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THE ROLE OF ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS IN SHAPING RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India's religious diversity has been a defining feature of its social and cultural landscape. However, the enactment of anti-conversion laws in various states has had a significant impact on religious freedom and identity. This research paper examines the role of these laws in shaping religious identity by regulating and restricting religious conversions. It explores the historical background, legal provisions, and socio-political implications of anti-conversion legislation. The paper analyzes landmark judicial decisions interpreting religious freedoms under the Indian Constitution and the balance between preventing forced conversions and protecting individual rights. It also investigates the impact on marginalized communities and the challenges to secularism and pluralism posed by these laws. The research methodology is doctrinal, relying on primary legal sources and secondary scholarly literature. The paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the complex dynamics of religious identity in India and calls for a nuanced approach to regulating conversions while safeguarding fundamental freedoms.

Keywords: Anti-Conversion Laws, Religious Identity, Freedom of Religion, Indian Constitution, Secularism

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I. INTRODUCTION

Religious diversity and freedom in India

India is a nation of immense religious diversity, with a rich tapestry of faiths, beliefs, and practices. The Indian Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion, including the right to profess, practice, and propagate one's religion. This fundamental right is enshrined in Articles 25 to 28, which seek to protect individual religious freedoms while also empowering the state to regulate certain aspects related to public order, morality, and health.³ The Constitution envisages India as a secular state, with equal respect for all religions and no official state religion.

However, the exercise of religious freedoms, particularly the right to propagate one's faith, has been a contentious issue.⁴ The enactment of anti-conversion laws in several states has raised concerns about their impact on religious liberty and the shaping of religious identities. These laws, ostensibly aimed at preventing forced or fraudulent conversions, have been criticized for disproportionately targeting minority religions and curtailing individual autonomy in matters of faith.⁵

II. ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS IN INDIA

A. Historical context and origins of anti-conversion laws

Anti-conversion laws in India have a long and complex history, dating back to the colonial era.⁶ During British rule, several princely states enacted anti-conversion legislation to protect their religious identities and prevent conversions to Christianity. These early laws, such as the Raigarh State Conversion Act of 1936 and the Patna Freedom of Religion Act of 1942, required individuals seeking to convert to obtain permission from the state authorities.⁷ The laws also imposed penalties for conversions achieved through force, fraud, or inducement.

After India gained independence in 1947, the debate surrounding anti-conversion laws continued. In the Constituent Assembly, members discussed the need to protect vulnerable individuals from forced conversions while ensuring the freedom to propagate one's religion.⁸

³ Constitution of India, arts 25–28.

⁴ *Rev Stainislaus v State of Madhya Pradesh* AIR 1977 SC 908.

⁵ Chhattisgarh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam, 1968.

⁶ Laura Dudley Jenkins, 'Legal Limits on Religious Conversion in India' (2008) 71(1) *Law & Contemp Probs* 109, 113.

⁷ Goldie Osuri, *Religious Freedom in India: Sovereignty and (Anti) Conversion* (Routledge 2012) 30-31.

⁸ Shefali Jha, 'Secularism in the Constituent Assembly Debates, 1946-1950' (2017) 37(30) *Econ & Pol Wkly* 42, 45-46.

However, no explicit provision banning conversions was included in the final draft of the Constitution. In the following decades, several states enacted their own anti-conversion laws, citing the need to maintain public order and prevent religious tensions.

B. Key provisions and objectives of these laws

The key provisions and objectives of anti-conversion laws vary across different states, but they share some common elements.⁹ These laws generally prohibit conversions that are achieved through force, fraud, or inducement. Force is often defined to include threats of divine displeasure or social excommunication, while inducement encompasses offers of material benefits or gifts. The laws require individuals who wish to convert to another religion to give prior notice to the authorities and obtain permission.

The stated objectives of anti-conversion laws are to prevent forced or fraudulent conversions,¹⁰ protect the religious freedoms of individuals, and maintain public order and social harmony. Proponents argue that these laws are necessary to safeguard vulnerable communities, particularly those belonging to lower castes and tribes, from being exploited or coerced into changing their religion. However, critics contend that the laws are often misused to target minority religions and restrict the legitimate exercise of religious freedom.

