CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

India is a pluralistic society from the religious point of view. We have followers of all the great religious systems in the world. The followers of all the religious systems have a common ethics, a common culture and a common pattern of life. So, conversion hardly raised eyebrows.

Conversions are nothing new in India. In the 6th century BC countless Hindus became Buddhists. During the 15th and the 16th centuries mass conversions of Hindus to Islam could not easily be counted. During the entire Mughul rule conversion took place on compulsion or for money and material needs. This was starting point of the Muslim religion in India. During the Muslim periods the converts to Islam were drawn from the lower strata of the society. Over 95% of our Muslims are converts from Dalits or Backward Classes 1 and 80% of our Christians have been either Dalits or Tribals 2. Conversion to Islam was finally stopped only after the 17th century when the Christian missionaries started conversion among the Harijans to Christianity since 1854 3 onwards as the Muslims had done earlier.

1.0. What is Conversion?

Conversion refers to a striking and really sudden change in an individual's view of life. Conversion may involve changes in beliefs, group identification or personality characteristics. It leads to the reorganization and reorientation of an individual's intellectual and emotional outlook. Conversion may occur in
an individual’s political, economic, social or philosophical views, although in traditional general usage, it refers most often to religious belief.

According to Frykenberg “conversion is a process by which people move out of one religious community into another”.

Some scholars in the human sciences limit conversion to sudden, radical alterations in people’s beliefs, behaviour and affiliation. Some other view conversion as a dynamic, multifaceted process of change.

According to Andrew Wingate, “Conversion is a process, including a personal decision taken alone or as part of a group, to center one’s religious life on a new focus, which one believes more liberating in every aspect of that word, and closer to truth. This involves a change of outward affiliation to a new community.... And tangible changes of behaviour and religious practices”.

Lewis Rambo focused on the following issues in conversion:

i) Conversion is a process over time, not a single event.

ii) Conversion is contextual and thereby influenced by a matrix of relationships, expectations and situations.

iii) The factors... are multiple and interactive...there is no one cause of conversion, no one process, and no one simple consequence of the process.
1.1. Religions freedom in Globe

The atrocities committed in the name of religion during the Second World War shocked the conscience of the world and a consensus emerged to make freedom of religion and belief one of the basic human rights. One can not preach religion in communist countries like Russia, China and Korea because the law of the land does not allowe to do so. While the United Nations Charter proclaims the equality of mankind, the following specific human rights instruments spell out the details.

1.1.1. Religions freedom in Nepal

Nepalese law does not prohibit its citizens to become Christians or convert to any other religion. But, if found converting to another religion from Hinduism they are liable to be sentenced to one year in prison and any one convicted of engaging in religious conversion to the detriment of Hinduism can be sentenced to up to six years in prison.

1.1.2. Religious freedom in South Africa:

South Africa has been described by the government as a “Christian country”. It is therefore accepted that everything will be done to propagate Christian teachings and generally uphold all Christian facets of life despite the fact that tax payers may belong to Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Zoroastrian and other faiths. The Government supports conversion through its powerful broadcasting medium in the country. The contribution of the South African Broadcasting Corporation to the spread of Christianity in South Africa is
immeasurable. The number of broadcasters devoted to the spread of Christianity and propagation of Christian teaching is incalculable. Yet never in the history of broadcasting in South Africa has Hinduism ever featured as the subject of any programme.¹⁰

1.1.3. Religion freedom in Sri Lanka:

Sinhalese, Buddhists and Taxnilians are facing problems on account of religious conversion. Over seven thousand families have been forced to convert to the Buddhist religion due to economic reasons. So, the Sri Lankan government is also considering bringing legislation to ban conversion in their country.¹¹

1.1.4. Religion freedom in Bangladesh:

In the 190 years of colonial rule in united Bengal, only 111,426 people were converted to Christianity. Out of this converts, about 50 thousand were citizens of East Bengal. The number of Christians in the territory had risen by 400% from about 50,000 in 1947 to 200,000 in 1971. According to one estimate, in the period between 1971 and 1991, the number of Christian converts in Bangladesh has risen from 200,000 to 400,000. Christian sources tend to underplay their numbers, but it is reported that their goal is to increase the Christian population to 10-12 million in the next 20 years.

NGOs make Bible reading compulsory for their staff, including the Muslims. One big missionary NGO employed only Christian teachers in its schools and a student had to be Christian before being given board and lodging in its hostels.
While the Bangladeshi student is only taught his or her religion in both private and public schools, the study of Christianity is compulsory for all students in most missionary schools. In one case, when the District Education Officer pointed out this irregularity, he was told that the NGO was not obliged to provide an explanation.

1.2. Universal Declaration of Human rights

Article 18

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and, in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching or practice, worship and observance.

1.2.1. International Covenant on civil and political rights:

Article 18

1. Everyone shall have right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion, which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

3. Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedom of others.
1.3. Religions freedom In India

India, being a secular state, respects all religions equally. The preamble of the Indian Constitution proclaims that India is a “Sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic, republic” and serves to all citizens “liberty of thought, expression, belief, faiths and belief and worship”. Yet, the Constitution has made specific provisions to ensure that the citizens enjoy the freedom to practice their religion in Articles 25, 26, 27, and 28.

Article 25: Freedom of Conscience and freedom of profession practice and propagation of religion.: Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion.

Article 26: Freedom to manage religions affairs: Subject to public order, morality and health, every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have the right

(a) To establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes;

(b) To manage its own affairs in matters of religion;

(c) To own and acquire movable and * immovable property;

(d) To administer such property in accordance with law.
Article 27s Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion. of any particular religions No person shall be compelled to pay any taxes, the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination.

Article 28s Freedom as to Attendance at Religious Instruction or Religious Worship in certain Educational Institutions:

1. No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds.

But, in 1977, the Supreme Court of India ruled that the constitutional right to propagate religion did not include a right to convert or attempt to convert another\(^\text{13}\).

1,4. Gandhi and conversion

Mahatma Gandhi understood conversion more or less in terms of an internal change alone. According to him, “Conversion is a matter between man and his Maker... Conversion without a clean heart is, in my opinion, denial of God and religion.”

If conversion is only a matter between God and human beings (vertical conversion) then it does not demand a change in religious affiliation (horizontal conversion). One can thus remain in one’s own religious tradition even after conversion. But his “internal changes” may not liberate\(^\text{14}\).
1.4.1. Conversion no remedy?

Gandhiji was much opposed to religious conversion as a solution to the problem of untouch ability. In his opinion, the converted Harijans would remain untouchables and untouchability would not go and change of religion would not make any difference in their social status. He said “Whether the Harijan is nominally a Christian, Muslim or neo-Sikh, he is still a Harijan. He cannot change his spots inherited from Hinduism-so-called. He may change his garb and call himself a Catholic Harijan or a Muslim Harijan, Neo-Muslim or neo-Sikh. But his Untouchability will haunt him during his lifetime until Untouchability is removed from Hinduism, no matter what he adopts. The moment Untouchability is utterly banished from Hindu society it will ipso facto disappear from elsewhere too”. He did not approve of the activities of the Christian missionaries to convert Harijans by giving them temptations for equal social status and material inducements like free milk, grain, soap etc. and asked them not to make conversion the price of their service. His opinion was that their activity did not show any spirituality.

