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Legislations cannot stop conversion: Buddhist monk

By Our Staff Correspondent

GULBARGA Nov. 11. The founder-President of the International Buddhist Youth Organisation, Bante Bodhi Dhamma, today said that conversion of dalits and oppressed classes in India would continue despite the ban imposed in Tamil Nadu and a few other States against "forcible" conversion.

The Japan-based Buddhist monk, who undertook a tour of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh for 40 days between September and October, told presspersons here that legislations could not stop people from choosing their religion to escape from the humiliation heaped on them.

He termed the Tamil Nadu legislation motivated and unconstitutional, and said that the Constitution gave the right to the people of India to practice and follow a religion of their choice. The Tamil Nadu Government by enacting a law was attempting to force dalits and the oppressed classes to remain in Hinduism without taking steps to end the atrocities on them.

Mr. Dhamma said he would visit Tamil Nadu next year to participate in the mass conversion of dalits and the oppressed classes to Buddhism, and challenged the Tamil Nadu Government to take action against him. "I would rather prefer to go to jail than accept such a reactionary law," he said.

Citing the lynching of five dalits in a Haryana village recently for allegedly skinning a cow, the monk said the shameful part of the incident was that there were some Hindu leaders who defended it and placed the life of a cow above the lives of

human beings.

He said the dalits had realised the futility of remaining in Hinduism, and after the Haryana incident more than 100 of them had converted to Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity in the village.

Mr. Dhamma, who lives in the Sogenji Monastery in Okayama city, said conversion was the only answer to the continued humiliation in the caste system followed by the Hindus where the dalits were treated as untouchables.

The rape of dalit women had become common, and steps had not been taken either by the Centre or the State governments to curb atrocities on dalits, he charged.

The monk said that if all dalits converted to Buddhism, there would be a revolutionary change and the dalits would be able to lead a honourable life.

During the 47th Dhamma Chakra Paravarthana Day on October 14 next year, more than five lakh dalits would convert to Buddhism at a function organised by the International Buddhist Youth Organisation in Bangalore, he said. The monk appealed to dalit organisations and others to make the event a success.

The Gulbarga District president of the organisation, Devendra Heggade, the senior dalit leader and former GDA Chairman, Vittal Doddamani, and the dalit leader, B.V.Chakravathi, were among those present.

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