society. But efforts have been underway to remove this malaise from Hindu religion. In 1986, in the presence of senior religious leaders and saints, Shri Kameshwara Chaupal (a Harijan) laid the foundation stone of Ram Janmabhoomi temple at Ayodhya.⁵⁰ Hinduism has produced more saints of high spiritual accomplishment from Non-Brahmin communities. No one including the so-called Brahmans even enquires about the caste of such great saints as Swami Chinmayananda or Swamini Amritnandamayi. Prevention of entry into temples of anyone based on his or her caste has been a punishable offence. Those who raise it as an issue are unaware of the fact that all the famous temples from North to South, like the Kashi, Tirupati, Palani, Rameshwaram, Sabarimala and Guruvayur etc. are open to devotees without any restrictions of caste.

Another issue is the conferment of priesthood to Dalits. It is true that a religious Hindu can't allow a Dalit to be a priest. It's a hard reality to which Hindu community has to accept. But in the present scenario even amongst the so-called Brahmans, very few people volunteer for the job of priesthood. Priests, especially the priests of ordinary temples would seldom earn enough to keep their kitchen fire burning. It is doubtful whether even the Dalits would prefer to enter into the profession of priest given the rigorous daily routines which they are called upon to observe and the pittance of an income they receive with no social security cover available for old age and indigent situation caused by sickness etc.

With reference to the ongoing analysis, we can clearly demarcate some of the crucial push, pull and blocking factors in the debate over Christian- Hindu re-conversion

⁴⁹ Dr. K. Rajaratnam, "Church must launch Dalit liberation struggle & Nazis opposing it", *Dalit Voice*, Vol.21. no.8, April 16-30,2002, pp.18-19 .

⁵⁰ *Clean Answers to Confused Questions*,(New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan,Yugabda 5102(20000, C.E.), p.13.

TABLE 3.3. Some Factors in Christian- Hindu Reversion

	Religious/ Theological	Cultural/ Social	Personal/ Psychological	Political, Economic, Institutional
P U S H	Lack of effective teaching. "Liberation" hopes not fulfilled. Lack of pastoral care. Ineffective, irregular worship. Loss of faith (very rare). Theology of equality.	Being despised as Christians "Harijan" religion. Persecution. Divisions in community. Division in family caused by conversion. Being in a minority	Isolation. Dislocation- moving to city. Quarrels. Guilt at leaving Hinduism. Disillusion after reversal of healing or other experience.	Loss of benefits, Unemployment, Church institutions unable to provide all. Church politics. Casteism in church. Western church.
B L O C K S	Commitment to Christ Eucharist. Baptism promises. Original conversion story. Good teaching or pastoral care. Fear of apostasy.	Church community membership. Christmas.	Fear of guilt. Fear of Parents/family/ pastor. Loyalty. Fear of punishment from evil spirits, etc.	Losing benefits of Christian institutions. Christian education.
P U L L	All absorbing Hindu theology. Reform of Hinduism. Activity of Arya Samaj Mutts etc. "Casteless" Hinduism. Jesus can be kept. Karma doctrine.	Caste links to Hindu colleagues. Marriage to fellow caste person. Village festivals. Common meals and socialising. "Religion of forefathers". Sharing in life cycle events.	Guilt at betraying Hinduism. Family pressure. Not much expected from Hinduism,	Gaining benefits. Better future for children BJP/ Nbnationalism propaganda.
B L O C K S	Contempt for "Idols". Village Hinduism. Caste distinctions in temples and priesthood. Caste as theologically justified in Hinduism.	Oppressive ways of "Brahminism" or significant Shudra castes. Untouchability.	Difficulty of going back to what you have left. Betrayal feeling involved in Suddhi ceremony.	Political stridency of right wing Hinduism.

Source: Andrew Wingate, *The Church and Conversion: A study of Recent Conversions to and from Christianity in the Tamil area of South India*; ISPCK Publication, Delhi (1997), p. 266.

Indian Christians are primarily perceived as the new converts from lower castes and Schedule Tribes. But this notion is far from the truth. Indian Christians come from four major sources. First, pre-colonial Christians of Kerala who converted as individuals and families. They largely belong to upper castes and local landed aristocracy. Second, those who embrace Christianity in North and South India through mass movements mainly from lower castes and tribes of central India during the colonial period. Third, those who are products of miscegenation: the Anglo-Indians and Indo-Portuguese population.

Fourth, those who embraced Christianity after India became independent, the tribes of northeast India.⁵¹

Conversion is not a change of nationality, rather it is a notional change which by definition indicates a radical and conceptual change, a change in one's philosophical outlook an ideological change, a total revolutions change in one's social philosophy". It shouldn't be forgot that change of religion is a human right if resorted to in search of other basic human rights: dignity, respect, equality, food, shelter, education, health etc. The debate on conversion, if one goes back to a not very distant past, has been going on for more than a century now. However, its contours have changed in the past centuries. With the ascent of the Hindu, the Muslim communalist forces and the exclusivist Christian groups, the debate over conversion has been taking place in demographic terms. If the Muslim and Christian communal groups have over the years spread the message that the Muslim and Christian population is beneficial for Muslims and Christians respectively as it ensures a better bargaining positions, the Hindu communalists from the early decade of the century have been giving the alarm of declining number of Hindus.

