

Karnataka Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021

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In news- Recently, the Karnataka assembly passed the anti conversion bill – The Karnataka Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021.

Key features of the bill-

- It proposes a **maximum punishment of 10 years of imprisonment for forcible conversion of persons** from Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe communities, minors and women to another religion.
- It **prohibits conversion by misrepresentation, force, fraud**, allurement of marriage, coercion and undue influence.
- As per the bill, **complaints of conversions can be filed by family members of a person** who is getting converted, or any other person who is related to the person who is getting converted, or any person associated with the person getting converted.
- The **offence of conversion is cognisable and non-bailable** and will attract a jail term of three to five years and a fine of Rs. 25,000 for people found violating the law and a jail term of three to 10 years, and a fine of Rs. 50,000 for people converting minors, women and persons from the SC and ST communities.
- It also envisages **a compensation of Rs.5 lakh** to victims of forced conversions.
- Once the law comes into force, any person intending to convert to another religion will have to **inform the district magistrate** at least thirty days in advance.
- The person executing the conversion must also give a

notice one month in advance, following which **an inquiry will be conducted by the district magistrate through the police to establish the real intent of conversion.**

- **Not informing authorities will carry a prison term of six months to three years** for persons who are converted and one year to five years for the persons carrying out the conversions.
- **After getting converted, the person has to again inform the district magistrate** within 30 days after conversion and must appear before the district magistrate to confirm his/her identity.
- **Not informing the district magistrate will lead to the conversion being declared null and void.**
- **Post conversion, the district magistrate has to inform revenue authorities,** the social welfare, minority, backward classes and other departments of the conversion, who will, in turn, take steps with respect to the entitlements of the person in terms of reservations and other benefits.
- **It also states that any marriage which has happened for the sole purpose of unlawful conversion or vice-versa** by the man of one religion with the woman of another religion, either by converting himself before or after marriage or by converting the woman before or after marriage, **shall be declared as null and void by the family court.**
- It, however, **provides an exemption in the case of a person who “reconverts to his immediate previous religion” as “the same shall not be deemed to be a conversion under this Act”.**

List of other states with similar laws-

- **Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand have laws restricting religious conversion.**

- Penalties for breaching the laws can range from monetary fines to imprisonment, with punishments ranging from one to three years of imprisonment and fines from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 50,000.
- Some of the laws provide for stiffer penalties if women, children, or members of Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) are being converted.
- **Some other States, including Manipur, are reportedly “considering similar laws.”**
- **Odisha was the first State to enact anti-conversion legislation, the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967.** Madhya Pradesh enacted the same the following year.

Similar initiatives at central level-

- In post-Independent India, **the first Indian Conversion (Regulation and Registration) Bill was introduced in 1954**, which sought to enforce “licensing of missionaries and the registration of conversion with government officials.” **This bill was rejected.**
- This was followed by the introduction of the Backward Communities (Religious Protection) Bill in 1960.
- The bill was aimed at checking conversion of Hindus to ‘non-Indian religions’ which, as per the definition in the Bill, included Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism.
- The Freedom of Religion Bill in 1979, sought “official curbs on inter-religious conversion.”
- These bills fell through for want of majority approval.