

DALIT VOICE

[The Voice of the Persecuted Minorities]

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EDITORIAL

WHY THIS WAR PREPARATION?

The "earthquake" in Meenakshipuram has drawn the attention of the whole country, its Government, Parliament, press, public, political parties, religious leaders and other busybodies. There is an endless discussion on the mass conversion of untouchables to Islam. Hindu society is shaking in its shoes. The tiny village has suddenly become a centre of pilgrimage to all sorts of trouble-makers.

Union Minister of State for Home Yogendra Makwana's visit to the village renamed Rehamat Nagar became a front-page news in the national press. *Eve's Weekly* called it a "national crisis". Home Minister Zail Singh was grilled by MPs including a CPM leader and they all extracted an assurance from him that the Government of India was seized of the matter. The Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetha sent a three-man team of Brahmin (religious) leaders headed by the Pejawara Swamy, president of the vishwa Hindu Parishad. Scores of "fact-finding teams" beelined to the village. They met the Prime Minister, who according to AICC general secretary Mooppanar expressed grave concern over this. The Hindus suddenly overcome by compassion and love towards the "Harijans" decided to dig wells in Rehamat Nagar. Makwana, after a stormy visit to the areas gripped by bloody Hindu violence on untouchables,

got locked in a verbal battle with Chief Minister M. G. Ramachandran over his remark that the "Harijans are not safe under the Tamil Nadu police". The well-planned visit of Makwana had raised high hopes in the Hindu communal circles that he would discover "Arab money" and the "threat" to convert the 'poor Harijans'. But he discovered nothing. His visit turned out to be a big disappointment to the communal Hindus. On the other hand, his off-the-record talks with the press men at Madurai and Madras and Dalit leaders revealed the truth.

Our representative present at such informal talks writes:- Makwana mission was a total failure. He could do nothing with the untouchable converts to Islam. He admitted that some of them even shouted "Makwana go-back slogans. Besides the untouchables of Rehamat Nagar, Dalit representatives of neighbouring villages, particularly Dalit lawyers, teachers and

other educated Dalits, told him that they were ill-treated only because they were Hindus. Therefore, they had decided to quit Hinduism to gain social status. Makwana admitted that he had written letters to the Shankaracharyas but this was wrong on his part. The methods adopted by the Hindus would provoke even those one or two still remaining as Hindus in each family. If Hindus behaved this way, he said, nobody could stop the exodus. He feared that even if a single convert was assaulted that might result in a Hindu-Muslim clash causing serious repercussions all over India. He condemned reports about Arab money. According to him ill-treatment by Hindus, police atrocities and the frustration of the youth were the three causes for the conversions. He said very clearly that he was not against conversions to Islam". writes our representative in Madras.

As regards the allegations made by the RSS and other Hindu communalists that Arab money was paid and that force was used for conversion, they must be specific. Which country paid the money, who brought it and who received it and how much? All these details with their names must be published. So also the names of those who used force for the conversion.

Untouchables and tribals all over India are desperate. Hinduism has made mince-meat out of them. They are suffocated in the air-tight stinking dungeon of Hinduism. It is this desperation that is driving them out of the Hindu fold. Ambedkar had opened the gates and showed the way. Even to this day, untouchables are a set of people who are negatively defined by their exclusion from the Hindu community. This takes both religious and social forms. Their movement under Ambedkar to seek a more positive identity at the time of independence was thwarted by Gandhi and other communal politicians for political reasons. Now that the Hindu community has failed to integrate them in the last 30 years of our "national" existence, they should refuse to be fooled again by the myth created by the high castes that they are Hindus. The truth is that the untoucha-

bles were never Hindus nor will they ever become Hindus except in negative forms. So the question before them is how they should get rid of their negative identity socially and religiously. It is time that they should now decide for themselves and do not allow anybody to exploit them. The only way and the best way is to quit Hinduism and announce it publicly. They may lose the crumbs of reservations which have reduced them to the level of permanent beggars before the closed doors of the Hindus. The untouchables of Rehmat Nagar have set an example by renouncing Hinduism and thus gaining manhood.

