



INTERNATIONAL SIKH CONFEDERATION

ਅੰਤਰਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਠਨ

RELIGIOUS CONVERSIONS IN PUNJAB

—An Information Note —

Even as there is lack of precise data available for religious conversions in Punjab, but given the rise in the number of churches and the communal clashes/ disharmony over the last few years, there is a clear sign of upsurge in conversions to Christianity. These are largely orchestrated by "independent pastors and churches." The movement is known as Pentecostalism, and is the fastest growing Christian movement worldwide. Mainstream Christian leaders, too, express concern over independent pastors, criticizing their "quick fix" theology and alleged financial irregularities. Also known as Charismatic Christianity, it promises spiritual gifts like healing, prophecy, speaking in tongues (glossolalia) and a spirited experience of union with God to the individual. Their ability to perform 'miracles' and solving all kinds of problems has turned churches into hubs of hope for the sick, the distressed, the needy, and the marginalized ones. The unprecedented conversions have sparked social tensions, political mobilization, and calls for regulation - thus making conversion a pressing issue for dialogue today. Guru Tegh Bahadur ji's martyrdom offers a historical lens to examine contemporary challenges, reaffirming the importance of safeguarding religious freedom and cultural integrity.

Key Patterns and Methods of Conversion

- * **Language and Cultural Influence:** Use of regional dialects and cultural familiarity to promote conversion through 'home churches' and small community gatherings.
- * **Faith Healing and Rituals:** Emphasis on miraculous healing and spiritual experiences to attract vulnerable individuals.
- * **Hybrid Worship:** Punjabi gospel music, dholak-driven hymns, Christian lyrics using Sikh idioms.
- * **Material Incentives:** Offers of financial aid, education, & social upliftment to economically disadvantaged groups.
- * **Soft Coercion:** Missionary-run schools, hospitals, and rehab centres serve both as aid institutions and subtle spaces of conversions. Scholarships for Christian students and emotional healing from caste trauma or family disputes addressed.
- * **Stealth Conversions:** Covert methods targeting Scheduled Castes and marginalized communities without disclosure of religious intent.
- * **Use of Digital Media:** The use of digital media has transformed the scale and speed, and preaching now enters homes unfiltered, through Live Miracle broadcasts; Testimonials of healed individuals subtitled in Punjabi, Hindi, and English on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook; Before-and-After stories; Healing Hotlines; WhatsApp Prayer Groups, etc.

Institutional Concerns and Community Response:

- * **Local Community Mobilization/ Investigations:** Some Gurdwaras, Local religious bodies, Village Elders level Committees raised concerns and even initiated inquiries into reported conversions, especially in rural Punjab.
- * **SGPC and Sri Akal Takht Sahib** has called for Anti-Conversion laws, warning that foreign-backed missionary activities threaten not only religious heritage but also national security in this sensitive border State.
- * **SGPC** launched the "ghar ghar andar dharamsaal" campaign to strengthen Sikh teachings to counter conversions.
- * **Media and Public Discourse:** Coverage of conversion-related incidents has sparked broader debates on religious freedom and social ethics.

Root Causes Identified

- * **Socioeconomic Vulnerability:** Poverty, illiteracy, and lack of access to basic services make certain populations susceptible.
- * **Cultural Displacement:** Lack of Equality and Equal Representation in community structures.
- * **Institutional Gaps:** Perceived inaction or inefficiency of religious institutions in addressing grassroots concerns.

Broader Implications

- * **Social Fragmentation:** Conversion activities have led to tensions within communities and disrupted social harmony.
- * **Isolation:** Individuals and families who undergo conversion also face alienation from their original cultural and religious roots.
- * **Identity Crisis:** Hybrid identity, such as that of a "turbaned Christian" challenges the traditional form of Sikh identity and blurs the boundaries between the religions. The Term "Punjabistan" has emerged in media & religious discourse to describe the perceived Christianisation of Punjab.

P.T.O.

* **Unofficial Conversion:** SCs and STs do not officially convert to Christianity, as they do not wish to give up their reservation benefits in education, employment, political representation, etc., which are available to them only if they remain in the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist or Jain fold. But they are regular church-goers and promote Christianity.

Ethical Dimensions:

* Questions around morality, consent, coercion, and transparency in conversion practices remain unresolved.

Political impact:

* Pastors' followers are vote banks; Christian bodies formed (Shiromani Church Parbandhak Committee, SCPC, in 2019, Pentecostal Christian Parbandhak Committee, PCPC); a political party United Punjab Party (UPP) launched in 2023.

* Increasing Christian influence in Punjab has led to tensions with Sikh bodies, such as, SGPC.

* On 31.08.2022, the Jathedar of Sri Akal Takht alleged forced conversions of people of the State and demanded an anti-conversion law.

Demographic Trends:

* Census 2021 has not been conducted. According to Census in 2011, Christian population in Punjab was 3,48,230, making up 1.26% of the State's total population.

* Field estimates by OpIndia, United Christian Front, India Today show a significant surge in Christian population between 2011 and 2024. There is reported a growth of 102% in Tarn Taran, 194% in Amritsar, and 260% in Jalandhar.

* Rise of "independent churches" and 5,000 homegrown pastors since 2000s.

Constitutional Provisions on Religious Freedom:

The Constitution of India guarantees freedom of religion. Below is a constitutional position:

* **Article 25** – Subject to public order, health and morality, Article 25 guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion to all citizens.

* **Article 26** – Grants religious denominations the right to manage their own affairs in matters of religion.

Legal Position on Religious Conversion:

* **No Central Law:** India does not have a national law banning/ regulating religious conversions. However, several States have enacted their own laws.

* **State-Level Anti-Conversion Laws:** As of 2025, at least 12 States (including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, and Himachal Pradesh) have passed laws to prohibit conversions by force, fraud, or inducement.

Hon'ble Supreme Court's Interpretation:

* In *Rev. Stanislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (1977), the Court held that the fundamental right to "propagate" one's religion under Article 25 does not include the right to convert another person, and that forced conversions can be prohibited by State law to maintain public order.

Concerns of the Hon'ble Supreme Court:

* Hon'ble Supreme Court has raised significant concerns that State anti-conversion laws may violate fundamental rights, including the right to privacy, personal liberty and freedom of conscience.

* The Court has also highlighted the laws' potential for misuse, and harassment, the "onerous" and intrusive procedures they impose, the vagueness of "inducement" or "fraud" and the conspicuous involvement of the State in personal matters of faith.

* The penalties under the laws are "mind-boggling" with offences being cognizable and non-bailable, and the fines extremely high and punishments harsh with imprisonment up to ten years.

The situation demands that the intellectual class take note of this grave scenario in time, and provide a narrative & a programme for the Sikhs as well as guidelines for the Government of Punjab. We, hereby, seek your precious views and suggestions, in the light of Gurmat, as to the Way Forward for: The Sikhs & The Government of Punjab.