In his opinion change of religion was not like the change of garments; it was a matter of spirit and faith and heart; if one had lost faith in Hinduism he was free to change his religion. But to change out of economic and political considerations was not correct. There was no necessity of a programme of ‘Shudhi’ (purification) to bring back the converts to the Hindu fold. If they wanted to come back, they might do so absolutely freely. No inducements should be offered to them.¹⁵
Gandhiji wrote, "Conversion now-a-days has become a matter of business, like any other. I remember having read a missionary report saying how much it cost per head to convert and then presenting a budget for the next harvest". He further maintained, "If I had power and could legislate, I should certainly stop all proselytizing. For Hindu households, the advent of a missionary has meant the disruption of the family, coming in the wake of change of dress, manners, language, food and drink". What Gandhiji wanted to stop the Christian missionary has held as his basic religious right. Gandhiji saw conversion of the depressed classes as a threat not only to communal harmony but also to the very context of the Indian nation. Therefore, he openly expressed his disapproval of conversion to Christianity.

1.5. J.C. Kumarappa's views on Conversion

J.C. Kumarappa is a freedom fighter, a famous Gandhian and a great advocate of rural industries and rural economy. He strongly condemned conversion through force and fraud.

The problems of conversion cannot be dealt with either as a "spiritual change" or as a “change of community” without the principle itself being considered and understood, as otherwise we shall be merely begging the question. The term conversion itself has been used in many senses. Similarly, also the words religion and God-

The western nations have four arms—defensive and offensive—the army, the navy, the air force and the church. So conversion is recruiting in the service of God, King and
country. “Conversion, as practiced by missionaries, has no support from Jesus, as far as I can see, and it is only a mode of increasing the adherents of an institutional religion called Christianity, of which Jesus was neither the founder nor a member”\(^\text{17}\).

1.6. Historical background of Dalits

The Dalits are often kept outside the Hindu social order and are referred to as fifth varna or “panchamas”. During the Vedic period they were known as “chandalas” and were untouchable. The chandalas were bom, according to Manusmrithi, as the progeny of the most hated union, the “pratiloma” marriage between a Brahmin female and a Sudra male. They have existed in India for at least 2,000 years.

When we turn back to the available records of history, it is seen that during the Sangam period (600 AD) there were no castes, that is, no Namboodiri caste, Dewaswoms, or Brahmaswams. Historically, the Hindu religion was non-existent in India Hinduism was brought to India by the Aryans in the seventh century and eighth centuries and they made temples the center of all social activities\(^\text{18}\). The existing Dalits were the “adidravidas”—sons of the soil. Thus it becomes crystal clear that the Dalits were never Hindus. They are called Untouchables, outcastes, Harijans, Scheduled Castes, and Dalits.\(^\text{19}\)

1.6.1. Who are Dalits?

The term Dalit is not a social category, but also a philosophy. Dalit etymologically a Sanskrit word which means broken and downtrodden, is not a new cionage. There
have been a narrow definition, based on caste alone, and a broader one to encompass all those considered to be either similarly placed or natural allies. Variously known as Untouchables, Harijans etc. The term Dalit, in the genetic languages, denotes the poorest people of the land and, in the Indian context, it means those who are outside the caste structure of the society. Apparently it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of depressed classes the term the British used for what are now called the Scheduled Castes. In the 1930s there was a depressed classes newspaper published in Pune called Dalit Bandu. The word was also used by B.R.Ambedkar in his Marathi speeches. In Untouchables, published in 1948, Ambedkar chose the term broken men, an English translation of Dalit, to refer to the original ancestors of the untouchable for reasons which must have been self-evident because he did not explain them. The Dalit Panthers revived the term and, in their 1973 manifesto, expanded its referent to include the Scheduled Tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and also who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. Since the early 1970s the word has come into increasingly wider usage in the press and in common parlance where it is used normally in the original, narrower, caste based sense.

According to Gangadhar Partaware, “Dalit is not a caste; Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution. The Dalit believes in humanism; he rejects the existence of God, rebirth, soul, scared books that teach discrimination, faith and heaven, because these have made him a slave; he represents the exploited man in his society.”
A Dalit is not considered to be part of the human society, but something which is beyond that. The Dalits perform menial and degrading jobs. Sometimes Dalits perform important jobs, but this is mostly not socially recognized. Dalits are seen as polluting the higher caste people. If a higher caste Hindu is touched by an untouchable or even has a Dalit’s shadow cross him, he considers himself to be polluted and has to go through rigorous rituals to be cleaned.

Scholars have also written about Dalits in different ways. Two views predominate. Those using a class analysis of Indian society subsume Dalits within such class or occupational categories as peasants, agricultural labour, factory workers, students, and the like. This can be seen in most Marxist historical writings, subaltern studies, and to a lesser degree, in the Dalit Panther manifesto. To those using a communal analysis of caste, Dalits are people within the Hindu society who belong to those castes which Hindu religion considers to be polluting by virtue of hereditary occupation.

In India there are approximately 240 million Dalits. This means that nearly 25% of the population is Dalit; it also means that, in a country where everybody is supposed to have equal rights and opportunities, 1 out of 4 persons is condemned to be untouchable.23

In general one can say that being a Brahmin means that you. are more privileged. This can imply having a good education and, accordingly, a more powerful position in society. Being born as a Dalit you will be less well off and, because of less education, you will have a less good job. In daily life there are a lot of consequences of being a Dalit.
Dalits are poor, deprived and socially backward. Being poor means that they do not have access to enough food, health care, housing and/or clothing, which means that their physiological and safety needs are not fulfilled. They also do not have access to education and health care. All this keeps them in bondage of the upper castes.

Nevertheless, in the recent past, the Dalit society has also thrown up powerful leaders like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. He was one of the most powerful personalities to stand up for the rights of Dalits.

1.6.2. Who are the Scheduled Castes?

In 1935 the Government of India prepared a list of castes for providing special facilities to the untouchable castes. This included 429 castes which were called Scheduled Caste by virtue of their inclusion in the list.

Untouchable castes and depressed castes are called SCs. The term Scheduled Caste is the expression standardized in the Constitution of the Republic of India.

Article 341 of the Constitution empowers the President, after consulting the head of a particular State, to notify by an order “the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of this constitution be deemed to be so in relation to that state”

The expression Scheduled Caste has a technical meaning given to it by Clause 24 of Article 366 of the Constitution and it means such castes, races or tribes or
parts of . groups within such castes or tribes as are deemed under Art.341 to be Scheduled Castes for the Constitution .The expression standardised in the Constitution was first coined by the Simon Commission and embodied in the GOI Act, 1935 in section 309.

The Scheduled Castes are 166,635,700 in number in the country. This constitutes 16.2 % of the country’s total population. The states of Uttar Pradesh (21.1%) West Bengal (23%), Bihar (18.7%), Tamilnadu (19%) and Andhra Pradesh (16.2%)²⁶ account for more than 50% of the SC population, with Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal having more that 20% of their population from the SCs. Members of the SCs earn their livelihood through their own labour, either on land belonging to others or in occupations like scavenging, flaying and tanning of leather. More than three quarters of the SC workers are engaged in primary occupation and the proportion of those engaged in the tertiary sector is nearly half the national average. In the field of literacy, as against the national average of 52%, the literacy rate of the SCs is around 37%. Among the SC women, more than three quarters are illiterate. Moreover the dropout rate for the SCs in formal education is very high. Such factors put the community at a disadvantage.