But the way this conversion episode is tackled is something unprecedented. The whole thing looks mysterious. Why did Meenakshipuram receive so much attention. Why did the Hindu press, which always used to suppress any news about conversion, suddenly went berserk over Meenakshipuram? There appears to be a method in this madness, this breastbeating by the Brahmins, the SOS of the Shankaracharyas. It looks as if the sky is collapsing over Tamil Nadu. And this cry of "woit, wolf" is not stopping even after impartial observers declared that there is no wolf, not even a mouse. Why this scare-mongering?

This is what makes us suspicious about the whole thing. We feel there is a deep-rooted conspiracy behind these exercises. Something big is in the offing. Chief Minister M. G. R., said that conversions to Islam are not new to Tamil Nadu. A report in the Hindu (July 7) says M G R gave statistics to prove "that almost every year from 1969 to 1978 there had been cases of such conversion in two villages in Bodinalakanur taluk, Madurai District. In Tirunelveli district too there had been such mass conversions. In 1944, in 3 villages involving 170, 40 and 27 Harijan families". In six other villages also "Harijans as families or individuals had taken to Islam in the past. So it was incorrect to say that the conversion was a new phenomenon", he said. Different Dalit organisations have arrived at the same conclusion.

Then why all this un-ending deafening noise? A sort of a war-preparation? Our information is that the RSS and other communalists are planning to repeat Moradabad's in the South, may be between Muslims and untouchables themselves. Tamil Nadu has been so far free from communal clashes, because, thanks to Periyar, it had always voted for his followers. To wrest Tamil Nadu from the Periyar's followers and restore the Brahmin supremacy the twin interest-free "vote banks"-scheduled castes and Muslims-are needed. And the communal bigots cannot get a better opportunity than the current conversion controversy in which these two persecuted minorities are locked. This appears to be the game. We call both the Dalits, Muslims and Christians to beware of this fascist game and nip it in the bud. Muslims and Christian organisations all over India and Tamil Nadu in particular must immediately jump and take positions. Dravida Khazagam, DMK, Marxists and other Left elements should realise that any chance given to the Hindu communalists to poke their nose will be a setback to their respective movement.

EARTHQUAKE IN MEENAKSHIPURAM

[Our Correspondent]

The mass conversion of unteachables in Meenakshipuram and other districts of Tamil Nadu has created a country-wide flutter. Even if there had been an earthquake in that place, it would not have created so much of a row, and invited so much of attention. Even Union Minister of State for Home Malwana visited the village for a spot study.

We reproduce below two versions on the Meenakshipuram "earthquake" and readers may come to their own conclusion :-

RSS journal "Organiser" writing under the headline "Mass conversion through force and fraud" quotes from the "Vedanta Kesari" published by the Revolutionary March, Madras, which "has taken the strongest objection to this mass conversion with the help of massive foreign funds". The "Organiser" published yet another report from its New Delhi correspondent under the headline "Rs. 500- for each Harijan convert". A sub-heading says: "59 women circumcised".

The reports say: P. Ramachandran and K.S. Anantharama Seshan, president and Secretary of the Hindu Samudaya Valarshi Manram, an organisation formed by the Hindus of Meenakshipuram and villages around it have disclosed that the Harijan converts were given Rs. 500- each for changing their ancestral faith and that for that matter the conversions were illegal". The Organiser report adds they were "talking to the Press at the Press Club of India in New Delhi on June 10", and says: "An Arab priest and the Speaker of the Sri Lanka Parliament had taken part in the conversion ceremonies".

Surprisingly, "the Hindu" report of the press conference held at Hyderabad by the same leaders mentioned above contradicts the version given by the

"Organiser". The Hindu staff reporter's story published on 18-6-51 says: "A delegation of the Hindu Samudaya Valarshi Manram, Tirunelveli district, led by its President Anantharama Thevar and secretary Anantharamakrishna met the Prime Minister on June 11 and demanded judicial inquiry into the mass conversions". The report added that they told newsmen that "some of these Harijans who were converted to Islam on Feb. 18 at Meenakshipuram Village were also present when they met the Prime Minister. According to them "it was not a case of Hindu-Muslim quarrel but one of covert move on the part of international conspirators to exploit the religious fanaticism among Muslims to destabilise the political set up in India". "Over Rs. 50,000 was spent in a day to convert about 500 persons belonging to 100 families on Feb-18. The head of each family was paid Rs. 500- as inducement money, Anantharamakrishna said". That means we have two versions of the Press Conference held by the same delegation. According to the RSS rag piece, "Organiser", "Harijan converts given Rs. 500- each", and according to the Hindu staff reporter's version "heads of each family was paid Rs. 50- inducement money".