C. States that have enacted anti-conversion legislation

Several states in India have enacted anti-conversion laws over the years.¹¹ Odisha was the first state to pass such legislation in 1967, followed by Madhya Pradesh in 1968.¹² Other states that have implemented similar laws include Gujarat (2003), Chhattisgarh (2006), Himachal Pradesh (2006), Jharkhand (2017), Uttarakhand (2018), and Uttar Pradesh (2020). Some states, such as Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan, have passed anti-conversion bills that are yet to receive assent from the governor or president.¹³

The provisions of these state laws vary in their scope and stringency. For example, the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act, 2003, requires individuals seeking to convert to obtain prior permission from the district magistrate.¹⁴ The Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, imposes stricter penalties for conversions involving

⁹ Jessamine Mathew, 'Anti-Conversion Laws in India: A Comparative Analysis' (2021) 4(1) Indian LR 1, 4.

¹⁰ Jessamine Mathew, 'Anti-Conversion Laws in India: A Comparative Analysis' (2021) 4(1) Indian LR 1, 6-7.

¹¹ Sara Singha, 'Understanding Anti-Conversion Laws' (2021) 56(24) Economic & Political Weekly 42.

¹² Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967; Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam, 1968.

¹³ Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Bill, 2002; Rajasthan Freedom of Religion Bill, 2008.

¹⁴ Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act (n 17), s 5.

minors, women, or members of Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes.¹⁵ The Jharkhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2017, places the burden of proof on the person accused of forceful conversion to prove their innocence.¹⁶

III. CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND JUDICIAL INTERPRETATIONS

A. Analysis of Articles 25-28 of the Indian Constitution guaranteeing religious freedoms

The Indian Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion through Articles 25 to 28.¹⁷ Article 25 states that all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate their religion, subject to public order, morality, and health. This article also allows the state to regulate or restrict secular activities associated with religious practice. Article 26 grants religious denominations the right to manage their own affairs in matters of religion, establish and maintain institutions for religious purposes and acquire movable and immovable property.

Article 27 prohibits the state from levying taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion. Article 28 deals with the issue of religious instruction in educational institutions, stating that no religious instruction shall be provided in state-funded institutions. These constitutional provisions aim to ensure religious freedoms while also empowering the state to regulate certain aspects in the interest of public order and welfare.

B. Landmark Supreme Court cases interpreting the scope of religious freedoms

The Supreme Court of India has played a crucial role in interpreting the scope of religious freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.¹⁸ In *Rev. Stanislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh (1977)*, the court upheld the constitutionality of the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam, 1968, and the Odisha Freedom of Religion Act, 1967.¹⁹ The court held that the right to propagate one's religion does not include the right to convert others and that the state has the power to regulate conversions to maintain public order.

In *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994)*, a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court

¹⁵ Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance (n 17), ss 3, 5.

¹⁶ Jharkhand Freedom of Religion Act (n 17), s 4.

¹⁷ Constitution of India 1950, arts 25-28.

¹⁸ Jessamine Mathew, 'Anti-Conversion Laws in India: A Comparative Analysis' (2021) 4(1) Indian LR 1, 8.

¹⁹ *Rev Stanislaus v State of Madhya Pradesh* 1977 AIR 908, SCR (2) 611.

emphasized the secular character of the Indian Constitution.²⁰ The court held that secularism is a part of the basic structure of the Constitution and that the state should not favor or discriminate against any particular religion. The judgment also clarified that the freedom of religion is not an absolute right and can be subject to reasonable restrictions.

