

# **BEHIND THE MASK OF RETURNING HOME**

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'Returning Home' is an attractive phrase in Gujarati. It is an interesting concept. It is also deceptive. If we go behind and explain what is happening we will find real cheating in the name of 'Returning Home'.

In ordinary sense 'Returning Home' implies a person going back to his/her own home. Who is not happy with such home coming? It is a very happy event. There is joy in 'Returning Home'. It is just natural. A person living away from home for reason like being employed away from home or for studying. Those staying away from home returning to their own place from time to time. Such returning creates joy and happiness for all at home. People return to their own home on occasions like Diwali, Christmas, marriage or special occasion like death in a family, some anniversary celebrations etc. Everyone in a house welcomes such 'returning home'. People at home welcome with joy and enthusiasm when their dear ones come home after long absence.

The parable of prodigal son is well known. In it Jesus gave the story of a father and his two sons. The younger of the two sons wanted his father to give him his share of the property. He sold his share of the property and went away to a far away country and lavishly spent his money in loose living. He was dying with hunger after spending his whole money. In his want he remembered his home. In my father's house the servants get more food than they can eat! Here I am dying with hunger. He came into his sense and realized his great mistake. He regretted his leaving home. Prepared mentally to plead for his father's forgiveness and to live as a servant, he returns to his father's house.

His father saw his son while he was still far. He ran to meet his son and embraced him lovingly. Welcoming his son he ordered his servants to bring the best clothes for him and put a ring on his hand and chapels on his legs. Then, the father makes a great feast and make arrangement to celebrate the returning home of his prodigal son. (See Lk 15: 11-24)

But the upholders of 'Manusmriti' have totally different connotation for 'Returning Home'. None of the above concept of 'Returning Home' is applicable for politicized Hindutva people. 'Manusmriti' and Vedic texts clearly state that Hindus clearly uphold four castes: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. Tribals and Dalits do not belong to any of these Hindu caste categories. They are not allowed to enter Hindu temples. The so called high caste Hindus observe untouchability with tribals and Dalits.

History proves that during the last few centuries the people who accepted Christianity and Islam are mostly from these tribals and dalits. The number of those who converted to Christianity or Islam from the high caste Hindus is insignificant. If the high caste converts go back to Hinduism then it is real 'Returning Home'.

Being a council member of International Catholic Union of Press (UCIP) for 24 years I have had the opportunity to travel to 35 countries in Europe, North & South Americas, Asia, Africa and New Zealand. So I have the opportunity to meet local people and discuss with them their

perception about matters of concern for all. The people of foreign countries hold different views about Hindu religion and the caste system. Some hold that the so called Hindu religion is no religion at all but a social system, a cultural organization.

Here I would like to give Gandhiji's definition of Hinduism as quoted by Valjibhai Patel in 'Naya Marg' January 16, 2015. Valjibhai writes, "There is no definition of Hindu religion. So I make a definition of Hindu religion.....Gandhiji's definition of Hindu religion is, "The Caste System (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra) which believes in rebirth, Atman - Paramatman and heaven-hell is considered a Hindu". (Sudra means Other Backward Class the untouchable Dalits do not come in the category of the Sudra)".

When I was the editor of DOOT for about 16 years I have had the opportunity to travel a lot in Gujarat visiting many villages. One thing I could not understand at the beginning. Why the Christians lived either at the end of a village or at the beginning of a village. Later I understood that in many villages there are the people of the 4 castes. But the so called untouchable did not belong to any caste, their place was just outside the village.

But when the Christian Missionaries began to work among the OBC people started schools for them in their locality. Then the approach roads were for bullock carts, motor cycles and finally jeeps. So the roads were built straight to go to the OBC area were sometimes called the Christian streets or Dalit chawls. Then, when pacca roads were built to the villages, they often used the roads built by missionaries and hence the village roads began or ended at OBC people's place.

Thanks to missionary education, social works and medical services the OBC people progressed. The same with tribal (Adivasi) people. The grip of caste system and untouchability began to lose its hold on OBC, and Tribals. Still OBC people's homes can be seen close to the cow dung just outside the village. Then OBC and other Dalit people and the tribals living outside the village go to prove that they are in no way Hindus. So the Christians and Muslims among the OBCs and dalits cannot in no way describe as 'Returning Home' if they enticed or forced to embrace Hinduism.

Still during the last few decades there is a systematic and well organized effort to include the tribals and dalits in the (politicized) Hindutva or Hindu religion. The Adivasis (meaning the original dwellers) are not called any more Adivasis; but they are rechristened 'Vanavasis' (meaning forest dwellers. If the tribals are called Adivasis then there is the recognition of them as indigenous people and by implication the Hindu Aryans as migrant people. So the Hindutva people are not ready to accept Adivasis as the original dwellers of this land. Hence in school the tribal boys and girls are explicitly forced to register as Hindu tribals. The Hindutva people are building Hindu temples among the tribal people and distributing money lavishly to celebrate Hindu feasts. All these attempts show clearly that the tribals are not Hindus but they are really the indigenous people.

Many of these Dalits and Adivasis have embraced Christianity, Islam or Buddhist religion. These Dalits and tribals have never been in the Hindu caste system to be considered Hindus. But false propaganda is broadcast that they have been Hindus before they embraced Christianity, Islam or Buddhism. In fact, there is no religious ceremony in Hinduism for conversion. But a sort of

purification rite is held by some sadus or RSS leaders and such change of the religion is called 'Returning Home'. But actually they forced the victims to become Hindus even though they are not included in any caste category. In the name of 'Returning Home' what is happening is Dalits and Tribals are forced to declare themselves as Hindus with all sorts of allurements and incentives. So there is hypocrisy and cheating in so called 'Returning Home' to Hindu fold.

Actually the promoters and leaders of 'Returning Home' really know that there is no religion or Hinduism in 'Returning Home'. There is no Hindu spirituality in 'Returning Home'. The so called reconverted tribals and Dalits have no place in any of the four castes or 'Varna'. The ordinary Hindu people do not share meals with the converts nor engage in marriage relationships.

But we can see political and cultural reasons for 'Returning Home' movements. They say that the Dalits and Tribals, who have embraced Christianity or Islam, are accused of not respecting and honoring the Hindu teachers. (Gurus and Acharyahs). On the contrary, they are accused of upholding extra territorial loyalties towards Rome and Mecca. The 'Returning Home' people are enticed with prestige and economic benefits. For instance, the 'Returning Home' people get economic benefits and the benefits of reservation in jobs and in education. But the Indian constitutions explicitly prohibit any enticement or force in reconversion or conversion

. Simply put, "Returning Home" means keeping away from or totally neglecting the constitution of India. In other words "Returning Home" means it is the hidden and not so hidden efforts of the Hindutva people to make socialist and secular India a Hindu Rashtra, Hindu nation!

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