

## Anti-Conversion And Re-Conversion: A Threat To Dalit Community

12

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### Abstract

*The heated discourse, here and now, on anti-conversion and reconversion seems to have threatened on the fundamental rights of secular and democratic country. The recent SUO MTO ACTION has escalated and triggered an increasingly tension, discomfort in the life of Dalit community. The article 25(1) articulates that "subject to public order, morality and health and other provision of this part, all person are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and right to profess, practice and propagate religion". Nevertheless of this fundamental right, last couple of months various mushrooming reports have been coverage on GHAR WAPSI have surfaced, seemed to be connotation of violation of rights in multi-fold. In this very action many Dalit are in confusion point on what to opt whether Christians, Muslim or Hindu religion. Because even in reconversion BJP, HBP and RSS offered allurement recently to Dalit to get ration cards but instead they were forcefully reconverted into Hindu likewise there had been riot between the Adivasi Christian and Adivasi Hindu in Chhattisgarh is a sign of imposition of the ideology of totalitarianism. So as it happened with Dalit in Chhattisgarh too. So it is excruciatingly disturbing the peaceful ethos of Dalit community.*

### Introduction

The safety and security of minorities in India has been a matter of immense concern for decades and it has assumed much significance in the post-election scenario after the formation of a majoritarian government at the centre. The prime minister, Mr.NarendraModi continues to assure from podium that his government will protect the minorities and work for their authentic development and growth without

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succumbing to appeasement politics, on the contrary every such assurance is countered by attacks on minorities by his own party men in different parts of the country. Should citizens trust the words of the Prime minister? Still worse, despite increasing attacks on minorities the prime minister has neither condemned these attacks nor spoken anything about these events. Evidence shows that his party men are violating the rights of the minorities especially their freedom of religion and belief with total impunity. In state no one has the power to impair the rights of the minorities, religious or linguistic". Today, it is shameful that neither the judges nor the elected representatives have shown the audacity to abide by the constitution. Ironically, in the first session of the newly-formed Parliament both the major political parties, the BJP and the Congress, had failed to address the safety and security of the minorities. Instead they continued to spit out old jargon and rhetoric, discussing who is more communal than the other? The minorities are on a daily basis lampooned and ridiculed or spoken against in derogatory language. Attempting to break the parliamentary deadlock on religious conversions, parliamentary affairs minister M Venkaiah Naidu has clarified that the government does not support either conversion or reconversion (Xavier, 2014). Yet, both Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha remain blocked with opposition demanding a statement from Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the contentious gharwapsi programme pursued by RSS and VHP.

The issue of religious conversions rocked Rajya Sabhas as well as Lok Sabha, and blocking the transaction of any business of both houses. In the Lower House, the government asserted that neither it nor the ruling BJP had anything to do with conversions (Times of India, 2014). Launching the attack, JD (U)'s Sharad Yadav has said that the government has failed to keep poll promises; it had found a new way. "They had never said there will be 'gharwapsi' (conversion) there are such incidents in some parts of Gujarat, Kerala and UP but government kept silent. Mulayam Singh Yadav also blamed the government for the House remaining paralysed due to such "divisive" activities. In LS, opposition members raised the issue in the wake of media reports on conversion of 30 Dalit Christians to Hinduism in Kerala and demanded the PM's response as "only his writ runs in the country" and he "holds the master

key". Rejecting the demand, parliamentary affairs minister M Venkaiah Naidu said the government does not support conversion or re-conversion and if any individual is violating the law, the state governments are empowered to take action.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed as a fundamental right under the Constitution's Article 25 and in a truly secular country religion should remain a private matter, closed off from state intervention. Yet, when RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat is aggressively pushing the idea of a Hindu rashtra and calling for a national anti-conversion law while BJP president Amit Shah is daring opposition parties to oppose it, the furore is threatening to drown out the government's developmental agenda.