⁵¹ Op.cit..no.17, p.188.

Conclusion

If one faith believes in harvesting souls like Christianity and another faith doesn't go in for evangelism on any significant scale like Hinduism, secularism enjoins equal respect for both the positions. Christianity, unlike Hinduism, is an open missionary religion. The Latin word 'missio' means sending forth. Christ was sent forth by his Heavenly father into the world. The disciples were commissioned and sent forth to the ends of the earth by a risen and ascended Christ. However, the existence of missionary Christian in our country is as old as Christianity itself. The historically accepted tradition is that in 52 AD Thomas Didymus, one of Christ's 12 apostles landed in Kerala and founded seven Churches there. Most of his converts were high caste people of Kerala and are also known as St. Thomas Christians. It's to the St. Thomas Christians that the Syrian Christians community in India traces its descent.

Even though Hinduism doesn't go in for evangelism on any significant scale but its adherents are also many. This is largely due to its propagation though intensity is lesser than Christian missionary evangelism as is shown in the analysis in third chapter. Further, if at all Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are all branches of Hindu Sanatana Dharma as is very often proclaimed by the Hindutva ideologues, then, we can safely observe that religious propagation is inherent in these religious traditions as is discussed in the first chapter.

The popular notion is that Hinduism does not convert because it is benignly tolerant and integrates new practices. But the reality says otherwise. Conversion implies an entry into a new community that (theoretically, at least) promises equality (as Islam, Christianity and Buddhism do). Hinduism in its very essence is based on difference and hierarchy because of the existence of the caste system at its core. One can not convert on an equal footing into an essentially pyramidal, hierarchical structure. One can only join on whatever level of the social/caste pyramid one already belongs to. So, Hinduism does not integrate new cultures and practices, rather it aggregates and assimilates these practices in order to absorb the labour of different groups. In India, Dalits in remote areas are not allowed to step into temples. They cannot use common wells. They are forced to live on the outskirts of towns. Strangely, while on the one hand, Dalits are untouchables,

at the same time, their women folk become victims of sexual exploitation. Cases of physical violence are quite common. Recently five Dalits were lynched for skinning a dead cow in Jhajjar, Harayana.

For those outside the Brahminical tradition in India, Hindu 'hierarchical relativism' is experienced as deeply oppressive, not only in its caste expression, but also in its resistance to criticism. This does not mean, of course, that change is not possible; but, rather, that those who have initiated change have had to step out of Hindu mainstream. The Buddha and Buddhist monasticism, Jain vegetarianism and non-violence, local tribal deities and religious myths have all suffered the same absorption. Here it seems that particularity, difference and critique are swallowed up in a suffocating universalism.¹

Indian Constitution guarantees not just equality for all religions, but also the equal right for every citizen to carefully deliberate with his own conscience and make the right choice. Sometimes when a person hears another who speaks about the virtues of his religion and the advantages following it, he is persuaded to be converted. In other words, propagation of religion with a view to its being accepted by a person gives an opportunity to the later to exercise his right to choose his religion. Hence, the prevention of conversion infringes the right to be converted or choose another religion and thereby infringes his/her freedom of conscience.

However, the Sangh-Parivar ideologues argue that the personal freedom to change one's religion voluntarily has not been taken away by the law made against forcible conversion. It only seeks to check unethical means, if, any, employed in bringing about a change of heart. In almost all the anti-conversion laws, the essence of the words like force, allurement, fraud etc. are identical. Almost all the Anti-Conversion laws define the term force as, 'a show of force or a threat of injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure or social excommunication.' One fails to understand how people belonging to

¹ Vinoth Ramachandra, *Faiths In Conflict ? Christian Integrity In a Multicultural World*, (Secunderabad: O.M. Books 2000)p.121.

certain faith can socially ex-communicate persons outside their fold for their refusal to convert. However, the crucial question Dalit activists raise is, 'if people cannot be forced to renounce their religion, can the state force people to remain in the religion they were born into.' When any citizen is not given the right to offer worship in Hindu temples, the government has no authority to force him/her to remain in Hinduism. But what sounds really ominous is the phrase threat of divine displeasure. What this means is, if a Christian or a Muslim clergyman preaches to the people of other faiths that wrongful acts are a sin, he can be charged with using 'force' and imprisoned. Divine displeasure is an inherent part of the teaching of all religions, including Hinduism, and it is impossible to propagate a religion without warning people against it to discourage them from committing sinful acts. By the term allurements and fraudulent means, the laws probably envisage only monetary benefits but should not the promise of a fabulous life in heaven or a nirvana after death be considered an allurements?

