CHAPTER-VII

Conclusion
The study of Muslim and Christian communities of Sagar can be termed to be a positive step towards enhancing our acquaintance about system of social organization and behavioural practices in its actual functioning. It makes analytical description of the existence of bright as well as some dark features of their social fabrics in midst of extensively projected egalitarian image of these two communities. Hierarchical division of people along the caste-line and prevalence of untouchability are some of the dark features that often appear as to be the incidents coming within the purview of violation of human rights.

Ideologically, there are striking similarities between these two religious communities. Both the religions have not originated in India. Both came to India from foreign countries. Though, the religion is foreign, but the adherents are indigenous. These two religions came to India through travelers and traders. Subsequently the Muslim rule and there after the British rule contributed significantly to spread Islam and Christianity in India. As such, all the people of Islam and Christianity are indigenous converts. Majority of the (if not the entire) converts are Hindus and next to them are tribals. Convert though changed their religious faith, but have still continued to practice some aspects of Hinduism which are often reflected in their present behaviour.

Muslims and Christians, both trace the origin of their religions through prophets who are taken to be the messengers of almighty God. They are believed to have been sent by the God to spread the message of kind, equality and fraternity among the people. The message as propagated by the prophets became the source for numerical growth of these two religions.
The high ideals of equality, humanity and universal fraternity were made basis to enlarge their followers by both the religions. There is similarity in the professed ideals of both the religions. Both presented a vision of society, which is free from hierarchical division, differential treatment, and practices of subjugation. Christianity flourished in Europe and Islam in Arab countries. Quran (collection of the messages of Prophet Mohammad) is the holy scripture of Muslims and the Testament-Bible (messages of Jesus Christ for the Christians. There is again similarity between Muslims and Christians with regard to religions treatise. The religions text of Muslims and Christian were not a document written by their prophets themselves. It was their disciples who compiled the messages of Prophets and gave a form of the holy books.

II

Both, Islam and Christianity do not believe in idol worship. They believe that the almighty God has no material shape. He is omnipresent. This kind of conception of God appealed to the ancestors of present Muslims and Christians of Sagar, who were subjected to many rules of disabilities to worship in Hindu temples. They believed, as there was no idol of God, there could not be discriminatory treatment in worship.

The Religion – both Islam and Christianity – which started with high ideals of equality, itself became the target of division on enlargement of their respective followers. A new sect, known as Protestant emerged, and the Christians got divided into two branches, which are presently identified as Catholics and Protestants. Numerically, the Protestant outnumbers the Catholics. In the present study, 87.8 per cent Christians are Protestants. The Catholics constitute the small size of 12.2 per cent. The Protestants of Sagar are further divided in as many as six identifiable groups. Each group
maintains their identity through their affiliation to churches. Division in caste line is evident. One Church is exclusively for the persons belonging to untouchable or Dalit castes. Membership to Church is strengthening the existence of caste among the Christians of Sagar.

Over the years, the Muslims also could not sustain its cherished principle of 'one-ness'. Muslims got divided into three broad sects—Sunni, Shia and Bohara— and many other small sects. In Sagar, Sunnis are numerically more in comparison to people of other sects. The entire respondents in the present study are Sunnis. There is further categorization of Sunni, known as Ashraf, Ajlaf and Arzal. Each category is further divided into more than one caste groups, who are given a definite place in hierarchical order of the Muslims.

A沃尔raf category encompasses people of four distinct castes. All the castes among Ashrafs are placed at the highest in hierarchical order of Muslims of Sagar. Arzals are placed at bottom of the hierarchy. Ajlafs find place in between the Ashrafs and Arzals. Ashrafs claim to be non-occupational castes and project themselves as the descendants of foreign origin. The Ajalafs and Arzals represent occupational castes. Different castes in each of these two categories are given place in hierarchical order in accordance to the purity and respect attached to their respective occupations.

The people of Ajlaf and Arzal categories constitute five occupational castes. They comprise thirty per cent and Ashrafs count seventy per cent of Muslim population which were included for the purpose of this study. Each caste of all the three categories practice endogamy and recruitment of membership is by birth. Inter-caste marriage may take place between castes having close proximity in hierarchical order, but that too in rare situations. Ashraf Muslims are more rigid endogamous groups. Each of the four groups
practice endogamy, and are very rigid to not to establish marital relation with the people from occupational castes falling in and Arzal categories.

Religiously, the Muslims say they do not believe in caste, but in reality, the caste is very much in practice. The three fold categorical division of Muslims of Sagar based on the principle of purity of blood and practice of endogamy make one to say it a true replica of, using the phrase of Imtiaz Ahmad, Hindu Varna system. It would not be an exaggeration to say that three processes Sanskritization, Islamization and Arhradization are simultaneously working among the Muslims of Sagar.

