CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Change is the law of nature. Society with its potential aspects, is changing. The only unchanging law of nature is "social change". So many factors held responsible to bring about change in every aspect of society. In the present research study "conversion" studied as a means of bringing social and religious change in general and among scheduled caste Neo-Buddhists in particular. Almost all the Neo-Buddhists belong to scheduled castes. They were the downtrodden sections of the society and who suffered a lot in Indian history. In this chapter an attempt is made to summarise the causes and the course of conversion to Buddhism and the main findings of the Thesis.

Dr. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was for a purpose and an intent. It was to provide a way to liberate himself and his people from the misery of untouchability and thereby bring about a social change. It was not for the liberation of just one individual but of a people seeking equality and self-respect. The social oppression suffered by the untouchable castes are very well known and our history stands as a mute witness to it. These are the sad condition and the demeaning limits of human relations and rights. But what is significant to note that these sufferings were not the result of the laws of nature. The sufferings of the untouchables arose out of a social arrangement and the machinations of vested interests of a socio-religious system presided over by a group of people who assigned for themselves a superior position. These were not self caused or self-imposed, but were
thrust upon one people by another. The sufferings of the untouchables were ordained by men and institutionalized. They received their legitimation through Brahminism. Its unfortunate continuity made it a chronic disease of Hindu society.

Dr. Ambedkar believed that untouchability was born out of the struggle between Buddhism and Brahminism. According to him the untouchables were originally Buddhists and their untouchability was a punishment for taking up Buddhism. He called them 'Broken men' or those who were forced to live outside the village from the very beginning. He further believed that the root of their untouchability was beef-eating and that untouchability became intimately connected with the ban on cow-slaughter.

According to Ambedkar, the Hindu social order is the root cause of the various social evils perpetuated in various forms in the Indian society. For him Hinduism is responsible for the abominable conditions of the downtrodden, especially of lower castes. Hinduism is based on the principle of inequality for which it has established the caste system. One striking feature of the caste system is that the different castes do not stand as a horizontal series all on the same plane. It is a system in which the different castes are placed in a vertical series one above the other.

According to Ambedkar, in Hinduism inequality is a religious doctrine adopted and conscientiously preached as a sacred dogma. It is an official creed and no body is ashamed to profess it openly. Inequality for the Hindus is a divinely prescribed way of life, as a religious doctrine and as a
prescribed way of life. It has become incarnated in the Hindu society and is shaped and moulded by it in its thoughts and in its doings. Indeed inequality has become the soul of Hinduism.

Religion has been always a very sensitive and delicate issue. Holy wars have been fought throughout the history of mankind in several parts of the world. The tendency to appreciate one's religion and denounce the religions of the others is always fraught with danger. Though all religions ultimately mean the same thing and act as agents of social control in practice different situations exist which make some join one religion as against the other. This happened in case of Dr. Ambedkar and his followers. It is because the scheduled castes were a condemned people. They were arbitrarily assigned the lowest position in the Hindu caste system. They remained sunk in poverty, steeped in misery and had become totally defenceless. Today they are the targets of organised violence.

The scheduled castes in India are the victims of an apartheid which has existed for centuries. What is worse, this form of discrimination has almost always had the sanction of society. The assault on the scheduled castes at the social, economic and political levels is the result of a complex combination of causes that are perpetuated in many ways, both consciously and unconsciously.

Untouchability is a barbaric practice of assigning sub-human status to human beings. It is rampant all over the country and has even a religious sanction. Today the untouchables work in the fields, in mines, in forests and factories. They not only produce food grains, pulses and other
agricultural commodities but also build roads, bridges, dams and office blocks. They are engaged in hard manual work in the real sense they produce wealth. Yet they do not get a proper share. A majority of them are devout Hindus. While their breathren of the same religion shun their very touch, there faithful lowlies quietly accept it and continue to worship Hindu gods and Goddesses from distance. They have been appressed for so long and so heavily that the vast majority of them are content in this humility and never even dream of changing their religion. They have been in the Hindu fold since time immemorial. There has been a small section of these people that has from time time found the conditions beyond their tolerance and so converted to a different religion, thus acquiring new names, new relations and a new community status. As a result many scheduled caste people embraced Islam at Meenakshipuram in Tamil Nadu and millions of scheduled casets, especially Mahars in Maharashtra embraced Buddhism under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar, who are presently called Neo-Buddhists.

The religion of Lord Buddha is an excellent expression of humanism and humanitarianism. That is why it has attracted a large mass of people to tred the path as shown by the Enlightened. One who had always promoted the ideals of love, harmony and goodwill for enriching the human life without intolerance, injustice and exploitation. His philosophy is mainly concerned with the liberation of man from sufferings. The Buddhist religion is based on the ethical insight of man and at the same time is rooted in individuality oriented social system, which persist and endures on its own principles of compassion nad brotherhood.
The Buddhist philosophy as a theory of humanism has no god, no immortal soul, no creation, no last judgement like other theistic religions. The Buddha as a teacher and more especially, an exemplar of freedom. Buddhist philosophy therefore has attracted the downtrodden. This has brought the process of conversion. Conversion has been viewed as a social political breakthrough after which the scheduled castes can make a business like beginning for their career as citizens of a free and secular India.

