



Before You Convert: Will You Really Be Equal?

A Warning to Indians Considering Christianity or Islam

Before you accept a promise of salvation, examine the promise of equality.

You may be told that conversion will bring you into a universal brotherhood, free from caste, inherited status, and religious exclusion. You may hear that everyone stands equal before God. For someone who has suffered humiliation, these promises carry enormous power.

But what happens after you join?

Will you be treated as an equal? Will you remain free to question? Will your ancestry become a source of embarrassment? Will acceptance depend on your willingness to recruit others?

These questions deserve answers before conversion, when promises can still be examined against evidence.

Religious conversion changes your affiliation. It does not automatically change your nationality, ancestry, economic circumstances, or standing in another person's eyes.

Joining a religion and gaining equality within its institutions are different achievements.

Consider the Gulf. Human Rights Watch has documented hierarchies based on national origin, including workers receiving different wages for the same work according to nationality. Here, inequality is measured in income, working conditions, and power. Religious professions of brotherhood do not erase it.^[1]

An Indian considering Islam should ask what shared faith actually guarantees. Becoming Muslim does not make you Arab, confer citizenship, or admit you into a hereditary ruling family. Your fellow believer may welcome your conversion while continuing to regard your nationality or occupation as grounds for social distance.

Different ancestry is not itself discrimination. **Using ancestry to distribute dignity, opportunity, or authority is.** Examine whether the promised equality survives those distinctions.



Iran presents another test. Its constitutional framework privileges Twelver Shia Islam and recognizes Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians as religious minorities. Hindus are excluded from that recognition. The inequality is institutional, regardless of how individual Iranians behave toward their Hindu neighbors. ^[2]

A religious state should also be judged by its treatment of people who refuse conversion. If recognition depends on adopting an approved faith, religious identity becomes a condition of acceptance. Universal dignity cannot depend on theological agreement.

South Asian Muslim history raises a related question: does conversion abolish inherited rank?

Ashraf status became associated with claims to noble ancestry, including Arab, Persian, Turkish, or Afghan descent. Some upper-caste Indian converts also entered that privileged category. Other Muslim communities occupied subordinate positions. Common religious membership coexisted with distinctions of birth. ^[3]

For someone seeking escape from caste humiliation, this history matters. Before joining a community, examine its marriages, leadership, and everyday relationships. Does it actually reject hereditary privilege? Or does it preserve that privilege beneath the language of brotherhood?

Persian's historical prestige in India offers another lesson about culture and power. Conquering dynasties, many of them Persianized Turkish or Central Asian, established and patronized Persian as a language of courtly authority. Its elevated position reflected political power and cultural patronage. It did not establish the superior human worth of its speakers. ^[4]

No convert should mistake the prestige of a ruling culture for proof that their own ancestry deserves contempt.

Christian institutions require the same examination.

Becoming Protestant does not make an Indian white or Anglo-Saxon. Becoming Catholic does not automatically remove barriers of class, caste, or influence. There is no need to claim that Indians are forbidden from becoming pope. The serious question is whether institutions practice the equality they proclaim.

The Catholic Church's own statements acknowledge the persistence of caste prejudice. In 2003, Pope John Paul II urged Indian bishops to reform customs that perpetuated caste divisions among Christians. Christian membership had plainly not made those divisions disappear. ^[5]





A potential convert should therefore examine the particular church they intend to join. Who leads? Who controls resources? Are disadvantaged members welcomed into positions of authority as readily as they are welcomed into the congregation? Does equality extend to marriage and social relationships?

Then examine a freedom just as fundamental as equality: **the freedom to question.**

Hindu traditions contain substantial philosophical disagreement, including schools that do not accept a creator God. This diversity provides resources for examining religious claims from within the tradition. It does not guarantee that every Hindu community tolerates criticism, but it demonstrates that Hindu thought cannot be reduced to one compulsory position on God. ^[6]

Before conversion, ask what happens when your examination produces disagreement.

Can you question revelation? Can you assess the founder's conduct by ordinary moral standards? Can you conclude that a central teaching is mistaken? What consequences follow?

Quran 4:140 instructs believers to withdraw from gatherings where God's revelations are denied or mocked. That instruction does not prohibit every form of theological inquiry. It does, however, establish a boundary concerning rejection and ridicule that prospective converts should examine carefully. ^[7]

Christian doctrinal boundaries can also be explicit. The Catholic Catechism defines obstinate denial or doubt of required teachings as heresy and repudiation of Christianity as apostasy. The important question is therefore which conclusions an institution permits you to reach, alongside which questions it allows you to ask. ^[8]

Permission to study is insufficient if the acceptable answer has already been prescribed.

Your relationship with your past deserves equal scrutiny.

Changing your beliefs does not require despising your ancestors. You can reject their religious conclusions while respecting their humanity. You can criticize inherited customs while retaining your language, literature, family affection, and historical memory.

If a preacher demands that you condemn your entire inheritance as demonic or worthless, ask why adopting a belief requires cultural humiliation. Your ancestors' dignity does not depend on approval from your new religious authorities.





Examine recruitment expectations, too. Are you valued as a person capable of independent judgment, or chiefly as someone who can bring in additional converts? If advancement depends on recruitment, investigate whose interests that arrangement serves.

Your conscience is not an institution's recruiting property.

The right to convert belongs to you. So do the rights to remain unconvinced, criticize religious claims, and leave a community. Those freedoms must survive your decision to join.

Nothing in this warning excuses discrimination within Hindu or Buddhist society. Injustice deserves opposition wherever it occurs. That is precisely why escaping one hierarchy should not require accepting another.

Before you convert, speak to ordinary members, disadvantaged members, and people who have left. Examine how the community handles dissent. Compare its promises with its treatment of people who possess little money, influence, or prestigious ancestry.

Your dignity exists before conversion. Your freedom to think must exist afterward.

Anyone promising equality should demonstrate it before asking for your allegiance.





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