Anti-conversion laws once again showcase friction between Hindutva and secularism

Abhinav Mishra, Pavitra Ramesh | JAN 2026, 2:00 IST | UPDATED: JAN 7 2026, 2:00 IST

On November 30 last year when the Governor of Uttar Pradesh passed the ordinance titled the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2025, the state became the fourth Indian state to officially nationalise religious conversions, popular as the "anti-conversion law". Thus, it joined the ranks of the more states promulgating similar legislations, such as the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill, 2025, the Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill, 2025, and the Karnataka Bill, 2025, which discuss the contentious thought crime of conversion, and the Chhattisgarh Freedom of Conversion Bill, 2025, which proposes a punishment that needs to be stayed at all costs.

The UP ordinance, popularised as the 'Love Jihad' law, was precipitated by further the use of Muslim men's alleged deceitful practices to lure Hindu women into marriage, conversion, and other patriarchal attitudes, the state attempts to replicate over both marriages, and such up-bringing of women. The ordinance is also known as the "Anti-Romeo law" because it also criminalises "moral policing" conversion. The ordinance is also known as the "Anti-Romeo law" because it also criminalises "moral policing" that family members and community.

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These laws are not isolated instances but form a part of the larger agenda of the Hindu Right. These laws are a manifestation of the Hindu Right's fear of the Muslim minority, which is being driven to the country's economy and forces a crushing legislation under the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, and the National Population Register, 2020, which are being used to make Muslims a second-class citizens spiralling Covid 19. through the legislation, laws are being enacted to making use of misinformation campaigns.

To define a secular state, 'Love Jihad' law is a manifestation of the Hindu nationalist agenda which seeks to protect Hindu girls against the alleged attempts of seduction, marriage, conversion and trafficking by Muslim men.

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However, and makes the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 and the Citizenship Act, 1955 and the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003 and the National Identity Cards Rules of the Constitution and Rights to Equality laws law under Article 14 of the Constitution, Article 15

students as people who can excel in physics, the gender gaps in self-efficacy and sense of belonging are likely to persist. Also, established leaders our science and engineering communities should tackle issues of bias or instances of microaggression head-on, rather than staying silent.

The culture change will unfortunately be a gradual process, which is inconvenient for a quantum revolution. But it is never too late to embark upon this important task of improving the climate and culture of physics and related disciplines that have prevented many women, and other underrepresented groups from contributing. If quantum computers can factor numbers of unfathomable size, then surely the scientists and engineers who build them can handle a factor of two. For the second quantum revolution to succeed, we need to make sure that women succeed.

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The organisation has put its strength behind the largest mass contact programme undertaken since 1989 despite the impact of the pandemic

Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, JAN 13 2021, 17:31 IST | UPDATED: JAN 13 2021, 17:31 IST

This newspaper's report on 11 November 2020, that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad planned a fundraising campaign spread over almost 45 days across India, for construction of Ram Temple in Ayodhya after Makar Sankranti on January 14, evoked a sense of incredulity. At a time when pandemic-induced uncertainty was raging, the economy was virtually stagnant, and crores of Indians had little idea of what future held in store, what sense did it make to launch a drive that entailed mass contact in lakhs of villages and interactions with several crore families across the country? If nothing else, it would only aggravate risks of fresh spurt in Covid-19 cases.

Read | Foundation work of Ayodhya Ram temple to begin in January: Trust official

In the last week of December, the disbelief increased after reports surfaced that communal tensions had been stoked in the sensitive Malwa region of western Madhya Pradesh after several rallies were taken out to raise funds for the Ram temple. That these provocative marches were not taken out by groups formally connected with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) did not seem to hold good after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in the state condoned the high handedness of the districts administrations of Indore, Ujjain, Mandsaur and Dhar. Local officials, instead of taking action against people participating in these marches, initiated action against Muslim residents of colonies through which these processions had been permitted in the first instance.

Additionally, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan declared the intention of replicating the Uttar Pradesh government's draconian UP Recovery of Damage to Public and Private Property Ordinance, 2020, that is ostensibly to take action against stone-pelters, but effectively is yet another tool to browbeat minorities, especially Muslims.