### **Threat To Dalit Ethos And Peace**

As per the article 25 gives every Indian "freedom to profess, practice and propagate religion". But GharWapsi propaganda disregards this constitutional right of Dalit people and forces them to be converted to. The classical example of recent could be traced for Gharwapsi of Dalit Christian in many states, for instance Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Aligarh, Kerla, and UP. In Gujarat 300 hundred Dalit people have been reconvered from Christian to Hindu with the help of great political power. There had been riot in Bastar district of Chhattisgarh between the Dalit Christian and Hindu on the reason of several days of preaching and teaching of good news and pastor was driven away from those villages where he used to preach thereafter he ran away to nearby town for survival. In those villages there had been full of fear and Dalit people are unable to practice belief of Christianity. Likewise in Agra 100 Dalit Muslim have been converted into Hindu and one day Bajrang dal called upon a mass of Dalit Muslim and Christian in one platform by ensuring them to give Ration Card for everybody but, rather than they made them to have hawan and converted them into Hindu so it's a total crime against constitutional rights. Here BJP and RSS are using the political power to reconvert the Dalit Christian and Dalit Muslim into Hindu. It's a total threat to Dalit ethos and Peace. Because there is a freedom and rights to believe any religion and profess the belief but as the Modi Government took over the riot and threat to peace started across India and along with

this many Christian institution are being deteriorated like schools, church and even religious gurus are on the target. So minorities are having no security and even Mr. is not yet spoken on happenings which seem completely biased towards religions. So therefore even Hindu is converting the Dalit people by alluring or giving money so it cannot be said the way they are reconverting the people is fair and just. The emergence of Gharwasi and torture of Dalit, at the epicentre of religious reconversion row in Agra, was not surprising after all. It transpired that Valmikiis have largely been wooed away by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its offshoots in various ways, including funding religious functions and getting them represented at the local bodies elections as BharatiyaJanata Party candidates. Political experts point out that the incident of religious reconversion first came to light in Agra, considered Dalit capital of UP with 70% electorate comprising the social class. "This sent across a larger message that SanghParivar was tightening grip on Valmikiis which constitute more than 5% of the electoral base in Agra," a political observer said. Local BSP sources say not only Valmikiis; even Khatiks have been engaged by the BJP as part of their political design. Dalit thinkers say, providing religious identity played a significant role in Valmikiis turning towards BJP. Mayawatiis now exposing the BJP at the grassroots as a communal party. Even as the religious reconversion row shifts its base to Aligarh, the BSP has started moved out at the grass root level to protect Dalit ethos. Political experts sayMayawati is well aware of BJP's move to embolden dalits by giving them religious identity.

### **Reconversion In Uttar Radesh As Promised**

This is not a Minority Report the church in India was expecting on the first 100 days of the government of the Prime Minister, Mr.NarendraModi, who his ardent devotees in his BharatiyaJanata Party and its ideologue engine the RashtriyaSwayamsevakSangh expect to take the country in its golden age of development and global pre-eminence. A recent rash of incidents against smaller church groups and believers in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, following the ban on Christian activity in several villages of the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh, have caught the church leadership by surprise and has also stunned it into silence, at least for the moment. The Dalit Christians are targeted in what is called

GharWapsi, or Home-coming, which is a polite word for coercive conversion of the Dalit people in India. The process against Dalits, the former untouchable castes who profess the Christian faith, is called Shuddhikaran, or purification. The popular rage against Muslims, especially in rural areas and small towns, is built upon the myth of Love Jihad, an allegation that Islamic young men have been trained to seducing Hindu women to force a demographic change in India and reduce the Hindu population to a minority. Many of the scores of incidents of violence against Muslims in Uttar Pradesh this year have been triggered by such rumours. The all political parties are locked in a bitter struggle for political supremacy. One of several cases of coercive action including physical violence from this region include the August 27, 2014 conversion of a large family of Dalits who were members of the Seventh Day Adventist church in Asroi village, some 30 km south of the university town of Aligarh in Hathras District. An aggressive group of activists of the SanghParivar brought with them a Hindu priest and a photograph of a deity and performed a "hawan" or fire-worship ceremony to "purify" the small church into a temple. The police arrested several of the miscreants. The one room church is locked up, and the village now has no Christian presence. The media in the region, which sides with the BJP, said the Dalits returned to Hinduism because they received no benefits from the church. In the Greater Noida area also in western Uttar Pradesh, 10 pastors were thrashed by a mob led by a local political leader, and dragged to the police brought in for questioning to Surajpur Police station in Greater Noida on Saturday over allegations that they were "forcefully converting Hindus to Christianity". The police also joined the group to beat the pastors. Days later, an enquiry by senior officers exonerated the pastors and said the politicians had made a false allegation to incite the mob and rouse religious passions in the villages. These incidents have deeply disturbed the Dalit community. The situation in the rural areas is exacerbated to a situation where Christian pastors and persons who have been attacked are afraid to even file a complaint with the police as they feel totally isolated and surrounded. The acts of violence also take away much from the reassurance that was sought to be given by some leaders of the larger denominations that Mr.Modi would control extremist

