I was born and brought-up a Christian. I believe that Jesus Christ is an Avatar of Love, and that now more than ever, specially after the 11th September terrorist attacks on America, we need his message of compassion, charity and kindness for one another.

Many Christians have taught the world that the first precept of Christ is to look after the deprived and the needy: Missionaries, such as Father Ceyrac, a French Jesuit who has lived for more than 60 years in Chennai, have understood this principle, tending to the poorest sections of this society, while respecting their culture (Father Ceyrac, who speaks fluently Tamil and Sanskrit, often quotes from the Upanishads).

Unfortunately, there has crept in the purity of the early Christianity an exclusiveness, a feeling of sole proprietary right over God. This exclusiveness, this feeling amongst Christians, that "we are the only true religion, and all other gods are false gods", has had the most catastrophic and bloody consequences: Millions have been killed in the name of Christ, entire civilizations, such as the Atzecs and Incas, have been wiped-out, "to bring them the word of Jesus". Even Christians have savagely murdered each other, whether in France or England. One would have hoped that this intolerance, this fanatical and militant drive to convert, forcibly or otherwise, pagans to the "True" God, had ceased in this new millennium of "enlightenment". Unfortunately, it is not so. For nearly three centuries, India has been the target of a massive conversion drive. It is even more so today, as Christianity is dwindling in the West: There are less and less people going to churches and very few youth willing to become priests and nuns, without speaking of the pedophilia scandals racking the American Church. The Vatican is thus looking for new converts in the Third World, particularly in India, where people have such an innate aspiration to spirituality. Indeed, the Pope has earmarked this new millennium as "The Evangelization of Asia". And it is in the North-East that this evangelization is meeting with the most success.

But conversions in India of low caste Hindus and tribals by Christian missionaries are sometimes nothing short of fraudulent and shameful. American, Australian, or Norwegian missionaries are investing huge amounts of money in India, which come from donation drives in their countries, where gullible Christians think their dollars or Euros are going towards uplifting "poor and uneducated Indians". It is common in Kerala, for instance, particularly in the poor coastal districts, to have "miracle boxes" put in local churches. The innocent villager writes out a paper mentioning his wish: A fishing boat, a loan for a house, fee for child's schooling... And lo, a few weeks later, the miracle happens! And, of course, the whole family converts, making others in the village follow suit!

One such fake " miracle" prayer meeting trick, where a glib preacher persuades naive tribals that a miracle is happening in their midst, while encouraging them to convert.
Festival 2002", is being organized in Gangtok (at Guards Ground), from April 26 to 28. It will be conducted by Dr Paul Dinakaran (he runs Jesus Calls from Chennai), who is famous for leading these "miracle" meetings all over India. Who is behind the drive? There are three US-based Christian fundamentalist organizations. The first is Bible for the world; second, Common Global Ministries Board; and third, United Church Board for World Ministries. These foreign missionaries could be quietly pulling the strings from behind the scenes. Where does the money for organizing these costly meetings come from? Only the Government of India can answer these questions. Sikkim is a sensitive border area, which is claimed by China. Does, for instance, the reader know that China encourages foreign missionaries to convert Tibetans in Tibet and that the Dalai-lama is very concerned about this fact? Although it is learnt from reliable sources that Governor Kedarnath Sahani of Sikkim, as well as Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, are very concerned, the State Government seems unable to do much, as many of its Christian ministers are involved in this meeting. Conversions have been taking place in Sikkim since long. Earlier, the North District of Sikkim was targeted in places like Janghu where the Lepcha community lives. But it is happening now in all the districts of Sikkim (West-Sombaria/ Soreng, South-Namchi, East-Gangtok).

It is especially the tribals and Hindus living below the poverty line who are being targeted. It's not just that conversion is an unethical custom; it also threatens a whole way of life, erasing centuries of tradition, customs, wisdom. It teaches people to despise their own religion and look westwards to a culture which is alien to them, with disastrous results. Look how the biggest drug problems in India are found in the North-East, or how Third World countries, which have been totally Christianized, have lost all their moorings and bearing, and are drifting away without nationalism and self-pride. It is time that Indians awoke to the threat of Christian conversions here.

The argument that Christians are only 3 per cent in India, and therefore cannot be a threat, is totally fallacious: The influence that Christians exercise in this country through their schools, hospitals and the enormous amount of money being poured in by Western countries for the purpose of converting Hindus, is totally disproportionate to their numbers.

Western missionaries (and their governments) would like us to believe that democracy includes the freedom to convert by any means. But France, for example, a traditionally Christian country, has a Minister who is in charge of hunting down "sects". And by sects, what is meant is any group that does not fall within the recognized family of Christianity, specially anything that is a Hindu flavor: There is not a single Hindu temple in France and all recent applications for the construction of one have been rejected.

It is sad that Indians, once converted, especially the priests and nuns, tend to turn against their own country and help in the conversion drive. There are very few "White" missionaries left in India and most of the conversions are done by Indian priests. Last year, during the Bishops' conference in Bangalore, it was restated by priests from all over India that conversion is the first priority of the Church. But are the priests and
bishops aware that they would never find in any Western country the same freedom to convert, that they take for granted in India?

Do they know that in China they would be expelled, if not put behind bars? Do they realize that they have been honored guests in this country for nearly 2,000 years (the first Christian community in the world is that of Syrian Christians, who have prospered in peace in India since 1st century AD) and that they are betraying those who gave them peace and freedom?

The message of Christ is one of Love, of respecting other's cultures and creed - not of utilizing devious and unethical means for converting people. It is false to say that Jesus is the only "true" God. The Divine has manifested Himself throughout the ages under different names and identities, whether it is Christ, Buddha, Krishna or Mohammed. Let this be the motto of the 21st century. Only then will true spirituality emerge, beyond all religions and intolerances.

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