Dalit Conversion to Buddhism

What is the issue?

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- In recent times dalits are facing various pressures from right wing groups.
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- This has intensified the conversion of Dalits to Buddhism which might impact the political scenario.
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What are the recent attacks by right wing groups on dalits?

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- 300 dalits in Gujarat converted to Buddhism recently following the incident of a dalit family beaten by cow vigilantes.
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- There was also another instance where gau rakshaks assaulted a group of villagers after which the whole village converted to Buddhism.
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- Various reports cite attacks by right wing groups to be one of the main reason for dalits conversion into Buddhism.
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What were the roots for this dalit conversion to Buddhism?

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- This conversion to Buddhism was initially started by Dr. B R Ambedkar who embraced the religion and vowed to follow Buddha’s faith.
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- After this, many dalit individuals, families in large groups converted to Buddhism tracing the steps of their leader.
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- Dr. Ambedkar’s cremation ceremony too witnessed masses conversion to

Buddhism.
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- Hence forth, every year people visit Deekshabhoomi (Where Dr. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism) and take religious vows.
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- The 2011 Census has recorded 84.43 lakh Buddhists all over India of which over 65 lakh only in Maharashtra.
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Why Dr. Ambedkar chose conversion to Buddhism as a tool?

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- Dr. Ambedkar felt this decision of conversion will shame the religion which denied him equality and self-respect.
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- It will also serve as a threat to both the reputation of Hinduism as a tolerant religion and to Hindus as a political entity.
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- He believed the ultimate object of both conversion and self-government is to attain freedom and stressed that conversion alone was the way for Dalit emancipation.
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- Ambedkar identified sympathy, equality and liberty as the three factors required for the uplift of an individual in a religion which were present in Buddhism and hence embraced Buddhism.
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How these conversions will impact the political scenario?

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- These conversions due to attacks from right wing groups will undermine the Union government’s political project of building a Hindu vote comprising of all communities.
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- Hindutva agenda valorising the past Hindu culture and celebrating brahminical values will worsen the situation as it directly contradicts the union government’s efforts.
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- Dalit youth a part of future generation are unwilling to accept old

hierarchies, therefore political power will rest with the parties which brings all religions and communities together.
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Source: The Indian Express

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