

Politics of Conversion

Political parties seldom find their way to dinner party without a reason, albeit Congress party has no valid reason to host a dinner party to mark the four “glorious” years of the United Progressive Alliance government. Four years later it is the business as usual cliché to pacify the aggrieved as market mayhem may aggravate further because another bout of hike in oil prices is round the corner. The Left continues to enjoy the company of Congress while obliging the Manmohan Singhs and Sonia Gandhis by attending their dinner party celebrations. In the absence of popular mass mobilisation against unbearable inflationary pressure, the political right has made fresh in-roads in areas which were previously overlooked even by die-hard communalists.

It’s a good diversion—conversion. It is gaining currency with increasing aggressiveness, thanks to spread of half-truths.

The saffronites say there is a threat to Hindu nation due to Adivasis converting to a ‘foreign religion’. The real face of the conversion came to fore when after the attack on nuns in Alibaug (March, 2008) was followed by a massive conversion to Hinduism, Shuddhi ritual (April 27, 2008) in nearby Mumbai. The person involved in both these has been the same. In the attack on the Adivasis, the followers of Sadguru Narendra Maharaj of Ramanandcharya Peeth were involved and in the elaborate Shuddhi ritual the Guru himself led the conversion. Talking on the occasion he said the Hindus are being reduced to a pitiable minority because of the activities of Christian missionaries. He also came down heavily on the central Government for not pushing through the anti-conversion bill and criticized the Maharashtra Government for passing the anti-Superstition bill, according to him both these steps are anti-Hindu.

His claim that Hindus are being reduced to minority is a stuff of make believe world as demographically India's Hindu population is fairly stable. The anti-conversion bills which many state Governments have passed and passing are totally against several articles of the Constitution. The Indian Constitution encourages the promotion of national thought, in pursuance of which Maharashtra Government has done the job of passing anti-superstition bill. Those opposing this bill surely want the presistence of blind faith in society. It is this which strengthens their social and political clout.

How does one understand the rising incidence of violence in Adivasi areas? One recalls just around the Christmas time in 2007, massive violence was unleashed in Kandhmal and Phulvani districts of Orissa. In most of the Adivasi areas—Dangs, Gujarat, Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, parts of Orissa, there had been a recurrent violence. It is these areas which have seen the conversion of Adivasis into Hindu fold. For one thing Adivasis are Animists, neither Christians nor Hindus. While some conversions to Christianity have been occurring they are not new as Christianity has been here for long. These conversions are due to many reasons, missionaries work in the area of education and health in particular. In recent times the population of Christians has been declining marginally (1991-2.60%, 1981-2.44%, 1991-2.34%, 2001-2.30%). Part of the conversion surely is

due to some groups amongst Christian missionaries who do believe in aggressive proselytization.

The Adivasi areas have invited the wrath of RSS combine from last two decades in particular since Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, an RSS affiliate intensified its activities in Adivasi areas. In these areas there is a vicious anti-Christian propaganda leading to violence. Since this takes place in remote places the culprits can get away easily, more so with the complicities of communalized state apparatus. In these areas various Godmen with RSS affiliation, direct or indirect, have been either been setting up their Ashrams or extending their influence.

Usually violence and intimidation is accompanied by cultural cooption. This latter has been done by holding huge Hindu Sangams and Shabri kumbhs. Sanskritization is also operative in these conversions to Hinduism—the process has been called *Ghar Vapsi* or *Shuddhikaran* (purification) on the premise that Adivasis are Hindus. This is unmindful of the fact that Adivasis are primarily animists and do not fall in the category of religion as a social phenomenon, as applicable to Hindus, Muslims, Christians etc.

Adivasis are the most deprived lot of the society and have been targeted more for political reasons than for their own welfare. As during the early 1920s, *Shuddhi movement* (Hindu communalism) was unleashed in parallel to *Tanzim* (Muslim communalism), now again the Shuddhi is back. Ghar Vapasi word has been cleverly coined. While browbeating Christian missionaries for conversions, the same term for its own activities will bring in disrepute. So this term, Ghar Vapasi, returning home! The propaganda behind this says that Adivasis are essentially those Hindus who ran away to forests to escape the conversions by Muslim kings. In forests they kept living for long because of which they kept sliding down on the scale of social hierarchy. This concoction serves two purposes. One it feeds into the notion that islam spread by sword and also makes the Adivasis' claim as the original inhabitants, null and void, so the Hindu nation's claim on the country becomes stronger, as they can also claim to be its original inhabitants.

The realization that to impose Hindu rashtra in this country the electoral majority is needed as a starting point, the process of co-opting Adivasis into Hindu fold has been stepped up. And this 8% population can be the wonderful addition to electoral base for right wing politics. The second advantage is that by indoctrinating them they can be unleashed against the other enemies of Hindus as witnessed in Gujarat, where they were used as ideal foot soldiers for the agenda of communal carnage.

Having failed to succeed in re-converting dalit-converts to islam, they have chosen the soft target—Christian tribals. Meanwhile, tribal land-alienation has reached a critical stage in almost every state but Congress and its Left allies have no time to think over it, they are busy to congratulate themselves at the 4th anniversary functions.

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[Contributed]