Voluntary change of faith prompted by spiritual motives, no body objects. This type of conversion, which is due to conviction, is perhaps the best method of conversion. There the conviction is dictated from within the individual self. It is a sort of inner transformation – a change of heart and mind. No religion however tolerant, can afford to look on unconcerned when it is denounced by propagandists of other faiths as false and its adherents are seduced by all sorts of questionable means. One would have had no problem with religious groups providing material services to the needy out of a spirit of genuine concern and sympathy, but if these are simply a clever ruse to reap a rich harvest of converts then it makes a complete mockery of all protestations of charity. But if we put stress on our commonsensical knowledge, then we will find that the variety of inducements that the Christian missionaries are providing, predominantly in the nature of development assistance, health care, education, etc. and if these inducements are capable enough to win converts, then the issues which necessitate urgent attention and its redressal are poverty and illiteracy of our underprivileged brethren. Further, to believe in the idea that conversion is taking place due to force by an insignificant minority is nothing but intellectual bankruptcy. Can this miniscule population of our country dare to use force to achieve conversion of the majority? If at all, they are using force then it is purely the

issue of law and order for which state has to play a vigilant role. It is undeniable that there have been forced conversions in the past. Leaders of almost every religion have resorted to it, not only by leaders of proselytizing religions like Christianity and Islam but also Hinduism.

Christians undoubtedly receive large donations for education, health and social welfare. So too, do the NGOs and possibly the Organisations affiliated to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, too. When funds come legitimately, the recipient has to be registered with the Home Ministry; answerable to the donor agency for the use of the funds. Those who make wild and vague charges about institutions which are seemingly awash with funds should make specific charges and bring these to the notice of the Home or Finance ministry or the Catholic Bishops.

After nearly two thousand years of being integrated with the Indian scenario (the Apostolic tradition of St. Thomas), Christians today are less than three percent of the population, a figure which does not suggest that Christianity was propagated by force or fraud. The Portuguese style of conversion was confined to Goa, for a short period. In a sense, after the defeat of the Mughals, Christianity may be deemed to become a paramount power. However, the merchants of the East India Company were only interested in trade. When British took over the administration of India, following Queen Victoria's proclamation, missionaries formed a minor part of their Indian establishment. Infact, the colonial state accounts for only a small section of Indian Christians. It is of great relevance to note here that the proselytisation project facilitated by the British colonial state could have only increased the population size of Protestant Christians in India. But the fact is that 50 percent of Indian Christians are Catholics and the remaining half include not only Protestants but also several other denominations.

So can Christianity one day become a majority religion in India? Or we completely eliminate Christianity from our soil to establish Hindu Rashtra? If no, then why are there such hate campaigns and virulent attacks against this miniscule population? There are several reasons for this which is as follows: (1) Christians are a small and

electorally insignificant minority in most part of the country and thus a convenient target. Adverse foreign reactions have so far been neutralised and contained by the claim that these are, not being riots. (2) Another argument based on electoral politics is that the campaign against Christian community is a part of an elaborate attempt to discredit Sonia Gandhi, the President of Congress Party. Mrs. Gandhi being both Christian and an Italian by birth possesses an identity which is naturally vulnerable to Hindu nationalist criticism. (3) Some analysts have feel that attacks on Christians as the continuation of a strategy which targets minorities as a straight forward means of mobilizing and consolidating the Hindutva electoral base. (4) In the analysis of Christophe Jaffrelot, after the destruction of the Babri Masjid, the Sangh Parivar's highly successful campaign, around the temple-mosque issue in Ayodhya began to lose momentum.² Attacks on Christians have emerged to fill the void created by this latent end, so that the goals of Hindu Rashtra will be kept alive – an absolutist state based on single religion with which the state is to be fully and exclusively identified³ and the cadres will be fed notions of superiority. (5) Despite Swadeshi rhetoric, Sumit Sarkar notes that concessions to multi-nationals have gone ahead at an unprecedented speed under BJP rule.⁴ In this context attacks on Christians emerge as a symbolic means of resisting the foreign hand and so reaffirming the indigenous credentials of Hindu communalism. (6) Missionary activities are gradually raising awareness among Dalits, tribals as well as among the women of their rights and identity and enabling them to acquire political power. The reasoning is that conversion undermines the caste system and at the same time disturbs the rural economic system of India, in which high caste landowners exercise tight control over lower castes. In this scenario, conversion is seen as threat not only to the caste system but also the economic interests of landowners and therefore opposed by Hindu leaders. (7) Furthermore, it is argued that conversion was used by the Hindu fundamentalist as part of deliberate attempt to undermine the Christian community. The problem initially arose when the

² C. Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalist in India*, (London :Hurst and Co, 1996), pp .489-99.

³ Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside The Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*, (Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1998), p. xi.

⁴ Sumit Sarkar, "Hindutva and the questions of conversions "in K.N Panikar, (ed) *Of Concerned Indians Guide to Communalism*, (New Delhi: Viking Publications, 1999),pp. 98-9.