Types of discrimination faced:

- Segregation in housing
- Prohibition on inter-dining and inter-marriage
- Separate tumblers for Dalits in tea stalls and discriminatory seating arrangements and separate utensils in restaurants
Segregation in seating and food arrangements in village functions and festivals

Widespread impunity for crimes and atrocities committed against Dalits by non-Dalits

Devadasi system of ritualized temple prostitution of Dalit women

Prohibition on entry into dominant caste houses

Violence against Dalit women

Discrimination in access to health services

Discrimination against and segregation of Dalit children in schools, e.g., sitting arrangement, access to water taps

Restricted access to land

Discrimination in access to public places, e.g., post offices, public health centres, roads, public transport, government schools, public bathing ponds, etc.

In December 1930, the Kallars in Ramnad propounded eight prohibitions, the disregard of which led to the use of violence by the Kallars against the SCs, whose huts were burnt, granaries and property destroyed and livestock looted. Those eight prohibitions were as follows:

1. The Adi Dravidas should not wear ornaments of gold and silver;

2. Their males should not be allowed to wear clothes below their knees or above their hips;

3. Their males should not wear coats or shirts or baniyans (briefs);
4. No Adi Dravida shall be allowed to have his hair cropped;

5. The Adi Dravidas should not use other than earthenware vessels in their homes;

6. Their women shall not be allowed to cover the upper portion of their bodies with cloths or ravukvais or thavanis;

7. Their women shall not use umbrellas for protection against sun and rain or wear sandals.

In June 1931, the eight prohibitions not having been satisfactorily observed by the SCs in question, the Kallars met together and framed eleven prohibitions which went still further than the original eight and the attempt to enforce these led to more violence. These eleven prohibitions were:

1. The Adi Dravidas and Devendra Kula Velalars should not wear clothes below their knees;

2. The men and women of the said depressed classes should not wear gold jewels;

3. Their woman should carry water only in pots and not in copper or brass vessels. They should use only straw to carry the water pots and cloths should not be used for that purpose;

4. Their children should not read and get themselves literate or educated;

5. Their children should be asked only to tend the cattle of the mirasdars;
6. Their men and women should work as slaves of the mirasdars in their respective pannais;

7. They should not cultivate the land either on war am or lease from the mirasdars;

8. They must sell away their lands to the mirasdars of the village at very cheap rates and if they do not do so no water will be allowed to them to irrigate their lands. Even if something is grown with the help of rainwater, the crop should be robbed when it is ripe for harvest;

9. They must work as coolies from 7am to 6pm under the mirasdars and their wages shall be for man Rs.4 per day and for woman Rs.2 per day;

10. The above said communities should not use Indian music (melam etc.) in their marriage and other celebrations;

11. They must stop their habit of going on a horse on procession before tying the thali thread in marriage and they must use their house doors as a palanquin for their marriage procession and they should use no vehicle for any purpose.\textsuperscript{29}

\textbf{1.6.3. Plight of Dalits in Modern Society}

Dalits are no longer like the Dalits in traditional society. They are now well educated, employed in both Government and private agencies. Though they are employed the traditional caste identity and untouchability still prevail among the educated also. Even after 57 year of Independence, two tumbler system, restrictions on use of wells, water sources, roads and other common facilities and entry into temple persist.
Here we have certain instances of atrocities on Dalits as evidence for the type of condition prevail in Tamil Nadu.

In 2003, a low caste woman panchayat president faced a chapal attack at the hands of caste Hindus for hoisting the flag on Independence Day.  

About 50 Dalit women from Krishnagiri sought “protection” from the Tirunelveli City police, who harassed them even during the night under the pretext of searching for the culprits involved in a burglary in a private finance company.

The Dalits of Thadiyanpatti reserved Village Panchayat could elect their leader. But they can not conduct a meeting, as the Vice-president and the Councillors belonging to high castes refused to come to the village of the president’s low-caste community. So, the Dalit panchayat leader was forced to shift the Panchayat office to the caste Hindu area. Scheduled Castes are denied access to drinking water in common water sources in the villages and to the temples, tea shops, saloons, laundry services and other social ceremonies. Such incidents take place frequently in Tamil Nadu. A few instances will give a clear picture about the evils of the caste system and its impact on Dalits.

Two Dalits in Thinniyam in Trichi were forced to consume human excreta by Thevars. Muthusamy from the near by Ariyalur Village faced the inhuman treatment of caste Hindus urinating in his mouth. In another incident in Madurai, in Kelaurapanur, a Dalit woman was teased by caste
Hindus; when she emotionally reacted to it, she was molested and human excreta was dumped upon her head by the caste Hindus.\textsuperscript{33} In September 2002, Sangan from the Dalit community in Goundampatti in Dindigul District suffered a police constable urinating in his mouth.\textsuperscript{34}

Even after 57 years of Indian independence Panchayat elections cannot be conducted in the reserved constituencies of Keeripatti, Pappapatti and Nattarmangalam Village Panchayats. These Village Panchayats fall in the category where the post of President is reserved for Scheduled Castes. The social elite in those villages have managed to ensure that the Dalits did not dare file nominations.

Such incidents take place at regular intervals. The state government has failed to direct its energies to ensuring security and dignity to the them. These are the bases for Dalits deciding to convert themselves to another religion.

\textbf{1.7. Dalits in Tamilnadu}

Pallars, Paraiyars, and Chakiliyars represent, by and large, the Dalits in Tamilnadu and constitute around 18 percent of the total population. Though nationally they are the single largest community, their sect differences, their miserable economic and social status and their geographic dispersal have combined to deny them any significant political weight. The details of the history of these castes are as follow.
1.7.1. Pallan

They are an agricultural community. The name Pallan said to be derived from Pallam, a pit in which they were said to be standing when the castes were originally formed’.

According to another school of thought, which appears more probable, the word is said to be derived from “low ground” or “wet cultivation” in which Pallars are experts. According to their oral tradition, they are said to have migrated to Kerala. Thurston (1909), quoting from the Manual of the Madura District (1868), says that the Pallans are “a very numerous, but a most abject and despised race, little, if indeed at all, superior to the Paraiyas”. The Pallans are said by some to have sprung from the intercourse of a Sudra man and a Brahmin woman. Others say Devendra created them for the purpose of laboring on behalf of Vellalans (Thurston, 1909). They are found in the Idukki and Trichur districts of Kerala and also in the neighbouring states of Tamilnadu, Karnataka and the Union Territory of Pondicherry. Among their community, they use the Tamil language and script. With others they use both Malayalam and Tamil. The Pallans also use the Malayalam script. They are non-vegetarians. Rice is their staple food, supplemented with pulses like gram, tur, urad, moong, peas and beans. The cooking medium is coconut oil, though now palmoil is also used. Occasionally, men take alcoholic drinks. Smoking beedis/cigarettes and using snuff is common among the males while chewing betel leaf is common among both sexes.35
The Pallans are divided into four subgroups, namely Anja, Aiya, Atha and Amma. The so-called four subgroups are based on the terms they use to address their mother. Each of these is again divided into matrilineal clans (Kilai). The clans indicate social status and descent and regulate marriage alliances.