Lower caste converts are trying to adopt more and more the behavioural practices of higher castes Muslims, exactly in the manner of Sanskritization. The recent converts are conscious to acquaint themselves about textual prescription and behavioural practice of Islam. In addition to these, a new process is also gaining ground among Ashraf Muslims of Sagar. People of Ashraf categories are trying to acquire a look of the pure and real Ashrafs of India and foreign countries. The behavioural practice of this kind has been described in this thesis, as the process of Arhradization. At first look, it appears to be contradiction in terms. How people of a caste will adopt behavioural prescription of their own caste. They are supposed to practice that which is an expected behavioural prescription of their caste or category.

Situation is quite different among the Ashraf Muslims of Sagar. Though Ashraf Muslims of Sagar claim to be the descendants of real Ashrafs of foreign countries, but others do not take their claim true. People hold the opinion that majority of Ashraf Muslims are indigenous converts. They have simply taken the honorific caste names of real Ashrafs. According to this kind of belief, the Ashraf Muslims are generally presented as 'spurious and genuine Ashrafs. Even the Ashraf Muslims present themselves as genuine
and others as spurious Ashrafs. So, if one takes the version of individual Ashrafs, than except the one who reports, others are spurious Ashrafs. Prevalence of this kind of notion is known to all Ashrafs. So, they make conscious efforts to look like more as a genuine than spurious Ashrafs. Their desire to present themselves as genuine Ashrafs, they try to live life similar to a genuine Ashraf. Competent to read Quran in Arabic language, maintaining distance from non-Ashraf Muslims, and observances of rules of endogamy are some attributes that make one qualify as genuine Ashrafs. The process of Ashrafization has come to stay as one more mechanism to fortify the caste system among Muslims of Sagar.

III

Caste system among the Christians have acquired a new shape which finds is expression in suppressed form. Two processes can be attributed for the occurrence of specific shape of caste system among the Christians of Sagar– the conversion process and of the simultaneously operating processes of retaining pre-convert caste name by higher caste converts and adoption of western surname by lower caste converts.

The Muslims of Sagar embraced Islam collectively, people of a caste or sub-caste as a whole. The conversion among Christians was mostly an individual’s endeavor. In individual conversion, people did not carry their traditional occupation and caste name. After conversion, they took western surname as their caste name. Western surnames had no relation with specific traditional occupation. Western surnames were not caste name, but only a family name. Converts of this category consciously concealed their pre-convert castes, as most of them were from Dalit or untouchable castes of Hindu fold. Western surname gave rescue to them.
Higher caste converts follow opposite line. Even after conversion, they keep their pre-convert caste and also keep Hindu name. Higher caste converts still perform some rituals of their pre-convert castes as a mechanism to show their ritually superior status. The large-scale conversion of untouchables into Christianity has made higher caste converts of Sagar to express their pre-convert ritually high status more vigorously.

Both the situations create problems to identify caste among the Christians. But this is not a problem of people of higher caste converts. Record of short history of each convert is maintained in the Church. So, through the records of the church and from their own deep investigation, they come to know the caste of lower caste converts. The higher caste converts keep this kind of information to establish their social relation and more particularly to use those information at the time of settlement of marriage. By and large, all Christians make enquiry about the pre-convert caste during settlement of marriage. They do not establish marital relations with a family from untouchable or Dalit caste. It is surprising that the Dalit converts also do not favour untouchable castes for settlement of marriage. They avoid eating in the same row along with untouchable converts. The participation of untouchable converts is restricted even in performance of rituals like Holy Communion. Higher caste Christians does not allow the untouchable converts to enter their kitchen. The Christians of Christian locality (the residence of respondents) know the pre-convert caste of each other. They do not take food in the house of untouchable converts.

Some cases highlighting the practice of extreme from of untouchability reveals the intensity of the feeling of untouchability among them. Some higher caste converts even ask the untouchable converts to wash their tea cup. Though Christians of Sagar overtly say that caste and untouchability are non-
existent facts in their society, but the caste continues to remain in background to define the pattern of their relationships and to regulate vital aspects of their life organization. Thus, we can say, that caste is not there by its name, but caste if present to govern their behaviour.

IV

Existence of caste and practice of untouchability is one more point of similarity between Muslims and Christians of Sagar. Another similarity is also found in allocation of authority for interpretation of religions philosophy and doctrine contained in their holy scriptures. Catholics believe that only highest clergy in ecclesiastical order of church has the right to interpret the text of the Bible. Very often this right is vested in seat of Pope. Among Protestants, the chief priest of church commands this authority. Common believer of Christianity is not expected to interpret the Bible and present his own ideas about religions prescriptions. Common men are expected to follow and translate the religions dictum in their real life.