Hindu fundamentalist organization sought political support from tribal areas, which necessitated displacing the considerable Christian influence on tribals. Later the issue of conversion was used as a retaliation against the secular position taken by several Christian organizations in the face of Parivar politics. (8) Further, Hindus and Christians hold conflicting conceptions and definitions of conversion, which put them at loggerheads. It is argued that Hindu's see conversion in sociological and political terms, while Christians view it in theological terms. Hindu's feel threatened by Christian campaigns of conversion because of their historical experience with colonial power, which causes them to interpret even the spiritual conversion, which Christians declare to be their concern, as socio-political in nature.⁵

Even though, these unseemly rash of attacks are taking place time again, no effort has been made to facilitate speedy inquiries and bring the miscreants to book. Rather those in power are busy in digging cricket pitches, damaging cinema halls, dictating the people what to eat and what not to wear? What we need now is not only a set of just laws, which would respect and treat every individual and communities equally, but also the mechanism and the political will to implement such laws. Creating a conducive atmosphere that would enable every man and woman irrespective of their identities, to enjoy such freedom is the most important aspect.

There is an urgent need to fill the vacuum in the parliamentary democracy with a just, egalitarian ethos and the ideology of governance and human welfare. It is high time for the empowerment and emancipation of the Dalits, the tribals and the minorities and the protection of their rights. So that they would feel proud of being born in India which has earned glory for its rich heritage and multicultural ethos Protection of religious rights is but a necessary condition of democracy. It is time also for national, international solidarity to uphold not just freedom of religions but the right of everyone to have a life with dignity and exercise of his/her conscience freely.

⁵ Sebastian C .H. Kim. *In Search of Identity: Debates on Religious Conversion in India.*(New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 4-5.

It will be more appropriate to say that no religion is bereft of lofty ideals, nor is any religion bereft of outmoded codes. Only a religion that resolutely emerges from the shackles of old principles and yields place to new ideas and principles in consonance with the modern values can contribute to progress. Whatever is high and noble in any religious tradition should be accepted, and whatever separates man from man should be rejected. Humanity's best spiritual resources are to be rallied to help resolve the crisis of our times. If the nation is the territory demarcated by common consent with political boundaries, then, the people within those boundaries constitute the nation. The majority can't arrogate to itself the right to define that nation in terms of its own religion and culture, nor can it deny to any of its citizens their Constitutional rights.

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Appendices

The following are the sources for appendices:

1. Summary of Recommendations of the Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee (Niyogi Report)

Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee, vol 1 (Nagpur. Government printing, Madhya Pradesh 1956.

2. The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967.

In the Orissa Gazette, Extraordinary, No. 28, dated January 11, 1968. Orissa Act 2 of 1968

3. The Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam, 1968
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Madhya Pradesh Rajpatra (Asadharan), dated 6 Sept-1968, page, 1391.

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5. Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Bill, 2002

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APPENDIX I

Summary of Recommendations of the Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee (Niyogi Report)

The following is a summary of the recommendations which we have made:-

1. Those missionaries whose primary object is proselytization should be asked to withdraw. The large influx of foreign Missionaries is undesirable and should be checked (Paragraph 72, Chapter II, Part IV, Volume I).
2. The best course for the Indian Churches to follow is to establish a United Independent Christian Church in India without being dependent on foreign support (Paragraph 76 *ibid*).
3. The use of medical or other professional services as a direct means of making conversions should be prohibited by law (Paragraph 82 *ibid*).
4. To implement the provision in the Constitution of India prohibiting the imparting of religious education to children without the explicit consent of parents and guardians, the Department of Education should see that proper forms are prescribed and made available to all schools (Paragraph 86 *ibid*.)
5. Any attempt by force of fraud, or threats of illicit means or grants of financial or other aid, or by fraudulent means or promises, or by moral and material assistance, or by taking advantage of any persons inexperience or confidence, or by exploiting any person's necessity, spiritual (mental) weakness or thoughtlessness, or, in general, any attempt or effort (whether successful or not), directly or indirectly to penetrate into the religious conscience of persons (whether of age or underage) of another faith, for the purpose of consciously altering their religious conscience or faith, for the purpose of consciously altering their religious conscience or faith, so as to agree with the ideas or convictions of the proselytizing party should be absolutely prohibited (Paragraph 87 *ibid*).
6. Religious institutions should not be permitted to engage in occupations like recruitment of labour for tea gardens (Paragraph 88 *ibid*).
7. It is the primary duty of Government to conduct orphanages, as the State is the legal guardian of all minors who have no parents or natural guardians (Paragraph 89 *ibid*).
8. Government should issue an appeal to authoritative and representative Christian Missionary Organisations and to Christian individuals to come together and to form an authoritative

organization which should lay down and inform the Government in clear terms the policy which the Missions and Christians in general will follow in respect of propagating their religion. The methods to be followed in conversions, the type of propaganda which will be promoted and the attempts which will be made to confine their evangelistic activities within the limits to public order, morality and healthy (Paragraph 90 *ibid.*).