Consanguinous marriages between cross-cousins (maternal and paternal) and maternal uncle-niece are practiced. Marriages are arranged by elders through negotiation. Monogamy is the norm. The marriage symbol is the thali. Bride price (parisham) has to be given to the bride’s father or the bride on the marriage day. They follow patrilocal residence after marriage. Divorce is permitted. Either spouse can seek divorce with judicial approval. Usually the compensation is double the bride price and the price of the thali and it is given to the wife. In the event of divorce male children stay with the father and female children remain with the mother. Remarriage is permissible for both widows and divorcees. Sororate is permitted but is devoid of ceremonies. The family type is both nuclear and vertically extended, with an increase in the number of the former\textsuperscript{36}.

The headman of the Pallans is called Kudumbar and he is assisted by a ‘Kaladi’ and sometimes a caste messenger called Variyan whose business is to summon people to attend caste meetings, marriages, funerals etc. Their common titles are generally Muppar, Kudumbar and Mannadi.

They follow the equigeniture rule of inheritance (formerly it was only male equigeniture) and succession devolves upon the eldest son. Women take part in agriculture and animal
husbandry apart from doing household duties. The per-delivery ritual (Kachipothu) is performed in the seventh or ninth month of pregnancy. Delivery takes place in the natal home of a woman and thirty days of birth pollution are observed. Tonsure (mundane) ceremony and ear-boring (kathu kuthu) ceremony are conducted for both male and female children. Puberty rites (veedu veppu) are observed for girls.

Traditionally, marriage rituals were performed at the groom’s residence, but now they are performed at the bride’s residence or in public places. The consummation ceremony is held at the groom’s residence. The dead are cremated or buried and death pollution is observed for sixteen days.

The traditional occupations are as plantation labourers, as skilled labourers and in animal husbandry. The Pallans are also engaged in government and private service, mat weaving and business. The system of chieftainship (kudumbar and Kaladi) still exists. The Pallans profess Hinduism. Sacred specialists from both their own and other communities perform the marriage and death rites. The major festivals are Thaipongal, Adi and Diwali. The main craft is mat weaving. 37

The Pallans accept food and water from Muthuvans, Nadars, Thevars, Iyers and Christians, but not from the Chakkiliyans, Vannans, Parayans, Pulayans, etc. They share water sources and crematoria with others and visit common religious shrines. The Pallans participate in local festivals and festivities.

Formal education is favoured for both boys and girls. They favour modern methods of family planning. Firewood
and cow dung cakes are used as fuel. Rainwater, canals and rivers are sources of irrigation. They use organic manure, chemical fertilizers and insecticides. The ICDS free midday meals for school, children and fair price shop facilities are available to them.

Their traditional occupation is agriculture labour. Of late, they have taken up a variety of occupations like government and private jobs, and skilled and unskilled labour.

1.7.2. Paraiyaa/Parayaa

Bishop Caldwell is of the opinion that the name Parayan is from the Tamil word parai, ‘a drum’, as certain Paraiyans act as drummers at marriages, funerals, village festivals and on occasions when government or commercial announcements are proclaimed (Thurston, 1909). They are notified as Paraiyan, Parayan, Sambavar and are also known as Sambavan or Samban and nowadays as Adi Dravida. They are distributed in Tamilnadu, Kerala and Pondicherry. The language used within the family and the community is the Dravidian language, Tamil, and the Tamil script is used for writing. But the Parayans of Kerala are bilinguals and also know the regional language, Malayalam. They are regular non-vegetarians and eat beef and pork. Their staple cereals are rice or millets like ragi which are supplemented with different types of vegetables and pulses. Groundnut and palm oils are used for cooking. The men regularly take alcoholic drinks. They smoke indigenous cheroot, chew tobacco and betel leaf and use snuff.
Marriage with one’s father’s sister’s daughters, mother’s brother’s daughters or elder sister’s daughters is preferred. Adult marriage is practiced and the mode of acquiring a mate is through negotiation. Monogamy is the norm. A marriage badge (thali) and toe-rings are the symbols of marriage for women. Bride price and dowry are given in cash and kind and kanyadan is performed. Divorce is sought on grounds of adultery, barrenness, maladjustment, cruelty and insanity. The widowed and divorced are allowed to remarry. Junior sororate is permissible. They live either in nuclear or in extended families.

All the sons inherit property in equal measure and the eldest son succeeds the father. Their women have specific roles in agricultural operations, animal husbandry, collection of fuel, bringing of potable water and in other economic activities; they also participate in social functions, rituals and religious activities. The Parayans observe pre-delivery restrictions and post delivery pollution. Naming and tonsure (mundane) ceremonies are observed. Puberty rituals are performed on the first menstruation of girls. Marriage rituals are performed at the bridegroom’s residence and the marriage feast is hosted at the bride’s family. They either cremate or bury the dead and death pollution is observed. The mortal remains are immersed in water. Ancestor worship is observed.38

Some of them own substantial landholdings. Cultivation and labour are their traditional occupations. There has been a rise in the number of agricultural labourers due to the
depletion of landholdings. Their traditional caste council settles disputes and the statutory panchayat plans and implements welfare and developmental activities and also exerts social, control. They are Hindus by faith; sacred specialists from other communities perform their birth, marriage and death rites.

The Parayans accept and exchange water and food with other communities. The receiving and rendering of services and cultivator-labour relationships are in existence.

Formal education is favoured for both the sexes. Their attitude to indigenous, traditional and modern medical practices and to the adoption of family planning methods is favourable. The Parayans use firewood and cowdung cakes as domestic fuels. The sources of irrigation are rainwater and canals. They use organic manure, chemical fertilizers and insecticides. The midday meals scheme is availed of by the school-going children.

The Parayans of Kerala are migrants from Tamilnadu. They are dark brown or brownish in complexion and are characterised by black hair, a short and flat nose with wide nostrils, black and large eyes and short stature. The distinct subgroups among them are Paran, Pullangi and Chakkili and the basis for this differentiation is the different materials that are used for making basket and umbrellas. These subgroups are, in turn, divided into clans like Yelappa, marunadam, yangadi, etc. In addition to their daily domestic chores, their women also participate in social, economic rituals religious rituals. Their marriage is solemnized at the bride’s residence.
and the consummation ceremony is performed at the bridegroom’s residence. Their traditional economic resource is forestry and their occupation is basketry. Besides, the Parayans are also engaged in agricultural labour, sweeping, drum-beating and skin and hide work. Some Parayans are employed in Government and private services\textsuperscript{39}.

They profess Hinduism and their deities are Perakuttu, Pukutti, and Karing kutty. Floor painting, mat-weaving and basketry are the arts and crafts known to them. The Parayan accept water and food from all other castes except Chakkilaiyans, Barbers and Dhobis. They avail of government facilities such as modern medicare, family planning methods, rural employment programmes, free midday meals scheme, the public distribution system, etc.

The Parayans are also notified as Scheduled Castes in Karnataka.

