

STATEMENT - January 4, 2021

We are a Forum of Concerned Citizens from various walks of life; including Judiciary, Civil and Police services, Armed Forces, Academia, Professionals and other intellectuals; with an unshakable belief in the greatness of Indian democracy and its sacred institutions, the sovereignty and integrity of India, a robust economy, a healthy cohesive society knitted in the fabric woven from the highest human values. It is a matter of concern that one group of retired civil servants, visibly biased with an anti-establishment attitude despite overtly posing as 'non-political', repeatedly avail of every opportunity to put the Indian democracy, its institutions, and persons legitimately holding high offices in poor light before the whole world by making ill-considered public statements, or writing misconceived communications to various authorities.

At the outset, we make it clear that this politically motivated pressure-group does not represent thousands of the former Civil Servants, Police and other AIS Officers, former Judges, officers of Defense Forces, Professionals, and other nationalist intellectuals who believe in India emerging as the greatest democracy of the world, and a global icon bringing pride to every Indian. The recent open communication addressed to the democratically elected Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, exhorting him to 're-learn' the Constitution of India, is irresponsible statement which demeans our democratic institutions. This is not for the first time, that this very group made futile attempts to tarnish our Parliament, Election Commission of India, and even the Supreme Court of India. This group seems to have usurped to themselves the Constitutional power of Judicial Review to put every law of the land to the test of their own whims. Needless to say, they are doing a monumental disservice to India, and the image of the Indians settled all over the world.

The Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020 applies to every one belonging to any religion, provides for regulation of conversion through prescribed declaration and giving notice to authorities for ruling out unlawful conversions based on misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement, fraudulent means, marriages etc. It rightly provides that the marriages done for sole purpose of unlawful conversion can be declared void by the Family Courts on a petition by any of the two parties in a marriage. The said law safeguards the dignity of women involved in marriages leading to conversions, and further makes a special provision in favour of minors, women or anyone belonging to Scheduled Castes / Scheduled Tribes.

In a hasty generalization based on a solitary incident of alleged lapse in Moradabad while implementing the UP Ordinance prohibiting unlawful conversions or regulating other conversions in UP, the law itself has been dubbed as illegal and, in particular, anti-Muslim. It is a shocking obsession of this biased group to stoke communal fire by instigating the religious minorities. Any seasoned civil servant having spent lifetime in governance knows that there can be, as per the judgment of some people, some incident of alleged lapse in implementing the best of laws, but systems are always in place to punish those specific public servants found guilty of any mala fide misconduct, and to provide relief to the sufferer. The UP Government must understandably be taking such recourse in any such incident.

It is really strange that a mature elderly group of former public servants, while hastily generalizing on the basis of one such incident, have lost sight of large number of incidents where hapless victim women have been brutally murdered in a ghastly manner in the course of inter-faith marriages and conversions. For example, such horrifying cases as that of 19 years old Ms. Ekta who was murdered and buried in Village Lohia in PS Doral (Meerut) on 14.06.2019, Ms. Chanchal Chaudhary and her minor daughter who were murdered and buried inside the room of their house itself on 28.03.2020 in P.S. Partapur (Meerut), the 23-year-old Ms Priya, who was brutally murdered in Sonabhadra when

she refused to convert to Islam after marriage, are just a few of series of incidents which should have been looked at seriously before taking a ridiculous sweeping position.

A look at comprehensive findings of 8th Report of VII State Law Commission under the Chairmanship of Justice Aditya Nath Mittal would have made this group of 104 former public servants to desist from making wholly misconceived remarks about the rationale, intent and purpose of the UP law against unlawful conversions. They should also have kept in mind that even prior to India's independence, during the British Raj, princely states including Kota, Patna, Surguja, Udaipur, and Kalahandi passed laws regarding religious conversions. After Independence Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand etc. had legislated on matters relating to unlawful conversions. New laws reflect the evolving needs of a dynamic society.

A highly distorted reference of 'Ganga-Jamni culture' has been given in wrongly criticising the UP Law on unlawful conversions. The 'Ganga-Jamni culture' concept stands for harmonious inter-faith evolution and coexistence of art, culture, languages etc; but certainly not the 'Unlawful Conversions' with criminal intent, leading to murders, mutilation, torture and betrayal of women in particular. We strongly believe in a secular India with harmonious coexistence of people of all faiths, and consider unlawful conversions with wrongful intent and questionable means a threat to communal harmony. In view of the above, we, the Concerned Citizens, totally reject and disassociate from the wholly misconceived point of view of some of our fellow retired civil servants.

We urge all State governments to discharge their functions in the best public interest in maintaining law and order, social harmony and dignity of women without succumbing to any pressures.

Yogendra Narain, IAS
Former Chief Secretary, UP
Former Secretary-General of Rajya Sabha