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PAPER CLIPPINGS

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ಇಲಾಖೆ / ವಿಷಯ : DEPARTMENT / SUBJECT: Convent matter

ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: The Hindu

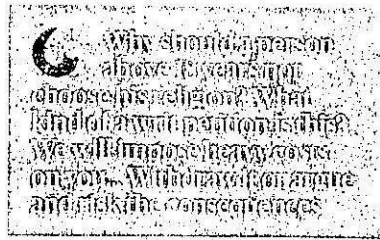
ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE 20/4/2022

# People are free to choose religion: SC

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday said people are free to choose their religion, even as it lashed out at a "very, very harmful kind" of "public interest" petition claiming there is mass religious conversion happening "by hook or by crook" across the country.

Instead, a Bench, led by Justice Rohinton F. Nariman, said people have a right under the Constitution to profess, practise and propagate religion. "Why should a person above 18 years not choose his religion? What kind of a writ petition is this? We will impose heavy costs



on you... Withdraw it or argue and risk the consequences," Justice Nariman told petitioner-advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay.

Justice Nariman reminded Mr. Upadhyay of the fundamental right under Article 25 of the Constitution to freely profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality and

health. "Why do you think there is the word 'propagate'?" Justice Nariman asked the petitioner.

Religious conversion is being done through a "carrot-and-stick" approach, Mr. Upadhyay had claimed in his petition. Justice Nariman said every person is the final judge of his/her choice of religion or who their life partner

er should be. Courts cannot sit in judgment of a person's choice of religion or life partner.

Religious faith is a part of the fundamental right to privacy. Justice Nariman reminded Mr. Upadhyay of the Constitution Bench judgment which upheld inviolability of the right to privacy, equating it with the rights to life, of dignity and liberty.

Mr. Upadhyay's petition was dismissed as withdrawn. His pleas to approach the Law Commission or the High Court with the petition was not expressly allowed by the Bench.

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## People are free to choose religion: Supreme Court

The petition alleged that the court should direct the Centre and the States to control black magic, superstition and religious conversion being done through threats, intimidation or bribes. "There is not even one district which is free of

black magic, superstition and religious conversion... Incidents are reported every week throughout the country where conversion is done by intimidating, threatening, luring through gifts and monetary benefits," the petition alleged.