9. An amendment of the Constitution of India may be sought, firstly to clarify that the right of propagation has been given only to the citizens of India and secondly that it does not include conversion brought about by force, fraud or other illicit means (Paragraph 91 *ibid.*).
10. Suitable control on conversions brought about through illegal means should be imposed. If necessary, Legislative measures should be enacted (Paragraph 92 *ibid.*).
11. Advisory Boards at State level, regional level and district level should be constituted of non-officials, minority communities like Tribals and Harijans being in a majority on these boards (Paragraph 93 *ibid.*).
12. Rules relating to the registration of Doctors, Nurses and other personnel employed in hospitals should be suitably amended to provide a condition against evangelistic activities during professional services (Paragraph 95 *ibid.*).
13. Circulation of literature meant for religious propaganda without approval of the State Government should be prohibited (Paragraph 96 *ibid.*).
14. Institutions in receipt of grants-in-aid or recognition from Government should be compulsorily inspected every quarter by officers of the Government (Paragraph 97 *ibid.*).
15. Government should lay down a policy that the responsibility of providing social services like education, health, medicine, etc., to members of scheduled tribes, castes and other backward classes will be solely of the State Government, and adequate services should be provided as early as possible, non-official organizations being permitted to run institutions only for members of their own religious faith (Paragraph 98 *ibid.*).
16. A separate department of Cultural and Religious affairs should be constituted at the State level to deal with these matters which should be in charge of a Minister belonging to a scheduled caste, tribe or other backward classes and should have specially trained personnel at the various levels (Paragraph 99 *ibid.*).
17. No non-official agency should be permitted to secure foreign assistance except through Government channels (Paragraph 100 *ibid.*).

18. No foreigner should be allowed to function in a scheduled or a specified area either independently or as a member of a religious institution unless he has given a declaration in writing that he will not take part in politics (Paragraph 100 *ibid.*).
19. Programmes of social and economic uplift by non-official or religious bodies should receive prior approval of the State (Paragraph 100 *ibid.*).

B.P.Pathak (Member- Secretary), M.B. Niyogi (Chairman), Ghanshyam Singh Gupta (Member), S.K. George (Member), Ratanlal Malviya (Member), Bhanu Pratap Singh (Member)

APPENDIX II

The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act,1967.

(The following Act of Orissa Legislative Assembly having been assented to by the Governor on 9 January 1968, was published

in the Orissa Gazette, Ext., No. 28, dated January 11, 1968.)

Orissa Act 2 of 1968

An Act to provide for prohibition of conversion from one religion to another by the use of force or inducement or by fraudulent means and for matters incidental thereto.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Orissa in the Eighteenth Year of the Republic of India, as follows:

1. Short title extent and commencement. —
(1) This Act may be called the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967.
2. It shall extend to the whole of the State of Orissa.
3. It shall come into force at once.

Note:

Objects:- Conversion in its very process involves an act of undermining another's faith. The process becomes all the more objectionable when this is brought about by recourse to methods like force, fraud, material inducement and exploitation of one's poverty, simplicity and ignorance. Conversion or attempts to conversion in the above manner, besides creating various maladjustments in social life, also gives rise to problems of law and order. It is, therefore, of importance to provide for measures to check such activities, which also indirectly impinge on the freedom of religion. The Bill seeks to achieve the above Objectives "Vide Statement of Objects and Reasons" printed in the Orissa Gazette, Ext., No. 1592, dated December 13, 1967.

2. Definitions.- in this Act unless the context otherwise requires —
(a) "conversion" means renounce one religion and adopting another;

(b) "force" shall include a show of force or a threat of injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure or social ex communication;

(e) "fraud" shall include misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance;

(d) "inducement" shall include the offer of any gift or gratification, either in cash or in kind and shall also include the grant of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise;

(e) "minor" means a person under eighteen years of age.

3. Prohibition of forcible conversion. - No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise. any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion.

4. Punishment for contravention of the provisions of section 3.- Any person contravening the provisions contained in section 3 shall without prejudice to any civil liability, be punishable with imprisonment of either description which may extend to one year or with fine which may extend to five thousand rupees or with both:

5. Offence to be cognizable. - An offence under this Act shall be cognizable and shall not be investigated by an officer below the rank of an Inspector of Police.

6. Prosecution to be made with the sanction of District Magistrate.. No prosecution for an offence under this Act shall be made without the sanction of the Magistrate of the District or such other authority, not below the rank of a Sub-divisional Officer, as may be authorised by him in that behalf.

7. Power to make rules.- The State Government may make rules for the purpose of carrying o the provisions of this Act.

APPENDIX III

The Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam, 1968

No.27 of 1968

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sections

1. Short title, extent and commencement.
2. Definitions.
3. Prohibition of forcible conversion.
4. Punishment for contravention of the Provisions of section 3.
5. Intimation to be given to District Magistrate with respect to conversion.
6. Offence to be cognizable.
7. Prosecution to be made with the sanction of District Magistrate.
8. Power to make rules.

(Received the assent of the Governor on the 9 October, 1968; assent first Published in the “Madhya Pradesh Gazette” Extraordinary, dated the 211 October, 1968”)

An Act to provide for prohibition of conversion from one religion to another by the Use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means and for matters incidental thereto.