The same delegation speaks one way in Delhi and another in Hyderabad. Whose report is correct?

Should not there be consistency while speaking falsehood?

NO ARAB MONEY, NO FORCE BEHIND CONVERSIONS, SAYS "HINDU"

We reproduce a report in the "Hindu" (15-6-51) from the Thanjavur staff correspondent of the paper under the headline: Why the Mass Conversions?

Although we have the report of K. Anantharam, IAS, Regional Director of Scheduled Caste & Tribes, after his visit to Meerakshipuram and also that of many other impartial sources saying that neither foreign money nor coercion was used, we hope the Hindu staff correspondent's eyewitness report will silence the RSS and other Hindu critics who continue to make all sorts of wild allegations:-

"What exactly is the reason for the mass conversion of Harijans to Islam in Meerakshipuram, a desolate hamlet, 12 kilometers from Tanjavar in Tirunelveli district or in Kilasari and Tharivalai villages in Madupalathur taluk of Ramnathapuram district of Tamil Nadu?"

"Talks with a cross-section of the Harijans, Muslims and Caste Hindus in some of the interior villages of these two districts as also of Thanjavur district, give the answer:-

neither foreign money
nor coercion Islam,
inequality and press-
ure minutes forced some
to do.

One has a 20-year old Hindu-Harijan ten-pedic incidents in the area. But relations between them have been so bad as to give officials claim

that the villagers inhabited by 500 Harijans of which 500 have embraced Islam in February last, a survey of the village is being undertaken to make a correct assessment and also a review of the work done.

"It is not poverty that made us to switch over to Islam", said Perumayyan a former president of the Panchayat Board who now calls himself Saad Sulaiman but "the torture the select Harijans in the village were subjected to by the Police". He alleged that following the murder of two members of the Thavar community at Makkural village, near Meerakshipuram, the Harijans were frequently interrogated in an attempt to trace the culprits involved in the murder but still absconding.

"Another convert said that most Harijans in the villages were farm workers. To reach their place of work they had to go through the village of Parparathi inhabited by caste Hindus who always humiliated them. His contention seemed to be that the idea of conversion was not of recent origin but was lingering in their minds for the last few years. He said that a Harijan's attempt to open a tea stall were thwarted by caste Hindus. Another man had to close down a hat-dressing shop he was running because of threat from the upper caste Hindus.

Syed Sulaiman denied having got any money for conversion and asserted that after he and a group of Harijans got converted they were getting better respect from the same old caste Hindu families" says the Hindu.

JAGJIVAN RAM & MAKWANA CRITICISE HINDUISM

Jagjivan Ram : said in Agra that "the Harijans who embraced Islam..... had been left with no other option. He criticised the Hindu religion for denying rights to Harijans. If the Hindus do not accept the Harijans as Hindus, what is the point in their staying within the fold of that religion ?"-the Hindu-30-6-81.

Pejawara Swami of Udupi : said in Kurnol, (AP) that "caste Hindus were responsible for driving Harijans to the arm of other religions. The Swamiji spoke regretfully of the torment and humiliation that caste Hindus heap on Harijans.... He agreed that caste Hindus treat Muslims and Christians with greater respect and tolerance than Harijans"- the Hindu - 30-6-81.

Makwana : Union Minister of State for Home said in Madras that "conversion could not be done by lure of money or coercion.... What was very clear was that the Harijans had been treated badly, humiliated and attacked and their property was looted and burnt. From newspaper reports, it was obvious that out of humiliation and anger they had converted to Islam.... the Hindu religious leaders must, therefore, learn from history-Hindu-24-6-81.

"Makwana said the Harijans who embraced Christianity and Buddhism had found that casteism was being practiced in these religions also. Probably the intelligent Harijans of Tamil Nadu had chosen Islam which welcomed them with open arms". UNI reports in Deccan Herald-26-6-81.