inducements, which it terms “forced conversion”. However, it has actively promoted conversions to Hinduism of those who supposedly drifted to Islam and Christianity or are being “lured” to these faiths. The VHP and Bajrang Dal had accelerated their campaigns both in the rural and urban areas. Reconversion drives in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa (now Odisha) had intensified and were accompanied by violence against the Christian institutions and missionaries. The Dangs, Jhabua and Sarguja districts were constantly in the news for violence unleashed on Christian priests and nuns. Leaflets were circulated in the Dangs calling upon Hindus to “wipe out” Christians from the district (Venkatesan, 1999).

### **Some Features Of Reconversion (Ghar Wapsi)**

The way the Sangh Parivar has gone about accomplishing gharwapsi has certain distinctive features. First, it is the communities on the borders of the Hindu-Muslim or Hindu-Christian fault lines that have been the target. The VHP’s attempt to reconvert these communities involves getting them to give up Muslim or Christian practices – like burying their dead, giving up nikah and circumcision, replacing the cross with Hindu idols, giving up church prayers, etc. This gharwapsi is largely a de-Islamisation or de-Christianisation rather than imbuing the reconverts with Hindu spiritual or shastric knowledge (Sikand and Katju, 1994). In many instances of conversions in the last few months, the neo-converts have stressed that they never left the Hindu religion. Nor they gave up one or the other religion. They simultaneously adhered to the tenets of both religious faiths – following what one might call a “dual religiosity”. Practising such religiosity implies that these communities have not been trapped by rigidities of religious identity. It also implies that in everyday life this duality has helped in carrying on with practical matters. *Second*, the groups targeted for reconversions are economically hard-up and often destitute. Rarely do we see the privileged, well-to-do social groups converting to a religion of their choice for spiritual solace. For the poor, however, conversion is often a strategy for securing welfare benefits and job or perhaps to deflect active social discriminations, as the recent conversions in Agra district, where a community of poor rag pickers became the target of reconversions, illustrates so well (BBC News India,

2014 and Mishra, 2014). They were promised ration cards, Aadhaar cards and school admission for their children for going through the gharwapsi rituals. It is also easier to intimidate the poor and marginalised into “coming back home”; the fear factor was clearly evident in the conversions at Agra where the whole area where gharwapsi was performed was enveloped in fear. This brings us to the *third feature* of gharwapsi. These VHP-organised programmes are almost always group conversions and not about individuals making choices (Sikand and Katju 1994). Historically, the Hindu nationalist organisations have focused on these very groups for gharwapsi. The Sangh leadership admits that caste oppression made these oppressed sections move to different religions. However, as the experience of the past many decades suggests that rather than address the caste issue, it has attempted to bring them “back” mainly through the promise of material gratification.

### **Reconversion (Gharwapsi) Paradox**

Politics on reconversion is per se paradox because of following reasons which are follows:

- RSS believes on ideology gharwapsi or Shuddi (proslytisation) is derived from Christianity and it is not a Hindu religious idea therefore it was opposed by Gandhi.
- Gharwapsi is taking place only in Tribal and Dalit community and why not Gharwapsi for elite Hindu, Brahmin and Muslim who converted into Christianity.
- Why Gharwapsi only in minorities festival and marking it the good governance.
- Why anti conversion bill despite of existing the law in constitution.

These are the elementary reasons which seem itself paradox while RSS and BHP force the Dalit Christians and Muslim to convert into Hindu because politics Dalit communities are unable to enjoy the rights given in constitution.

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