1.7.3. Chakkiliyan

They are also referred to as Pagadai, Arundhatiyar, Madari, Toti etc. They are distributed all over Tamilnadu. The term \textit{chakkiliyan} is derived from the Sanskrit word \textit{shatkuli}, meaning flesh-eaters. Thurston (1909) writes that the Chakkiliyans are the leather workers of the Tamil districts corresponding to the Madigas of the Telugu area, and are migrants from Telugu or Kannada districts, as there is no mention of their community in the early Tamil inscriptions. They migrated from Andhra Pradesh as a service group along with other Telugu-speaking immigrants during the reign of Telugu kings/chiefs in some parts of Tamilnadu. Their mother tongue is Telugu but there are bilinguals who can also speak
fluently in Tamil. Only the Tamil script is used. They are non-vegetarians who eat pork and beef. Rice and millet and ragi are the staple cereals taken with all kinds of pulses and seasonal vegetables. Milk products and fruits are occasionally consumed. Both men and women consume alcoholic drinks purchased from the market. Groundnut oil or sesame oil is used as the cooking medium. Smoking of beedis or cigarettes chewing betel leaves and the use of snuff are common. Chakkiliyans are mostly of short stature, have a mesocephalic head shape with a narrow and short forehead, a small face and a short chin. They show moderately broad nasal features (mesorhine type). The Chakkiliyans of different regions of Tamilnadu show marked heterogeneity in terms of head shape, facial profile and nasal features, due to the existence of numerous isolated groups representing specific regional variations.

The four endogamous sub groups among the Chakkiliyans are Kollak-kambalarn, Kosalvar, Anuppa Chakkiliyan, and Murasu (Morasu) Chakkilaiyan. Each sub groups is further divided into different surnames, which are meant to regulate marriage alliance and indicate lineage. Their position in the social hierarchy is low and they are considered to belong to the Sudra category in the Varna system. Monogamy is the general rule but polygamy is also practiced. Betrothal and marriage ceremonies are performed in the girl’s house. The marriage feast is hosted by both the parties. The nuptial ceremony is performed in the brides house. The marriage symbol for the woman is the thali. Adult marriage is the norm. Maternal uncle-niece and cross cousin marriages are practiced. Both bride price and dowry are
prevalent. Residence is Partilocal and descent is patrilineal. Remarriage of a divorcee, widower and widow is permitted. Levirate and Sororate are permissible. Either party can secure divorce through the caste Panchayat. Property is divided equally among the sons and the eldest son succeeds his father. Women participate in socio-religious functions and in economic activities. Besides, they contribute to the family income. Pre- and post-delivery rituals are observed and birth pollution is observed for sixteen days. The tonsure rites are observed for females and menstrual pollution is observed for thirty days. The dead are either cremated or buried. Both daughters and sons perform the kolli ceremony. The mortal remains are immersed in water. Ancestors and virgin girls are worshipped.40

The Chakkiliyans are landless people and their occupation is to make and repair chappals and shoes. Some of them seek alms and a few act as village messengers, light carriers and drummers. Of late some have taken to labour and the educated persons from amongst them are in white-collar jobs. Child labour also exists. Exchange transactions are made either in cash or in kind. The chief of their caste panchayat is elected by a voice vote. All disputes are settled by the panchayat and it is empowered to punish the guilty. They are Hindus by faith. The family, village and regional deities are propitiated. They worship the Hindu Gods and Goddesses and visit Hindu shrines on pilgrimage. Perumal is the God they worship most. Sacred specialists are sought for curing mental illness, etc. Their festivals are traditions. Folk-songs are sung and traditional dances are preformed to the music of percussion and wind instruments41.
The Chakkiliyans accept water and food from other communities. They have their own dugwells and crematorium. They can enter Hindu temples and serve other castes on annual payment. Members from this community are employed as administrators, teachers, engineers, doctors, etc. and some of them are involved in political activity at the village panchayat level.

They have begun sending their sons and daughters to school and their children get midday meals in their schools. They use both traditional and modern medicines. They have adopted modern family planning methods and either spouse opts for sterilization. Drinking water is available within the locality and it is fetched from dugwells or hand-pumps.

They can secure loans to start shoe-making or repairing shops. They have been provided the facilities of electricity, drinking water and hospitals. They listen to the radio, visit the cinema, read newspapers and watch television. Their settlements are connected with motorable roads and post offices and they are often near a railway station. They are beneficiaries of development programmes like the IRDP, NREP and ICDS. Firewood, cowdung and kerosene are used as domestic fuel. Their attitude towards savings is no-, encouraging.

In the Union Territory of Pondicherry, the Chakkiliyans are called Chucklers or cobblers and are found both in Pondicherry and Karaikal areas. In some areas, they are also called Arundhatiyar or Arava chakkialies. The Chakkiliyans are also notified as a Scheduled Caste in Karnataka and Kerala.
1.8. Caste system in other Religion

Non-Hindu religions like Islam, Christianity and Sikhism profess an egalitarian social order. The egalitarian social order of these religions stands in sharp contrast to the ideology of caste- “In fact, the caste system applies to nearly every person in India regardless of his religion; Muslims and Christians also, who are almost all converted from Hinduism, suffer from this malady more or less”. The Tamilnadu Backward Classes Commission report points out, “though caste may be described to be the exclusive feature of the Hindu society, it is found among large sections of Christians and to a lesser extent among the Muslims”.42

1.8.1. Islam and Caste system

Islam is the second largest religion in India. Muslims are scattered all over the country. The egalitarian social order of their religion stands in sharp contrast to the ideology of caste. Though Islam does not admit any type of distinction among its followers, the Indian Muslims have adopted a caste system due to the influence of the Hindu social organization and because most of the Muslims are converts from the Hindu religion. So, one finds the caste system and even casteism prevailing among Indian Muslims. The census divisions of Muslims of India are Sayed, Sheik, Mughal, Pathan and others. Those who, before conversion, belonged to higher castes in Hinduism consider other Muslims lower in social status. Among the most important castes found among Indian Muslims are the following.43

1. Asharaf castes 2. Muslim Rajput castes
1.3.2. Caste among the Christians

Compared to Muslims, Christians in India are less numerous. They stem from groups converted by missionaries at various times and places. Converts are largely from among the lower castes, especially the untouchables. Wiebe and John-Peter show how caste-like differentiation characterizes the Catholic Church in particular parishes in Tamilnadu. Similarly Alexander’s study reveals how the Christians in Kerela live within a caste-like framework. While converts from higher castes have been integrated in the main group of Syrian Christians, social distinction between Pulayas, converts from untouchable groups, and Syrian Christians is kept.

Both studies exemplify the ways in which the stigma of untouchability is manifest within the Christian community. For instance, in 1984, the Supreme Court of India categorically stated, “the mark of caste does not seem to really have disapperared even after some generations after conversion. In Andhra Pradesh and in Tamilnadu there are several thousands of Christian families whose forefathers become Christians and though they profess the Christian religion, they nonetheless observe the practice of caste. There are Christian Reddys, Christian Kammas, Christian Nadars, Christian Adi Dravidas and so on. The practice of their caste is so rigorous that there are inter-marriage with Hindus of the same caste but not with Christians of another caste 44-.
1.8.3. Caste among the Sikhs

Sikhism emerged in India with a view to protecting the ideologies of both Hinduism and Islam, in 15th century. Guru Nanak is the founder of Sikhism, which preached the equality of all men irrespective of their caste. “God will not ask a man of his birth. He will ask him what he has done,” says Nanak in the Adi Granth. Although the religious dogma of the Sikhs categorically opposes the caste system, it is very much prevalent among the Sikhs in the same manner in which it is so among the Hindus. I.P. Singh, in his study of a Sikh village situated in Amritsar District, finds upper and lower caste clearly distinguished and finds not even a single case of inter- marriage”.

1.9. Caste conflicts a scenario

The caste system is a segmental division of society. It is hereditary. There are regular caste councils to regulate and control the conduct of all members. Traditionally there is a hierarchical arrangement of castes according to different degrees of dominance and privileges.