Be it enacted by the Madhya Pradesh Legislature in the Nineteenth Year of the Republic of India as follows:

Note:

It is observed that large scale conversions are taking place mostly among the Adiwasis and persons belonging to other backward classes of the State. The illiteracy and poverty of the people is exploited and promises of monetary, medical and other aid are given to allure them to renounce their religion and adopt another religion. The Bill seeks to prohibit such conversions by use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means. (Statement of Objects and Reasons published in M.P. Rajpatra (Asadharan), dated 6-9-68 page, 1391.)

1. Short title, extent and commencement

- (1) This Act may be called the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam, 1968.
- (2) It shall extend to the whole of the State of Madhya Pradesh.
- (3) It shall come into force at once.

2. Definitions.- In this Act unless the context otherwise requires, -

- (a) “allurement” means offer of any temptation in the form of—
 - (i) any gift or gratification either in cash or kind;
 - (ii) grant of any material benefit, either monetary or otherwise;
- (b) “conversion” means renouncing one religion and adopting another;
- (c) “force” shall include a show of force or a threat of injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure or social ex-communication;
- (d) “fraud” shall include misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance;
- (e) “minor” means a person under eighteen years of age.

3. Prohibition of forcible conversion.. –

No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion.

4. Punishment for contravention of the provisions of section 3.- Any person contravening the provision contained in section 3 shall, without prejudice to any civil liability be punishable with imprisonment which may extend to one year or with fine which may extend to five thousand rupees or with both:

Provided that in case the offence is committed in respect of a minor, a woman or a person belonging to the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes the punishment shall be imprisonment to the extent of two years and fine up to ten thousand rupees.

5. Intimation to be given to District Magistrate with respect to conversion.

(1) Whoever converts any person from one religious faith to another either by performing himself the ceremony necessary for such conversion as a religious priest or by taking part directly or indirectly in such ceremony shall, within such period after the ceremony as may be prescribed, send an intimation to the District Magistrate of the district in which the ceremony has taken place of the fact of such conversion in such form as may be prescribed.

(2) If any person fails without sufficient cause to comply with the provisions contained in sub-section (1), he shall be punishable with imprisonment which may extend to one year or with fine which may extend to one thousand rupees or with both.

6. Offence to be cognizable. — An offence under this Act shall be cognizable and shall not be investigated by an officer below the rank of an Inspector of Police.

7. Prosecution to be made with the sanction of District Magistrate.— No prosecution for an offence under this Act shall be instituted except by, or with the previous sanction of the District Magistrate or such other authority, not below the rank of a Sub- Divisional Officer, as may be authorised by him in that behalf.

8. Power to make rules.— The State Government may make rules for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Act.

In exercise of the powers conferred by Section 8 of the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam, 1968 (No. 27 of 1968), the State Government hereby makes the following rules, which was Published in the Madhya Pradesh Gazette, Ext. No. 14 dated February 3, 1969, namely:

RULES

1. Short title. — These rules may be called the **Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Rules, 1969**.

2. Definitions.— In these rules, unless the context otherwise requires:-

(a) "Adhiniyam" means the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam, 1968 (No.27 of 1968);

(b) "Form" means a Form appended to these rules;

(c) "Intimation" means the intimation with respect to conversion required to be given under sub-section (1) of section 5 of the Adhiniyam.

3. Period within which intimation to be sent.— (1) The intimation shall be sent to the District Magistrate of the district in which ceremony necessary for conversion has taken place within seven days after the date of such ceremony.

(2) The intimation shall be in Form A and shall be delivered either personally by the person giving such intimation to the District Magistrate or be sent to him by registered post with acknowledgement due.

4. District Magistrate to issue acknowledge receipt.— The District Magistrate on receiving the intimation shall sign there on a certificate stating the date on which and the hour at which the intimation has been delivered to him or received by him and shall forthwith acknowledge the receipt thereof in Form B.

5. Register of conversion.- The District Magistrate shall maintain a register of conversion in Form C and shall enter there in particulars of the intimations received by him.

3. Submission of Report to State Government.- The District Magistrate shall, by the 10 of each month, send to the State Government a report o intimations received by him during the preceding month in Form D.

Form A

{ Rule 3 (2)}

Intimation regarding conversion from one religious faith to another

To

The District Magistrate,

District

Madhya Pradesh

Sir,

I having performed the necessary ceremony for conversion as a religious priest/having taken part in the conversion ceremony of

Shri.....s/o..... r/o..... from..... religions faith

To..... religious faith, do hereby,

give intimation of the conversion as required by sub-section (1) of section 5 of the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam 1968 (No. 27 of 1968) as follows:

1. Name of the person converted.....

2. Name of the father of the person converted.....

3. Address of the person converted in full

House No..... Ward No..... Mohalla.....

Village..... Tah..... Distt.....