Other significant cases that have shaped the discourse on religious freedoms include *Commissioner of Police v. Acharya Jagdishwarananda Avadhuta (2004)*, where the court held that the right to propagate one's religion does not include the right to forcibly convert others,²¹ and *Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala (2018)*, which dealt with the issue of women's entry into the Sabarimala temple.²²

C. Balancing the right to propagate religion with the prevention of forced conversions

One of the key challenges in the context of anti-conversion laws is balancing the right to propagate one's religion with the need to prevent forced or fraudulent conversions.²³ The Supreme Court has recognized that the right to propagate religion is an essential part of the freedom of religion guaranteed by Article 25.²⁴ However, this right is subject to public order, morality, and health, and does not include the right to forcibly convert others.²⁵

In striking this balance, courts have emphasized the importance of individual autonomy and the right to freely choose one's religion.²⁶ At the same time, they have acknowledged the state's duty to protect vulnerable individuals from exploitation and coercion. The line between legitimate propagation and forced conversion is often blurred, leading to tensions and legal challenges.

Critics argue that anti-conversion laws can be misused to harass and persecute minority religious groups, particularly Christians and Muslims. There are concerns that the broad and vague definitions of terms like "force" and "inducement" in these laws can be interpreted to restrict legitimate religious activities. On the other hand, supporters of these laws contend that they are necessary to prevent conversions that are not truly voluntary and to maintain social harmony.

²⁰ SR Bommai v Union of India (1994) 3 SCC 1.

²¹ Commissioner of Police v Acharya Jagdishwarananda Avadhuta (2004) 12 SCC 770.

²² Indian Young Lawyers Association v State of Kerala (2018) 7 SCC 690.

²³ Arpita Anant, 'Anti-Conversion Laws in India: A Legal and Political Analysis' (2019) 54(3) Law & Society Review 641.

²⁴ Commissioner of Police v Acharya Jagdishwarananda Avadhuta (2004) 12 SCC 770.

²⁵ Rev Stainislaus v State of Madhya Pradesh 1997 AIR 908, SCR (2) 611.

²⁶ Sarla Mudgal v Union of India (1995) 3 SCC 635.

IV. IMPACT OF ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS ON INDIVIDUAL RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

A. Restrictions on the right to change one's religion freely

Anti-conversion laws in India have significant implications for an individual's right to freely change their religion. These laws often require individuals seeking to convert to give prior notice to authorities and obtain permission, which can be a cumbersome and intimidating process.²⁷ The requirement of prior approval from the district magistrate, as seen in the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act, 2003, places undue restrictions on the freedom of choice in matters of faith.²⁸ Such provisions can deter individuals from exercising their right to adopt a religion of their choice, as they fear scrutiny, delays, or even rejection of their application.²⁹ Moreover, the broad and ambiguous definitions of terms like "force," "fraud," and "allurement" in these laws can be misused to restrict voluntary conversions.³⁰ The inclusion of "divine displeasure" or "social excommunication" within the ambit of force can be interpreted to cover legitimate persuasion and preaching activities. This can create a chilling effect on individuals who wish to change their religion based on their personal convictions and spiritual experiences.³¹

B. Chilling effect on religious expression and propagation

Anti-conversion laws can have a chilling effect on the freedom of religious expression and propagation.³² The fear of legal repercussions and social backlash can deter individuals and religious groups from openly discussing and sharing their beliefs with others. This can lead to self-censorship and a reluctance to engage in legitimate missionary activities, which are an integral part of many religious traditions.

The vague and overbroad provisions in these laws can be misused to harass and persecute minority religious groups, particularly Christians and Muslims, who are often accused of engaging in forceful or fraudulent conversions. The threat of arrests, investigations, and

²⁷ Tehmina Arora, 'Anti-Conversion Laws in India: Unnecessary and Harmful' (2021) 11(1) Think India Journal 621, 623.

²⁸ Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act 2003, s 5.

²⁹ Jayanth Krishnan, 'The Rights of the New Untouchables: A Constitutional Analysis of HIV Jurisprudence in India' (2003) 25(3) Human Rights Quarterly 791, 820.

³⁰ Arpita Anant, 'Anti-Conversion Laws in India: A Legal and Political Analysis' (2019) 54(3) Law & Soc'y Rev 637, 643.

³¹ James Andrew Huff, 'Religious Freedom in India and Analysis of the Constitutionality of Anti-Conversion Laws' (2009) 10(2) Rutgers Journal of Law and Religion 1, 17.