Muslims also have the same system. It is held that it is not within the competence and intellectual capacity of common man to grasp the deep-seated meaning of sermons of Prophet Mohammad. Common man is not expected to express his views on any matter involving interpretation of religions doctrine and sermons. The authority for interpretation remains vested in the hands of Mufti who is district chief of Muslim's ecclesiastic order.

In both the religions, followers are expected to follow what is said to them by their respective religions priests. They are not expected to question the statement of priests, as neither they are authority to interpret religions text nor they have intellectual faculty to understand the real meaning contained in the text of religions books. This is one effective way to prevent dissension and
debate on religions prescription and practices. On raising any issue relating to their religion, people from both the communities do not indulge in the discussion. They would take excuse by saying that they are not competent to participate in the debate involving religions doctrines and prescriptions. This reveals the influence of mosque (for Muslims) and church (for Christians) in the social life of the people of these two communities. Dependency on church for Christian and mosque for Muslims is very strong among these two religions communities of Sagar.

V

The result obtained from the analysis of views and opinion of Muslims and Christians on issues pertaining to caste and untouchability is alarming. People of both the communities firmly accept that the practice of caste and untouchability is becoming strong day-by-day. Majority people from both communities unhesitatingly accept the existence of untouchability. The Dalit converts are more vocal to express their resentment about the prevalence of discriminatory practices.

Resentment over discriminatory treatment is much more among the educated untouchables of the Muslim in comparison to untouchables converts in the Christian community. They vent out their resentment in deep probing, but they do not express their voice publicly for fear of getting the wrath of religions priests and higher caste Muslims.

Resentment is gradually gaining ground among the middle range castes of the Muslims, who are classified in Ajlaf category. People of this category are trying to redefine their position through addressing themselves as backward caste. They want to be recognized as 'backward castes' at official level so that they can also get benefit of reservation as is given to backward castes of Hindus.
This kind of efforts of some sections of Muslim gives credence to the argument about the existence of caste among Muslims. The meaning of backwardness acquires sense only in the frame of hierarchical placement of the people. They are backward means, some people are above to them. The emergence of the consciousness of backward caste not only gives living proof about the existence of caste among Muslims of Sagar, but also contributing to strengthen the roots of caste system in them.

VI

Education has opened a new horizon of aspiration among Muslim falling in the middle range category of Ajlaf. Besides organizing themselves under the banner of backward castes, they are trying to achieve their desire for social mobility through adopting the caste name of Ashrafs. Twin processes are simultaneously working. They retain their identity to get benefit of backward caste, but at the same time, they are adopting the caste names of Ashrafs as a means to upgrade their social status. People of backward castes do not find any contradiction on simultaneous working of that twin processes. They argue that adoption of caste name of Ashrafs is their surname. The caste name is to be recognized by their original caste. This is common practice among the backward castes of Hindus also. They have taken the surname of higher castes, but want to receive benefits of backward castes. Argument here is, caste not only exists among Muslims of Sagar but it is further strengthening with the growth of awareness among them.

Caste does exist among the Christians of Sagar, but it is not that conspicuous as it is among the Muslims. The reason for this can be partly attributed to their socio-economic conditions. There is hundred per cent literacy among the Christians, where as the literacy is much less among Muslims. Nearly half of the Christians have attained higher education. Higher
education opened many avenues of opportunity. Sizeable section of them are in Government job. Not a single Christian household is engaged in low profile job. The situation is just different among Muslims. The number of persons engaged in low profile jobs is more than the persons engaged in high earning respectable jobs.

Occupation is closely linked with income. Earning from manual occupation is much less in comparison to non-manual occupation. Socially, manual occupations are rated low and degraded. Because of higher education, the Christians, by and large, are engaged in high graded respectable occupations. This has its effect on household income.

All the Christian households are economically far better in comparison to Muslim households. The earning of many Christian households has crossed the mark of fifteen thousand rupees per month. Economically there is no wide inequality among persons of Christian Community. Though, People from untouchable castes are not happy on being subjected to discriminatory treatment by higher caste coverts, but they feel satisfied that conversion to christianity helped them to improve their education and economic position.

The expression of the existence of caste and untouchability is not same in Muslim and Christian communities of Sagar. The difference in expression comes out open in case of identification of untouchable caste. The Muslim untouchables are easily recognized from their occupation and occupation based caste name. There is no system of occupation based caste system among Christians.