4. Age..... 5. Sex 6. Occupation and monthly income of the person converted.....

7. Whether married or unmarried.....

8. Name of Persons, if any, dependent upon the person converted.....

9. If a minor, name and full address of the guardian, if any.....

10. Whether belongs to Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe and if so, particulars of such Caste and Tribe.....

11. Name of the place where the ceremony has taken place with full details. House

No..... Ward No..... Mohalla.....

Village..... Tah..... Distt.....

12. Date of conversion.....

13. Name of person who has performed the conversion ceremony and his address 14. Names of at least two persons other than priest/the person giving intimation present at the conversion ceremony.....

- Signature of the religious priest/
the person taking part in the
Conversion ceremony.

Verification

I, the undersigned do hereby declare that what is stated above is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.....

Signature

Place.....

Date.....

Form B

(See Rule 4)

Received intimation under section 5 of the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam, 1968 (27 of 1968) on 1969 from

Shri..... S/o..... r/o.....

with respect to conversion of Shri.....

Shri..... S/o..... r/o.....

religious faith to..... religious faith.

Date..... District Magistrate

Form C

(See Rule 5)

Register of conversion

1. Name of person converted.....

2. Father's Name of the person converted....

3. Address of the person converted in full

House No..... Ward No..... Mohalla.....

..... Village..... Tah.....

Dist.....

4. Age

5. Sex

6. Occupation and monthly income of the
Person converted.....

7. Whether married or unmarried.....

8. Name of persons, if any, dependent upon
the person converted.....

9. If a minor, name and full address of the Guardian, if any.....
10. Whether belongs to Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe and if so, particulars of such Caste or Tribe.....
11. Name of the place where the ceremony has taken place with full details House No Ward No Mohalla Village Tal Dist
12. Date of conversion
13. Name of person who has performed the Conversion ceremony and his address
14. Names of at least two persons other than priestly person giving intimation present at the conversion ceremony

Form D

(See Rule 6)

Report for the month of.....

1. No. of Intimations received during the month.....

2. Religion-wise intimations

Break up	Religion from which converted	Religion to which converted

3. No of prosecutions, if any, instituted under the Adhinyam.

4. No. of acquittals and convictions under the Adhinyam during the month.

.....
District Magistrate

APPENDIX IV

Za chaiah, Mathi (ed.). freedom of Religion in India (Kottayam: NCCI, 1979)

The Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Indigenous Faith Act, 1978

Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly.

The Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978

To provide for prohibition of conversion from one religious faith to any other faith by use of force or inducement or by fraudulent means and for matters connected therewith.

Be it enacted by the Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh in the Twentyninth Year of the Republic of India as follows:

1. Short title, extent and commencement:
 1. This Act may be called the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978
 2. It extends to the whole of Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh.
 3. It shall come into force at once.
2. Definitions: In this Act unless the context otherwise requires:
 - (a) 'Government' means the Government of the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh.
 - (b) 'Conversion' means renouncing an indigenous faith and adopting another faith or religion.
 - (c) 'Indigenous' means such religions, beliefs, and practices including rites, rituals, festivals, observances, performances, abstinence, customs as have been found sanctioned, approved, performed by the indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh from the time these communities have been known and includes Buddhism as prevalent among the Monpas, membas, sherdukpens, Khambas, Khamtis, and singphoos, and Vaishnavism, as practised by Noctes, Akas and nature worships, including worships of Doni-Polo, as prevalent among other indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh.
 - (d) 'Force' shall include show of force or a threat of injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure or social excommunication.
 - (e) 'Fraud' shall include misrepresentation or other fraudulent contrivance.
 - (f) 'Inducement' shall include the offer of any gift, or gratification, either in cash or in kind and shall also include the grant of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise.
 - (g) 'Prescribed' means prescribed under the rules
 - (h) 'Religious faith' includes any indigenous faith.
3. **Prohibition of forcible conversion:** No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from indigenous faith by use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion.

4. **Punishment for contravention of the provision of Sec. 3:** Any person contravening the provisions contained in section 3 shall, without prejudice to any civil liability, be punishable with imprisonment to the extent of two years and fine up to ten thousand rupees.
5. **Intimation of conversion to the Deputy Commissioner and punishment:**
 1. Whoever converts any person from his indigenous faith to any other faith of religion either by performing himself the ceremony necessary for such conversion as a religious priest or by taking part directly or indirectly in such ceremony shall, within such period after the ceremony as may be prescribed, send an intimation to Deputy Commissioner of the District to which the person converted belongs, of the fact of such conversion in such form as may be prescribed.
 2. If any person without sufficient cause to comply with the provisions contained in sub-section (1) he shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to one year or with fine which may extend to one thousand rupees or with both.
6. **Offence cognizable:** An offence under this Act shall be cognizable and shall not be investigated by an officer below the rank of an Inspector of Police.
7. **Sanction for prosecution:** No prosecution for an offence under this Act shall be instituted except by or with previous sanction of the Deputy Commissioner or such other authority, not below the rank of an Extra Assistant Commissioner as may be authorised by him in this behalf.
8. **Power to make rules:** The Government may make rules for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Act.