³² James Chiriyankandath and C Nisha, 'The Politics of Religious Conversion in India: State Responses to Religious Conversion and the Rise of Hindu Nationalism' (2021) 35(2) India Rev 145, 156.

prolonged legal battles can have a deterrent effect on the free exercise of religion. This can result in a shrinking space for religious minorities to practice and propagate their faith, undermining the pluralistic fabric of Indian society.

C. Disproportionate impact on marginalized communities

Anti-conversion laws have a disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, such as Dalits and Adivasis, who often seek to escape the oppressive caste system and social discrimination through religious conversion.³³ These communities have historically faced severe social, economic, and political marginalization, and conversion to Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism has provided them with a sense of identity, dignity, and empowerment.

However, anti-conversion laws can be used to target and criminalize these marginalized groups for exercising their right to choose their religion.³⁴ The higher penalties prescribed for conversions involving Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in some state laws, such as the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, reflect the paternalistic and discriminatory attitudes towards these communities.³⁵ The assumption that these groups are incapable of making informed choices and are vulnerable to exploitation reinforces their subordinate status and denies them agency and autonomy.

D. Consequences for inter-religious marriages and relationships

Anti-conversion laws can have serious consequences for inter-religious marriages and relationships. Some of these laws, such as the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018, and the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, explicitly prohibit conversions for the purpose of marriage.³⁶ This can lead to the criminalization of consenting adults who choose to marry outside their religion and convert voluntarily.³⁷

The requirement of prior notice and permission for inter-religious marriages can also deter couples from pursuing such relationships due to fear of social ostracism, family opposition, and legal hurdles.³⁸ This can infringe upon the fundamental right to marry a person of one's

³³ Harald Tambs-Lyche, 'Caste, Religion and Emerging Patterns of Stratification in India' (2019) 49 (1-2) Contributions to Indian Sociology 103, 113.

³⁴ Arpita Anant, 'Anti-Conversion Laws in India: A Legal and Political Analysis' (2019) 54(3) Law & Society Review 649.

³⁵ Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance 2020, s 5(3).

³⁶ Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act 2018, s 3; Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance 2020, s 6.

³⁷ Charu Gupta, 'Hindu Women, Muslim Men: Love Jihad and Conversions' (2009) 44(51) Economic and Political Weekly 13, 15.

³⁸ Arpita Anant, 'Anti-Conversion Laws in India: A Legal and Political Analysis' (2019) 54(3) Law & Society Review 653.

choice, as recognized by the Supreme Court in *Shafin Jahan v. Asokan K.M. (2018)*.³⁹ The targeting of inter-religious marriages under the garb of preventing "love jihad" can fuel communal polarization and undermine the secular fabric of Indian society.

V. SOCIETAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS

A. Reinforcement of religious boundaries and identities

Anti-conversion laws can contribute to the reinforcement of religious boundaries and the hardening of religious identities. By placing legal restrictions on the freedom to change one's religion, these laws can create a sense of "otherness" and division between different religious communities. The narrative of "forced conversions" and the need to "protect" one's religion can lead to heightened religious sensitivities and a more rigid and exclusivist understanding of religious identity.⁴⁰

This can hamper interfaith dialogue, understanding, and social cohesion, as individuals may feel more invested in defending the boundaries of their religious community rather than engaging with others.⁴¹ The fear of legal sanctions and social stigma can also discourage individuals from exploring and embracing different spiritual paths, leading to a more homogenized and less diverse religious landscape.

B. Perpetuation of social hierarchies and discrimination based on religion

Anti-conversion laws can perpetuate social hierarchies and discrimination based on religion. These laws often reflect the dominant religious majority's anxieties and prejudices towards minority religions, particularly Christianity and Islam. The narrative of "forced conversions" and the need to "save" Hindus from the "proselytizing" activities of minority religions can reinforce the notion of Hindu supremacy and the subordinate status of other faiths.⁴²

This can lead to the marginalization and stigmatization of religious minorities, who may face social boycotts, economic exclusion, and even violence for their beliefs and practices.⁴³ The

³⁹ *Shafin Jahan v Asokan KM* (2018) 16 SCC 368.