V. G. Prasad Rao, Times of India, Staff Correspondent at Madras, in a report says :- "It was not mere economic gain that drew the Harijans into the Mohamadan fold but rather a yearning for social

equality.....Another interesting fact is that some Christians have also become Musalmans. This is obviously to protest against the caste system imported into Christianity in the South". Times of India 1-7-81.

Threat to Embrace Islam : UNI reports from Salem that 70 untouchable families of Devarayapuram village in Namakkal taluk of Salem district have threatened to embrace Islam on Aug. 1 if untouchability practised against them by the Hindus is not ended by then-Deccan Herald 3-7-81.

Untouchables Externed P.R. Kuppuswamy, Advocate, Karur (T.N.) writes : About 600 untouchables are on bail with the condition to stay 200 to 250 miles away from Ramnad. They are starving.

MAKWANA VISIT TO MENAKSHIPURAM : Union Minister of State for Home Makwana, who had earlier made an appeal to the Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peeta urging him to help stop conversion of untouchables to Islam, visited Meenakshipuram and other Tamil Nadu villages where mass conversions had taken place. Talking to newsmen on July 4 at Madurai after the visit, he said untouchables in Tamil Nadu were feeling insecure because of the rising criminal atrocities of Hindus. He said : Utter neglect of the Harijans and insult and humiliation at the hands of caste Hindus were stated to be the reasons for the religious conversions which were reported only in Tamil Nadu. He said the Harijans, who had embraced Islam, had told him that they had lost faith in Hindu leaders and Hindu society, as a whole. Those who had been

converted felt they were treated with equality and respect by their co-religionistsconversion is happening because of social injustice.....Asked if he suspected involment of foreign money.....he said he was not in a position to say anything on it. The Govt. was investigating". -Deccan Herald 5-7-81 quoting UNI report.

"ORGANISER" EDITORIAL - The RSS official journal in an editorial under the headline: "From Meenakshipuram to Rehamat Nagar," (5-7-81) says: "If the Harijans of Meenakshipuram had any grievances, they could have ventilated the same and sought redress. After all ours is an open and democratic society and not an Islami country where dissenters can be

flogged or have their hands or feet cut. Why did anybody have to use their grievances to destroy them socially, culturally, emotionally? We are very sorry to say that what has happened in Meenakshipuram is not an outburst of local grievances but a small expression of an old conspiracy-to destroy Hindus, Hinduism, and Hindusthan". The editorial says: "the whole things is immoral....And in so far as it has excited Hindu-Muslim feelings, it has threatened public order". It calls upon the Govt. to protest to the Sri Lanka govt. for the misconduct of its Speaker. It also calls upon the Election Commission not to recognise the conversions and demands a probe into the flow of foreign money into India.

ANNOUNCEMENT

We have received a number of letters from all over India and abroad wishing the "DALIT VOICE" all success. While we are grateful to all these comrades, we request them to pardon if we do not individually respond. We assure them that we will bear in mind all their suggestions and particularly criticisms.

We are overwhelmed by this show of solidarity and affection. We never expected that the "Dalit Voice" would become such an instant success. Amid this politics and sex-ridden jungle of journals, the readers must have found in "Dalit Voice" some-

thing new and refreshing. That means the readers have appreciated our dedication to the Dalit cause, the philosophy of Ambedkar, sincerity of approach and our brutal frankness. We assure that in days to come "Dalit Voice" will be a trend-setter in the history of Indian journalism.

A number of readers have asked us to send extra copies. But as we are financially not in position to print more copies, we request the readers to share the 'Voice', until we grow stronger. We pledge to keep up our word and live up to your expectations. —EDITOR.

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A UNIVERSITY WITH 300 TEACHERS, 9 STUDENTS

Bangalore There is a unique "University" with 300 teachers but only 9 students.

B. Basavalingappa, (Cong- I) said in the Karnataka State Assembly on June 30 that the Institute for Social and Economic Change headed by Dr. V. K. R. V. Rao, a former Union Education Minister, had a total staff of 300, 12 senior fellows, 15 fellows and nine students. There is an attempt to deem it a University.