The MP cabinet has already cleared its version of an anti-conversion law which aims to prevent inter-faith marriages. Chouhan is now unambiguous in his pursuit of a hard Hindutva line, in contrast to his moderate stance during his previous tenure. This indicates realisation among satraps that political survival depends on the continued blessings of the central leadership and this can be ensured solely by pursuing polarising policies.

RSS directive on fundraising

Last week the RSS convened a samanvay baithak, its bi-annual interaction among representatives of more than 35 affiliates, including BJP, in Ahmedabad. Amazingly, the meeting, the first major post-Covid RSS assembly, focussed on means of increasing influence of all affiliated organisations. As its first strategy in this direction, it was decided to throw the weight of the entire Sangh Parivar behind the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's fundraising programme that will continue till February 27.

This single-minded pursuit of its largest mass contact programme since 1989 is just one of the current narratives on the Ayodhya issue, the single-most important factor behind the BJP rise from a peripheral party with just two members in Lok Sabha, to one with majority of its own. The other is blurring of lines between religion and state on the one hand and religious activity and political campaigns on the other hand.

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Technically, the call for funds from the general public was given by the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, formed by the government under directions from the Supreme Court. It is supposed to function independent of the government. Yet it invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to perform "Bhoomi Pujan' on August 5 last year, an offer that was accepted post-haste, just as the invite to perform the ground-breaking ceremony for the new Parliament building was agreed to. The latter bypassed the President and paid no heed to Article 79 of the Indian Constitution, which specifies: "There shall be a Parliament for the Union which shall consist of the President and two Houses...".

The prime minister being jajman (person performing a religious ritual) of these two events blurred the lines between religion and the state. Even the fundraising drive will begin with VHP teams paying visits to the President and the Prime Minister. The temple Trust's call for funds has actually been adopted by the VHP and through it by the entire Sangh Parivar. This is evidence that a religious activity (constructing the temple) is now indistinguishable from a political campaign (solidifying public support of affiliated organisations). What makes the fundraising drive further perturbing is the declaration that the objective is to better the previous campaign on which it is modelled.

New mass contact programme

It is pertinent to recall here that 1989 was the final 'take-off' year of the Ram temple agitation through the Ram Shila Pujan/Yatras from September onward and the Shilanyas ritual, performed in Ayodhya on 9 November. The benefits of these accrued to the BJP which secured an astonishing 85 Lok Sabha seats in that year's parliamentary polls. The biggest role in this spectacular rise of the BJP was played by the Ram Shila Yatras, in which consecrated bricks that were specially inscribed with the words 'Shri Ram', were taken out across India.

These yatras, which headed to Ayodhya, evoked 'nationalist devotionalism', as French social scientist Christophe Jaffrelot termed it, and provoked major communal riots in several cities of India. Bhagalpur, Kota, Badaun, and Indore (its history or Ayodhya-linked communal violence runs deep). The fundraising campaign has potential to be more problematic than Ram Shila Yatras because participation in the latter was a mass scale and consequently, voluntary. A person was free to just watch processions go by and not necessarily join or make an offering. In the Temple fundraising drive, the objective is to "contact 10 crore families" as the RSS sah-sarkaryavah, Krishna Gopal said.

Also Read | Ram Temple project likely to cost Rs 1,100 crore: Trust official

Gopal also declared at the end of the samanvay baithak that the RSS "expects" every Indian to contribute at least ten rupees, but those from slightly more affluent families must donate Rs 100 to Rs 1,000. Undoubtedly, there will be fear if the campaign picks up in a big way that those who don't contribute, or don't contribute sufficiently given their means, will be vilified and targeted.

Despite the outbreak of Covid-19 and the threat to life and economic security, the Sangh Parivar has relentlessly pursued its objective to complete the construction of the temple to meet certain political deadlines. The government's decision to lend full backing to this programme and not ask for the postponement of such a massive mass-contact programme demonstrates the BJP's over-reliance on Hindutva campaigns to retain support. It shows that for the government sustaining and increasing the support of this regime depends chiefly on religiously-polarising campaigns and not governance deliveries, opportunities for which are especially aplenty in the post-Covid world.

(Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay is a Delhi-based journalist and author. His latest book is RSS: Icons Of The Indian Right. He has also written Narendra Modi: The Man, The Times (2013))

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