⁴⁰ Arpita Anant, 'Anti-Conversion Laws in India: A Legal and Political Analysis' (2019) 54(3) *Law & Society Review* 655.

⁴¹ Chad M Bauman, 'Identity, Conversion and Violence: Dalits, Adivasis and the 2007-08 Riots in Orissa' (2013) 37(2) *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 1, 14.

⁴² Nandini Chatterjee, 'The Political Economy of "Love Jihad"' (2021) 56(15) *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, 32.

⁴³ Chad M Bauman, 'Identity, Conversion and Violence: Dalits, Adivasis and the 2007-08 Riots in Orissa' (2013) 37(2) *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 1, 17.

targeting of Christian missionaries and Muslim youth under these laws can create an atmosphere of fear and insecurity among these communities, hindering their full participation in society.

C. Political mobilization around religious identity and anti-conversion narratives

Anti-conversion laws can become a tool for political mobilization around religious identity and anti-conversion narratives. Political parties and groups may use these laws to appeal to the religious sentiments of the majority community and consolidate their vote banks.⁴⁴ The rhetoric of "protecting" Hinduism from the "threat" of conversions can be used to polarize the electorate along religious lines and fuel communal tensions for electoral gains.

This can lead to the instrumentalization of religion for political purposes, undermining the secular and democratic ethos of the Indian Constitution. The politicization of religious conversions can also divert attention from the real socio-economic and developmental issues facing the country, as religious identity becomes the primary axis of political mobilization.

D. Challenges to secularism and religious pluralism in India

Anti-conversion laws pose significant challenges to secularism and religious pluralism in India. These laws can be seen as a departure from the constitutional vision of a secular state that treats all religions equally and does not discriminate on the basis of religion. By placing restrictions on the right to propagate and change one's religion, these laws can undermine the fundamental principles of individual autonomy, freedom of conscience, and religious liberty.

Moreover, the selective and disproportionate application of these laws against minority religions can erode the trust and confidence of these communities in the state's commitment to secularism and equal treatment. This can lead to a sense of alienation and marginalization, which can have long-term implications for social harmony and national integration. The challenges posed by anti-conversion laws call for a renewed commitment to the values of secularism, religious pluralism, and the protection of individual rights and freedoms.

VI. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

A. Comparison with international human rights standards on freedom of religion

International human rights law recognizes the fundamental right to freedom of thought,

⁴⁴ Subhash Gatade, 'Understanding Saffron Agenda: Tracing the Rise of Hindutva' (2021) 56(3) Economic and Political Weekly 32, 34.

conscience, and religion, including the freedom to change one's religion or belief.⁴⁵ Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) enshrine this right and prohibit coercion that would impair an individual's freedom to choose their religion or belief.⁴⁶

However, anti-conversion laws in India, with their broad and vague provisions, can be seen as inconsistent with these international standards. The requirement of prior permission, the criminalization of conversions based on subjective criteria like "force" or "fraud," and the disproportionate impact on minority religions can violate the principles of non-discrimination, equality, and religious freedom guaranteed under international law.

B. Lessons from other countries' experiences with anti-conversion laws

The experiences of other countries with anti-conversion laws can provide valuable lessons for India. In countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Bhutan, anti-conversion laws have been used to restrict the activities of minority religions and curtail religious freedom. These laws have often led to the persecution and marginalization of religious minorities, fueling social tensions and conflict.

On the other hand, countries like South Korea and Taiwan have taken a more liberal approach to religious conversions, recognizing the right to change one's religion as an integral part of religious freedom. These countries have focused on promoting interfaith dialogue, understanding, and social harmony, rather than imposing legal restrictions on religious conversions.

C. India's obligations under international treaties and conventions

India is a party to several international human rights treaties and conventions that obligate it to protect and promote the right to freedom of religion and belief. These include the ICCPR, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).⁴⁷

As a responsible member of the international community, India has a duty to ensure that its domestic laws and practices are in alignment with these international commitments.⁴⁸ This

⁴⁵ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted 10 December 1948) UNGA Res 217 A(III) (UDHR) art 18.