The Brahmins in India stand at the apex of the social ladder. A Brahmin is entitled to whatever exists in this world. The whole world is his property and others live on his charity. In the caste hierarchy, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas follow the Brahmins. At the bottom are the are Sudras. Along with the untouchables, the Sudras constitute the downtrodden section of the Hindu society. The supposition of pollution being communicated by some caste groups to the members of
the higher caste places severe restrictions on the extent of feeding and social custom sanctions marriage within the same caste. This endogamy being the “essence of the caste system”, any man violating this law is put out of his own sub-caste. Members of a particular caste group are expected to take to their hereditary occupation. No caste would allow its members to follow any occupation which was either degrading or impure. It was not only the moral pressure of one’s own caste group that compelled, one to choose one’s occupation, but also the prohibition imposed by other castes whose members did not permit members of the castes except their own to take to their occupation. The impure castes suffer from civil and religious disabilities.  

1.9.1. History of caste ©lashes in Tamilnadu.

Clashes between various caste and religious groups are neither a strange nor a new phenomenon in Tamilnadu. With a wide variety of castes, sub castes, some being treated as not being human at all, friction was bound to arise with a war of attrition quick on its heels. Many communal and caste clashes that took place in the state had been wiped away by the waves of time. But the clashes that took place after the country attained independence have left deep scars, some of which have not totally been erased, with scabs still sticking from them.

According to M.S.S. Pandian, a Fellow of the Madias Institute of Development Studies, each new spell of caste violence in southern Tamilnadu took an increasingly longer time to subside. While the conflict between the Thevars and
the Devendra Kula Velalar (Pallan) in Mudhukulathoor in Ramanathapuram District in 1948 subsided in five days, the conflict in the same area took 15 days to be brought to an end in 1957. The 1989 Bodi pogroms continued 23 days while in 1995-96 they continued for nearly nine months.

The reason for the clashes taking a longer time to subside is attributed to the emergence of recent militancy among the Devendra Kula Velalars and the consequent resistance offered by them to the caste oppression practiced by the Thevars. The tally of deaths and loss of property is also marked by an important shift. In the past the victims of conflicts were mostly the Devendra Kula Velalars. For example, during the riots in 1957, the Dalits lost 17 lives and 2,735 of their houses were set on fire. On the side of the Thevars, only eight lives and 107 houses were lost. During the 1985-86 conflict, the Thevars lost almost an equal number of lives as the Devendra Kula Velalars. Also the latter caused substantial damage to the properties of land owning and trading classes among the Thevars, who take enormous pride in flaunting their martial past, despite most of the police force being biased in favour of the Thevars or being Thevars themselves. There have been many caste clashes during the fifty-nine years of independence, but this report will become extremely unwieldy if all of them were to be studied.

At Villupuram, caste Hindus and Muslims, who were opposed to the presence of a Dalit colony, Periya Colony, in the heart of their settlements launched a series of attacks on Dalits. The Periya Colony was at hub of the town surrounded by business houses, commercial establishments, bus stand
and houses of high caste people. In fact ten unions of caste Hindus and Muslim merchants passed a resolution on 24.7.1978 seeking the removal of the Harijan colony from their midst. A similar resolution was adopted four days later and both resolutions were submitted to the District Collector on 29.7.1978.

There were also other reasons, the main among which was that a Dalit, Jyothilingam, who prospered economically, was becoming assertive by employing 300 workers. So, using the attack on one Kaliyamurthi Gounder, a vegetable vendor, by some Dalits, they launched a reign of terror which lasted for many days.

At Oonjanai, violence erupted following a dispute over the Dalits participating in the Ayyanar temple festival. The caste Hindus opposed the Dalits taking out a procession of idols of horses for the deity. In fact tension had been simmering from 1966, but, on June 28, 1979, it erupted into violence, which resulted in the killing of five Dalits, and injuring 29 persons from the same community. Adding fuel to the fire was the acquittal of the 81 caste Hindus who were charged with the massacre.47

1.9.2. Social **discrimination and rural tension: some reflections**

The prevalence of social discrimination between upper and lower status groups in India has led to social tension on the issues of operation, exploitation, wage, inhuman treatment etc. The Government of India, in order to safeguard the interests of these under-privileged segments subjected to
such type of exploitation, maltreatment, and, carried away by its Constitutional obligations to provide certain assistance to promote their socio-economic condition, introduced social welfare legislation measures such as the Untouchability Prevention Act, Reservation in Admission and Appointments, Minimum Wages Act, Abolition of Bonded Labour, Land Reforms Act, Rural Development programmes etc.

The caste Hindus who had to compete with a large majority in seeking government benefits developed feuds, and jealousy backwardness, unemployment, poverty, indebtedness etc.

The emerging prosperity observed amongst the Scheduled Castes and the indigent condition of caste Hindus, who were once the owners of the land on which these Scheduled Caste people were employed, sowed the seeds of conflict and rivalry and led to social tension. The wards of Harijans, owing to their higher education and employment in the government machinery, started deviating from the accepted traditional pattern of life. At the same time, the wards of the so-called higher status groups, although reasonably educated, were virtually unemployed, kept stagnant at their native place.

1.9.3. Nature of Caste Struggles Today

It is ironical that progressive legislative measures and executive actions undertaken by the national government such as land reforms, enforcement of minimum wages, distribution of surplus land to landless labourers and Dalits, protective discrimination such as reservation for OBCs and
SCs in educational institutions and reservation of jobs in government and public sector enterprises and the creation of reserved constituencies to provide for political participation of weaker sections in decision-making in order to assure them of social, political and economic equality, have created social tensions between the haves and havenots and between the upper castes and the OBCs on one side and the SCs on the other. Such social tension and conflicts have surfaced time and again in rural areas where feudalism is still well entrenched or where new capitalist farmers are emerging. These conflicts are also witnessed in industrial centres where these conflicts sometimes take the form of communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims.

1.9.4. Reasons behind the caste clashes

Various causes have been attributed to the prevalence of caste clashes in the Tamilnadu, particularly in the southern districts. The reasons behind the caste clashes are as follow.

1. There has been an upsurge, if not a renaissance, among the Dalits, especially among the youths of this community, which had been under caste dominance ever since hierarchy and made to do the most menial jobs and treated no better than slaves.

2. In some areas, the caste Hindus, especially the Thevars and the Nadars, had denied employment to the Dalits in order to make them genuflect. But Dalits who had no employment locally sought green pastures abroad and this changed the entire lifestyle and economy of the people.
3. While in many areas the Dalits have been the victims of caste Hindus’ atrocities, there have also been instances wherein in places where the Dalits were the dominant community, they have practiced a kind of reverse untouchability against Thevars.

4. Despite tall claims by the government, untouchability still prevails in many areas in various forms. In some villages Dalits are still served tea in tea stalls only in coconut shells or separate cups kept for them. They cannot sit on benches if a Thevar comes there.

5. Dalits are also prevented from fetching water from the wells and pipes used by the caste Hindus. This is also another reason for caste clashes in rural areas. There were also instances wherein the Dalits have been prevented from getting into buses in their village, but were forced to walk to the periphery of the village to do so.

6. Poster culture, which has been making serious inroads into the lives of both the communities, has also contributed to the heightening caste tension. Often posters denigrating one community are printed and pasted prominently and the other community retaliates by putting out even bigger posters defaming the other community.
7. Temple festivals have also been at the center of many clashes. Dalits who have not been allowed to go into temples or participate in the rituals now claim their right of participation, which the caste Hindus are not willing to concede. This has often led to bloodshed.