"The Government must either take over this institution or stop the Rs. 25-lakh grant since it has been used to change the economic position of some retired persons", the former Revenue Minister and a noted Dalit leader of India, said. Describing it as a "rehabilitation" institute, he said there was not even a single SC candidate in it. "What social and economic changes have they carried out in the last 10 years?" he asked.

The Institute, located next to the sprawling Bangalore University campus, is not only completely dominated by the Brahmins but it is meant for their welfare, it is said. The "Dalit Voice" will carry a report on this white elephant shortly.

CATHOLIC PRIESTS BACK FISHERMEN

TRIVANDRUM July 1: Twenty five Catholic priests in their soutane squatted and fasted before the state secretariat today in support of the demands of the fisherman.

The fishermen have been agitating for a total ban on mechanised fishing in the sea from June to August, which are the monsoon months, when fishermen usually face unemployment.

The priests walked after the morning prayer, from the cathedral church at Palaym

to the secretariat — one km. away.

Meenwhile, the Trivandrum fishermen's union announced that it would organise picketing of the secretariat from Saturday unless the state government ordered a ban on mechanised fishing. (Times of India 2-8-1981.)

Letters :-

WHY ISLAM ?

Durai Anbalagan, Dalit Panthers President, Dharavi unit, Bombay:

We came to know during our tour of Tamil Nadu that more than 10,000 people in the State are planning to embrace Islam to get equal status.

We admit that conversion to Islam will bring status. But at the same time, Muslims are less in number. By joining Islam our strength will go down. Therefore I suggest the Dalits to get converted to Buddhism. Ambedkar had shown us the path.

The truth is that Dalits need no 'religious conversion' but 'spiritual conversion'.

Dalits should think over this. By going over to Islam they will never solve their problem. On the other hand, Dalits will lose their strength in population.

Is there any guarantee that in future our converted Dalits will not be called 'Harijan - Muslims' and they continue to be untouchables like "Harijan Christians"?

AMBEDKAR SOCIETY

Bombay, July 9 The People's Education Society, Bombay, which conducts 10 colleges and scores of other educational institutions in Maharashtra, celebrated its 36th foundation day at Anand Bhavan, Fort, Bombay, today when a prayer service conducted by Ven. Bhikku Anand invoking the blessings of Lord Buddha.

The society chairman, Justice R. R. Bhole, recalled the yomen services rendered by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in founding the society for the education and other welfare activities of the downtrodden, on this day in 1945. (Times of India 10-7-81)

other educated Dalits, told him that they were ill-treated only because they were Hindus. Therefore, they had decided to quit Hinduism to gain social status. Makwana admitted that he had written letters to the Shankaracharyas but this was wrong on his part. The methods adopted by the Hindus would provoke even those one or two still remaining as Hindus in each family. If Hindus behaved this way, he said, nobody could stop the exodus. He feared that even if a single convert was assaulted that might result in a Hindu-Muslim clash causing serious repercussions all over India. He condemned reports about Arab money. According to him ill-treatment by Hindus, police atrocities and the frustration of the youth were the three causes for the conversions. He said very clearly that he was not against conversions to Islam. writes our representative in Madras.

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bles were never Hindus nor will they ever become Hindus except in negative forms. So the question before them is how they should get rid of their negative identity socially and religiously. It is time that they should now decide for themselves and do not allow anybody to exploit them. The only way and the best way is to quit Hinduism and announce it publicly. They may lose the crumbs of reservations which have reduced them to the level of permanent beggars before the closed doors of the Hindus. The untouchables of Rehmat Nagar have set an example by renouncing Hinduism and thus gaining manhood.

But the way this conversion episode is tackled is something unprecedented. The whole thing looks mysterious. Why did Meenakshipuram receive so much attention. Why did the Hindu press, which always used to suppress any news about conversion, suddenly went berserk over Meenakshipuram? There appears to be a method in this madness, this breastbeating by the Brahmins, the SOS of the Shankaracharyas. It looks as if the sky is collapsing over Tamil Nadu. And this cry of "wolf, wolf" is not stopping even after impartial observers declared that there is no wolf, not even a mouse. Why this scare-mongering?

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