⁴⁶ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171 (ICCPR) art 18.

⁴⁷ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (adopted 18 December 1979, entered into force 3 September 1981) 1249 UNTS 13 (CEDAW); Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990) 1577 UNTS 3 (CRC).

⁴⁸ Arpita Anant, 'Anti-Conversion Laws in India: A Legal and Political Analysis' (2019) 54(3) Law & Society

requires a critical evaluation of the anti-conversion laws in light of international human rights standards and taking necessary steps to reform or repeal provisions that violate religious freedom and non-discrimination.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

A. Need for a more nuanced and balanced approach to regulating religious conversions

Addressing the challenges posed by anti-conversion laws in India requires a more nuanced and balanced approach to regulating religious conversions. While the state has a legitimate interest in preventing forced or fraudulent conversions, it must also respect the individual's right to freedom of conscience and the autonomy to choose one's religion.

This calls for a recalibration of the legal framework to strike a delicate balance between protecting religious freedom and maintaining public order and social harmony. The focus should be on addressing the root causes of forced conversions, such as social and economic vulnerabilities, rather than imposing blanket restrictions on the right to propagate and change one's religion.

B. Strengthening legal safeguards against forced conversions while protecting individual freedoms

Strengthening legal safeguards against forced conversions is crucial, but it must be done in a manner that does not infringe upon individual freedoms. This requires a more precise and narrow definition of terms like "force," "fraud," and "inducement" in the anti-conversion laws to prevent their misuse and abuse. The legal process for regulating conversions should be transparent, accountable, and subject to judicial oversight to prevent arbitrary and discriminatory application of the law. The state must also ensure that the rights of individuals to freely choose and practice their religion are protected and that any restrictions imposed are necessary, proportionate, and non-discriminatory.

C. Promoting interfaith dialogue, understanding, and social cohesion

Promoting interfaith dialogue, understanding, and social cohesion is essential to address the underlying tensions and prejudices that fuel demands for anti-conversion laws. The state and civil society must create spaces and opportunities for different religious communities to

interact, engage, and learn from each other.

This can be done through initiatives like interfaith dialogues, cultural exchanges, and joint social action projects that bring people together across religious divides. Educational institutions can also play a crucial role in fostering religious literacy, critical thinking, and respect for diversity among young minds.

D. Addressing the root causes of religious conversions (e.g., social, economic factors)

Addressing the root causes of religious conversions, such as social and economic factors, is essential to create a more inclusive and equitable society. Many individuals, particularly from marginalized communities, may seek to convert to escape the oppressive caste system, social discrimination, and economic deprivation.

The state must invest in social and economic development programs that provide equal opportunities, access to education, healthcare, and livelihood to all individuals, irrespective of their religious or caste identity. Strengthening social justice measures and affirmative action policies can help in reducing the vulnerabilities that make individuals susceptible to forced or fraudulent conversions.

VIII. CONCLUSION

A. Summary of the main arguments and findings

This research paper has examined the complex interplay between anti-conversion laws and the shaping of religious identity in India. It has highlighted the historical context and legal provisions of these laws, their impact on individual freedoms and marginalized communities, and the broader societal and political implications for secularism and pluralism.

The analysis of the constitutional framework and judicial interpretations has revealed the tensions between the right to propagate religion and the prevention of forced conversions. The comparative analysis with international human rights standards has underscored the need for a more balanced approach to regulating religious conversions while protecting individual freedoms.

B. Significance of the research in understanding the complex dynamics of religious identity in India

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the understanding of the complex dynamics of religious identity in India. It has shown how legal measures like anti-conversion laws can have far-reaching consequences for individual choices, social relations, and political

mobilization around religion. By examining the impact of these laws on marginalized communities and the challenges they pose to secularism and pluralism, the research has highlighted the need for a more inclusive and equitable approach to managing religious diversity in India.