8. If any one wants to start a communal clash he only has to damage a statue of a leader of the other community or defile it. Statues of caste leaders have proliferated in Tamilnadu during the past few years on an unprecedented scale and the slightest damage results in heavy casualties.

9. Eve teasing of girls by members of other communities.

10. Police partiality and excesses, which have in some instances, become unbridled atrocity.

11. Instigation by self-seeking or self-styled-leaders who use the foulest language while encouraging their youths to violence and mayhem.

12. The unemployed youth have no work except sitting in the public places and passing comments over the passengers. This also leads to caste clashes.

13. The Harijans, over the years, became landowners and some of them even purchased cardamom estates. The caste Hindus were unhappy over these developments, with showdowns inevitable any time.
14. The root cause of such tension was that students became pessimistic and felt their merit would increasingly cease to count with the onset of linguism and casteism. Unemployment haunted them with perpetual darkness around.

15. Inflammatory speeches delivered by caste leaders of the oppressed precipitated large-scale riots.

16. Perpetuation of social discrimination and inequality.

17. Agricultural backwardness.

18. Lack of alternate sources of employment.

19. Sexual exploitation of Scheduled Caste women by upper caste men.\textsuperscript{51}

\textbf{1.10. Theoretical framework}

Theoretical framework is the base of every research to discuss the present and future perspectives of the research gap under investigation. So it is necessary to build/adopt a theoretical framework so as to ensure logical and scientific procedures in inquiring into the problem and its solutions.

In many fields the interplay between theory and fact is rapid and intimate. Empirical work focuses on problems which theory shows to be important. Theory incorporates new empirical findings, gives them meaning by integrating them with other findings and existing theory, and, on this basis, points the way to new empirical research. So, theories are used in the analysis of the phenomenon of religious conversion.

The major theories used here are as follow.

(i) Alienation theory

(ii) Conflict theory

(iii) Structural-functional theory
1.10.1. Alienation theory

Karl Marx is the pioneer of the alienation theory. His contemporary Hegel also supported this theory.

The development of the notion of alienation may be traced to German idealistic philosophy, especially as exemplified in Hegelian thought. But it was Karl Marx who first made use of the concept as a powerful diagnostic tool for sociological inquiry.

Sociologists formulate their conception of alienation in terms of widely differing feelings and attitudes. An individual is considered alienated unless he has the appropriate feelings.

Karl Mane analysed society in terms of economy. He analysed the class conflict saying “the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles” in an absurdly over simplified statement, emphasizing “the oppressor” and the “the oppressed”. It could equally well be written that all societies, past and present, have had their appropriate orders of status and that these divisions of social class were often labeled inhumanity. 52

Man feels that he is alienated from society. He is unable to identify himself among men, the impersonal mass society. Formal and routinized social relationships, devoid of emotions, make him feel lonely and rootless; he thinks he does not belong.
Alienation refers to the personal demoralization and psychic disorganization of the individual; the feeling of powerlessness, meaninglessness, rootlessness and isolation; psychological disorders such as extreme anxiety states, despair and pessimism; a lack, of a sense of purpose and attachment; behavioral adaptations that demonstrate apathy, distrust, aggression and withdrawal symptoms.

In this society property owners can ill-treat the property-less whom they employ; the property-less can feel that they are being denied their essential human dignity and are being used as units of labour to create profit for their employers. Problems of power, virulent feelings of grievance and of hatred at the humiliations and the sheer suffering and hardships involved, are certainly there in plenty. In this context, the sense of alienation from the essential conditions of human dignity has a real meaning for man so placed. The economic exploitation of men and inhuman working conditions lead to the increasing alienation of men. 53

1.10.1.1. Application of Alienation theory

In the Indian context, caste Hindus are ill-treating the low castes; not only their employers but also their fellow men; the low caste feel that they are being denied their essential human dignity, in the form of segregation from common/public places, denying entry into the temple and other inhuman practices, which promote a sense of alienation; human dignity has real meaning for low caste people so placed. The social discrimination so practiced leads to increasing alienation of men.
In both the districts studied caste Hindus are ill-treating low caste people in their working place; they are denied their basic human dignity, in the form of segregation in public places, settlement etc. Denying of entry into temple is practiced in Coimbatore District. Such discrimination leads to alienation of men.

1.10.2. Conflict theory

The conflict perspective in modern Sociology derives its inspiration from the work of Karl Marx, who advocates the struggle between the bourgeois and the proletariat. Mills, Lewis Coser, Daherendorf, Randall Collings, Irving Lewis are among the noted conflict theories of contemporary Sociology. They share the view that society is best understood and analysed in terms of conflict. Conflict theorists also say that use of ideology by dominant groups justifies their dominance.

Marx begins with a simple assumption: the existence of different social classes is the continuous source of inevitable conflict and changes in the social structure, the violent upheaval affect class composition.

According to Lewis Coser, conflict arises from frustration of specific demand within relationships and from estimates of gains of the participants which are directed at the presumed frustrating object.\(^{54}\)
1.10. 2.1. Application, off Conflict theory

Conflict perspectives portray the existence of different, social class is the continuous source of inevitable conflict and change in the social structure, the violent upheaval affecting class composition. In the Indian context there are upper caste lower caste ideologies. The dominant group justifies their dominance. If a system survives the subordinate group must follow the system. It would otherwise lead to instability of the society in the form of caste conflict. Different castes and discrimination are the continuous source of inevitable conflict and change is taking place in the social structure through religious conversion.

The educated enlightened Scheduled Caste people raise their voice against the caste system and other inhuman practices in the social structure. The caste Hindus want to maintain the status quo, which results in caste conflict. Conflict results in religious conversion.

1.10. 3. Structural **Functionalism, theory**

Structural functionalism has its roots in the work, ot early sociologists, especially Durkheim and Weber. Among contemporary scholars, it is most closely associated with the work of Talcot Parsons (1951), Marx, Robert Merton (1968) Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown. It is the dominant theoretical view in sociology today.
The terms *Structure* and *functions* refer to two separate but closely related concepts. Structure can be compared to the organs or part of the body of an animal and functions can be compared to the purposes of these organs. Like a biological structure, a social system is composed of many interrelated and interdependent parts of structure with specific functions.

Marx himself was quite explicitly aware that he was conceiving “the social system” as a functionally interdependent set of parts in this way and had quite clear definitions of nature of a society in his work.

The structural functional school of thought believes in the network of permanent and enduring social relationship. These relationships are distinct from individual relationships.

When two individuals have a relationship where each expects something from the other their behaviour is predictable and social behaviour is thus an expected and organized behaviour. It is defined by the social norms and given sanction by society.

Hebert Spencer viewed (1820-1903) society as made up of different parts, all of which have to work in order to remain healthy, meet the demands of the environment and survive.

**1.10.3.1. Application of Theory**

The structural functionalist perspective delineates the way in which the different structures are coordinated and integrated to preserve the unity of society as a complete system. When different parts are coordinated and integrated
the structure will remain. Functional deviations do not take place. When the structure is changed the function is also affected.

In the Indian context caste is a basis for social structure. The caste and its functions will affect the social structure. The caste based social structure implies discrimination among its members. The traditional social structure accepts discrimination and other practices. But, today, the functions are being questioned. So, changes have taken place in the functions of social structure in the form of conversion to another religion.