The prevalence of occupation based caste makes untouchable known not only to their fellow Muslims, but they also get recognized by wider section of society. As such, untouchable Muslims are subjected to degraded treatment within and outside Muslim society as well.
The converted untouchable caste among Christians are escaped from the problem of their pre-convert identity. They did not carry their traditional occupation, and at the same they adopted western surname as their caste names. Their pre-convert identity remains unknown to the people of wider society. They are recognized by non-Christians as to be only as Christian, not by their pre-convert castes. But this policy did not work to conceal their pre-convert castes from the members of their own community. The higher caste converts make conscious efforts to know the pre-convert castes of any new comers. This they do to define their relations with new comers. Thus, caste of untouchables no longer remains concealed from the eyes of higher caste converts of the Christians.

Caste factor play significant role among Christians in terms of membership to Church and place of worship. Separate seating arrangement in church is made for untouchable Christians. They are discriminated in rituals and worships.

VII

The practice of caste system and untouchability is a violation of human rights. Existence of the caste system and discrimination in consideration of untouchability is a vivid case of violation of human rights. The charter of human rights is quite long. Few lines from declaration of human rights are sufficient to explain the areas of its violation. The convention of Human Rights declares that all men are entitled for equal treatment and there shall not be any discrimination on the basis of birth or social grouping. Any action or practice threatening the life of a man and attacking his dignity is a violation of human rights. Life here has a wider meaning. It connotates the provision of conditions unobstructed for development and mobility of every human beings. Protection from any form of attack on dignity of human beings has been declared essential for perfect human life.
People from Behana and Bhisti castes are placed at the bottom of Muslims hierarchical order. They are regarded as degraded castes. Their interaction with people of other castes is governed on the basis of their hierarchical position. Recruitment of member in a caste is determined by birth. A person does not have control on his birth. Ascribing a fixed social position on the basis of birth is a restriction on his right to social mobility. In caste system of Muslims, the area of mobility is fixed within the confines of a caste. Imposing restriction on social mobility of a person on the basis of his birth is a case of discrimination. The practice of discrimination is violation of Human Rights.

Not only this, the people of lower castes is subjected to inhuman treatment. They are considered low and downgraded. Practice of untouchability is so obvious among Muslims that they do not allow a person of untouchable caste to enter their kitchen. This is the way through which the higher caste Muslims is strengthening the practice of untouchability in their relation with the people of lower castes.

Christians also make distinction between higher castes and untouchable castes. They also do not, allow people from untouchable caste to get entry in their kitchen. Separate Church for the people of Dalit and untouchable caste is a height of the practice of untouchability. Instances are many. One does not need to give examples of many events and practices to prove the existence of untouchability. Existence of single practice producing discrimination and hurting dignity of a person attracts the provisions of Human Rights. And thus, those practices or behavioural prescriptions can be referred to as violation of Human Rights. Muslims and Christians of Sagar are systematically institutionalizing the practice of untouchability. Muslims are doing this through hierarchical placement of people in consideration of purity and impurity of blood; system of membership by birth is an example of
recognition of the principle of purity and impurity of blood. Christians do this through institutionalizing the membership of church and in their performance of rituals.

VIII

The untouchables from Hindus have converted to Islam or Christainity to get rid from stigma and differential treatment. Conversion did not bring the desired change in their social status. The proverbial saying that ‘the caste is back with a bang’ truly depicts the situation-obtaining place among Muslim and Christian societies of Sagar.

Source of untouchability lays in the practice of caste system, which makes provision of different hierarchical position conditioned by the principle of superiority and inferiority of the people. Untouchability has its origin in the caste system. Caste system prescribes behavioural rules and area of social and religious participation of the people of each caste. The area of social and religious participation remains restricted, and number of rules is imposed on them about what to do and what not to do. This creates discrimination among people and consequently gives birth to the practice of untouchability.

Whatever may be the cause of the origin and existence of untouchability, fact is that practice of untouchability is a violation of Human Right. Now the question is, how to abolish or atleast weaken the caste based hierarchical division of people. Should it be left on the people themselves, or the state should stop its practice through legislation. Declaration of Human Rights unambiguously demands the abolition of all types of discrimination. India is a signatory of ‘Human Rights Declaration’. As such, it is binding on her to abolish it and create condition that is free from discrimination and injurious to human dignity.

In India, things are going apposite direction. On the label of reformation and social justice, the Government is strengthening the existence
of castes system. Result is before us. It is spreading in those communities where there was no provision of the existence of caste system and practice of untouchability as we see in the Muslims and Christians communities of Sagar.

This study on caste and untouchability brings out the existence of caste and practice of untouchability among Muslims and Christians in central region of Madhya Pradesh. Scholars have rightly recognized that Muslims and Christians can be understood only through making regional studies on them. System of social organization and behavioural practices varies from region to region. This study is one step in the direction of understanding the Muslim and Christian societies through regional studies. The findings of this research may also come as a meaningful contribution to enrich sociological literature on the subject relating to minority communities in India.