APPENDIX V

Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Bill, 2002

A Bill to provide for prohibition of conversion from one religion to another by the use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means and for matters incidental thereto.

Be it enacted by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Tamil Nadu in the Fifty-third Year of the Republic of India as follows:

Short title and commencement

1. (1) This Act may be called the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Act, 2002.

(2) It shall be deemed to have come into force on the 5th day of October 2002.

Definitions

2. In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,-

(a) "allurement" means offer of any temptation in the form of—

(i) any gift or gratification either in cash or kind; (ii) grant of any material benefit, either monetary or otherwise;

(b) "covert" means to make one person to renounce one religion and adopt another religion;

(c) "force" includes a show of force or a threat of injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure or social ex-communication; (d) "fraudulent means" includes misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance;

(e) "minor" means a person under eighteen years of age.

Prohibition of forcible conversion.

3. No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another by use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion.

Punishment for contravention of provisions of Section 3

4. Whoever contravenes the provisions of Section 3 shall, without prejudice to any civil liability, be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and also be liable to fine which may extend to fifty thousand rupees: Provided that whoever contravenes the provisions of Section 3 in respect of a minor, a woman or a person belonging to Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to four years and also be liable to fine which may extend to one lakh rupees.

Intimation to be given to District Magistrate with respect to conversion.

5. (1) Whoever converts any person from one religion to another either by performing any ceremony by himself for such conversion as a religious priest or by taking part directly or indirectly in such ceremony shall, within such period as may be prescribed, send an intimation to the District Magistrate of the district in which the ceremony has taken place of the fact of such conversion in such form as may be prescribed.

(2) Whoever fails, without sufficient cause, to comply with the provisions of Sub-section (1), shall be punished with imprisonment for a term, which may extend to one year or with fine which may extend to one thousand rupees or with both.

Prosecution to be made with the sanction of District Magistrate

(6) No prosecution for an offence under this Act shall be instituted except by or with the previous sanction of the District Magistrate or such other authority, not below the rank of a District Revenue Officer, as may be authorised by him in that behalf.

Power to make rules.

7. (1) The State Government may make rules for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Act.

(2) Every rule made under this Act shall as soon as possible after it is made be placed on the table of the Legislative Assembly, and if before the expiry of the session in which it is so placed or the next session, the Assembly makes any modification in any such rule or the Assembly decides that the rule should not be made, the rule shall thereafter have effect only in such modified form, or be of no effect, as the case may be, so, however, that any such modification or annulment shall be without prejudice to the validity of any thing previously done under that rule.

Repeal and Saving

Tamil Nadu Ordinance 9 of 2002

8. (1) The Tamil Nadu Forcible Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2002 is hereby repealed.

(2) Notwithstanding such repeal anything done or any action taken under the said Ordinance shall be deemed to have been done or taken under this Act.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTS AND REASONS

Reports have been received by the Government that conversions from one religion to another are made by use of force or allurements or by fraudulent means. Bringing in legislation to prohibit such conversion will act as a deterrent against the anti-social and vested interest groups exploiting the innocent people belonging to depressed classes. It may also be useful to maintain public order and to nip in the bud the attempts by certain religious fundamentalists and subversive forces to create communal tension under the garb of a religious conversion. The Government has, therefore, decided to enact a law to prevent conversion by use of force or allurements or by fraudulent means. Accordingly, the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2002 (Tamil Nadu Ordinance 9 of 2002) was promulgated by the Governor on the 5 October 2002 and the same was published in the Tamil Nadu Government Gazette Extraordinary, dated the 5th October 2002.

2. The Bill seeks to replace the said Ordinance.

J. JAYALALITHAA
Chief Minister

MEMORANDUM REGARDING DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Clauses 5(1) and 7 (1) of the Bill authorise the Government to make rules for the purposes specified therein.

(2) The powers delegated are normal and not of an exceptional character.

STATEMENT UNDER RULE 168 OF THE TAMIL NADU LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY RULES EXPLAINING THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH NECESSITATED THE PROMULGATION OF THE TAMIL NADU PROHIBITION OF FORCIBLE CONVERSION OF RELIGION ORDINANCE, 2002 (TAMIL NADU ORDINANCE 9 OF 2002).

Reports have been received by the Government that conversions from one religion to another are made by use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means. Bringing in legislation to prohibit such conversions will act as a deterrent against the anti-social and vested interest groups exploiting the innocent people belonging to depressed classes. It may also be useful to maintain public order and to nip in the bud the attempts by certain religious fundamentalists and subversive forces to create communal tension under the garb of religious conversion. The Government has, therefore, decided to enact a law to prevent conversion by use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means.

2. As the Legislative Assembly of the State was not in session at that time, it became necessary to promulgate an Ordinance to give effect to the above decision. Accordingly, the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2002 (Tamil Nadu Ordinance 9 of 2002) was promulgated by the Governor on the 5 October 2002 and the same was published in the Tamil Nadu Government Gazette Extraordinary, dated the 5 October 2002.

J JAYALALITA.
Chief Minister