1.11. Review of literature and research gap

Before making an attempt to review some of the studies already conducted, it is pertinent to mention here that there is a dearth of literature on this particular aspect which is primarily responsible for the present researcher making a modest attempt towards a greater understanding of the issue focused. Though there is a dearth of literature, a few studies relating to religious conversion are available and those studies are reviewed hereunder.

Iyer’s (1926) study on the anthropology of Syrian Christians is a comprehensive work on the prevailing caste oriented manners and customs among the Syrian Christians of Kerela. He says “each division among the Syrian Christians has become, as in the Hindu caste, an endogamous set, with no inter-marriage between the members of the one sect and of those another, though no objection is made to inter-dinning”. 56
J.C. Flugel’s (1945) psycho-analytical study on conversion pointed out that conversion, sometimes reflects the release of repressed social feelings. Early socialization may have taught one that certain religious beliefs can be saved. These ideas may be repressed until there is a carefree, moral, or even immoral type of behaviour that seems to deny ever having been exposed to such teachings. Then, suddenly, upon conversion, repressions are released, a strong sense of guilt emerges, and beliefs appear to have been fashioned anew in a very abrupt manner. What has really occurred, however, is that past social experiences have suddenly emerged from the unconscious into the conscious mind.\(^{57}\)

K.C. Alexander (1968) attempted to examine the plight of converted SCs in Kerela. The study indicated, “There is no inter-dinning between these groups. The Syrian Christians usually do not invite the BC Christians, as guests, to their social functions like wedding or baptism. On such occasions a few BC Christians who occupy good positions in the church or society alone may be invited. On the other hand, the Syrian Christians usually do not accept any invitations to partake with or eat in the house of BC Christians”. \(^{58}\)

Koshy’s (1968) study on caste in the Kerela churches uncovers the existence of caste elements in the churches though they claim to be traditional. The persistence of caste structure within the church has affected the life and growth of the church. In many places separate congregation, separate place of worship and even separate cemeteries are maintained for different caste Christians of the same denomination. \(^{59}\)
Dumont’s (1970) study on “Homo Hierarchies” pointed out that even the Catholics of more recent origin are divided into far distinct groups or castes. The Christians originated from untouchables seem to have their own churches.\(^{60}\)

Mandelbaum (1970) notes how exhaustive casteism is among the Kerela Christians. The Christians are not different from the Hindus with regard to caste organization. The equality the missionaries insisted on seemed confined to the hours of church worship and even padded shop was unquestionably the actual first among the putatitive equals.\(^{61}\)

Madelbaum (1972) says the following on the conversion movement:

“Religious movements offered the principal means by which people in this social system could regroup themselves in far-reaching ways. People in all complex societies sooner or later rearrange their social groupings in order to adapt to external change and internal development”. \(^{52}\)

Alexander’s (1977) study on caste among non-Hindus in India comes out with a different opinion with regard to the status of converts. He says “even after conversion, the lower caste converts continued to be treated as Harijans, by all sections of the society, including the Syrian Christians even though with conversion the former caste ceased to be legally Harijans and untouchables.”\(^{63}\)
The 1982 Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India report condemned casteism within the Catholic Church. “We state categorically that caste with its consequent effects of discrimination and caste mentality has no place in Christianity. It is, in fact, a denial of Christianity because it is inhuman. It violates the God-given dignity and equality of the human person. It is an outright denial of the fatherhood of God that, in practice, renders meaningless the brotherhood of men.”

Pillay (1983) cites the research by Oosthuizen and Hofmeyr who quoted extensively the statistical evidence of conversion among the poor, socially unstable Indians in Chatworth where conversion from Hinduism was phenomenally high while in the more affluent areas it was much lower.

Oommen (1985) has summarized some of the points emerging from conversion studies. Given the importance of collectivities in India (tribes, caste, kin-groups over individuals), one hears more of group conversion. The resulting patterns were that if two or more castes of identical status with traditional animosity existed in a region, then one of them converted; if both or all did so they invariably turned to different denominations; there were differences within the church fold; and, irrespective of denominational variations, the social stigma continued with further fissions as the case of neo-Christians attests.
Kananaikil’s (1986) study on the Christians of Scheduled Caste origin criticizes the existing caste system among Christians themselves. He says, “Perhaps the most crucial area where the church reveals its weakness is that of caste prejudices”.67

Thaillayvel Naidoo (1989) explains conversion in South Africa: “Conversion practices in South Africa are similar to those in India where religious freedom in unrestricted and missionary activities are never stifled, least of all by individual conscience. Some members of the Hindu community are known to have expressed the wish that government legislation aimed at curbing conversion should be introduced. Many Hindus see this as one of the ways in which the practice could be arrested”.68

Jana Kumar’s (2001) “A Study of the Santals of Bhimpore in the District of Midnapore, West Bengal” says: “Prior to conversion, all members of the tribe were the same and socially equal. With conversion, however, the Santal and Santal Christian converts now make a sharp distinction between them. Each of them tries to plead the superiority of its own “creed” over the other and advances several cultural and religious reasons to justify its attitude and evaluations. Such attitudes have affected their social relations adversely and created considerable gulfs between the types of Santals”.69

A study conducted by Antony Raj (2001) among the Christians of SC origin and SC Hindus in 12 taluks of Cuddapah District of Andhra Pradesh indicated that
conversion has brought about changes in the lives of Christians of SC origin. It is visible and the respondents have accepted it. There is, however, a long way to go in the cessation of caste discrimination within the Christian churches and outside. Yet conversion to Christianity does have an impact on the socio-economic status of the converts. It is not a myth. It is a reality.\textsuperscript{70}

The above review of studies clearly shows that only limited attempts have been made to study the issue of conversion, impact of conversion and expectation from conversion. With only limited studies, there is more scope with this topic. Moreover the above studies do not answer the following questions.

(a) Why is mass conversion taking place frequently?
(b) Has it changed the converts’ life style?
(c) Why is one group converted while another group remains in the Hindu religion?
(d) Do caste Hindus accept converts as Christians/ Muslims?
(e) Can awareness on problems of the lower castes make religious conversion possible?

Yet another crucial issue that is to be explored is whether caste structure and caste conflict lead to conversion. It is against this background that the present study has conceptualized social structure and religious conversion. Accordingly certain crucial aspects have been covered with a view to examining religious conversion.
1.12. Present study

This study makes an attempt to place religious conversion in the social structure and caste system which is deep rooted in the Hindu social order. A great deal of discrimination, inhuman treatment and various ill treatments were imposed on lower caste people which stimulated the lower caste people to convert to other religions in rural areas. This study covers the aspects such as the socio-economic background of converted families, the social structure, the circumstances and factors behind the conversion, the impact of conversion etc. Focus group discussions were held to understand the inter-caste perceptions about religious conversion.

1.13. Chapter scheme

This research report consists of five chapters. The first chapter gives a brief explanation of conversion, caste conflict and the plight of Dalits in rural areas besides a review of earlier studies on religious conversion and the theoretical framework. The second chapter presents a comprehensive view of religious conversion in India and its scenario. The methodology adopted to conduct the present study, the objectives, operational definition of concepts, sampling procedure and sample size, tools of data collection and method of analysis are presented in the third chapter. The fourth chapter is focused, on primary data analysis. The summary of major findings, suggestions and conclusions are presented in under the fifth chapter.
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