Buddhist humanism is of higher and qualitative type which consists of genuinely humane relations. It cultivates mutual respect between human beings. Buddhism constantly reminds the people to enter a new society based on the behalf that man is not fundamentally a material being, driven by the instincts of production and reproduction. This qualitative type of humanism combines respect, love for man and concern for his physical and spiritual welfare. It is an another morphic religion. It is this quality that led Babasaheb Ambedkar to adopt it in preferred to Islam, Sikhism or Christianity. All these principles of humanism of Buddhism have made the scheduled caste people with their leader Dr. B.R. Ambedkar decided to embrace Buddhism.

The religion of Lord Buddha is a great social doctrine, which has to be understood in the context of man and society. Buddhist religion obviously putsforth a humanist social order in which the right relations between man and man play a significant role. Ambedkar was not against the existence of groups in society. Ambedkar was not against the existence of groups in
society. He was against the exclusivism of groups. For Ambedkar religion had significance only in so far as it helped to establish a moral order characterised by equality, freedom, and fraternity. Hence, he decided to embrace Buddhism, with his followers.

In 1936, he announced his resolve to abandon Hinduism. However, after his announcement, he did not immediately convert to Buddhism. He only repeated his resolve to leave Hinduism, but gave no indication of the faith to which he wished to embrace. This decision of conversion of Ambedkar was criticized by Gandhiji and Savarkar. Savarkar was critical of Buddhism. He said that the advice of Buddha was squeezed for over 2500 years and had no essence left behind.

Ambedkar was confident that conversion was the only means to redeem the untouchables. The conversion was as important to him as the Swaraj. There was possibility of the facilities to the untouchables being affected by the conversion. But Ambedkar also knew that the facilities were not of a permanent character. The real strength of the untouchables was in their social organization. He felt imperative to emphasize the social movement. Therefore, he opined that for untouchables the conversion was important for the sake of spiritual as well as material good. Moreover, Ambedkar was careful in choosing only such a religion which had its origin in India, which appears derogatory to the concept of composite Indian culture.

Ambedkar made a formal declaration of the decision to embrace Buddhism in May 1950. The decision was not sudden because he had been
reading works on Buddhism for many years. There is no doubt that Ambedkar was not thinking of conversion only for himself. He was conceiving of it as an act in which a substantial number of his followers would join him. The choice of Buddhism would mean the loss of any marginal gain that might have resulted from increasing the relative size of one of the existing minorities. At the same time, Ambedkar was equally certain that the adoption of Buddhism as their religion was likely to meet with the least opposition from the Hindu majority.

While announcing the conversion programme Ambedkar was aware of his own responsibility and the good of the untouchables. For the removal of untouchability religious conversion was extremely necessary. Ambedkar was bent upon freeing the untouchability. Ambedkar was bent upon freeing the untouchables from the iron social framework of Hinduism. But he did not want to cut relations with the Indian culture. He desired to raise their spiritual and economic status. He was to retain the facilities, which the untouchables were to gain. But he did not want them to become a nation.

Ambedkar mounted an attack on Hindu Gods and Goddesses and praised Buddhism because it was a religion based on moral principles. If Hinduism stood for inequality, Buddhism stood for equality. It was the social, moral and spiritual message of Buddhism that had attracted him.

In September, 1950 Ambedkar made the first open plea to his people to embrace Buddhism as a way out of their sufferings and declared that he would devote the rest of his life to the revival and spread of Buddhism. And ultimately embraced Buddhism on 14th October, 1956 with his millions of
followers. At the same time Ambedkar preached twenty to vows for the Neo-Buddhists, which one should follow them in his life. After that the process of conversion is on progress from day to day. The conversion ceremonies held in various place in between 1969-1972 and in 1990 more than 10 lakh Harijans embraced Buddhism in U.P.

These processes show the positive changes in social, religious economic, political and educational fields of Neo-Buddhists. Hence, the conversion processes are on increase. It is, therefore, the researcher made an attempt to study the social and religious changes among Neo-Buddhists, who were in past untouchables. Under this background let us discuss the main conclusions drawn in the study so far as Hypothesis and objectives of the research are concerned.

In this research work the conversion to Buddhism is viewed as one of the greatest social movements. There have been many reformative movements. There have been many reformative movements in the past, but they did not fully benefit the downtrodden nor were they exclusively for the weak and the oppressed. The Bhakti movement, the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj movements and even Mahatma Phule's Satya Shodhak Movement ultimately because identified on a regional basis. They lacked the national movement characteristics the entire scheduled caste population. It was a call for all sections of society to come to Buddhism which preached social equality and humanism, but it was the followers of Ambedkar who took advantage of it. Hence it is theoretically treated as a social movement.

The study reveals that a majority of the respondents are educated. It seems natural as educated individuals are more receptive to social change. They have awareness about the importance of education in modern society.
Taking the above theoretical approach, a field study was conducted in three villages of Belgaum district. Since this district is very close to the borders of Maharashtra, one notices the influence of Ambedkar and neo-Buddhism in many regions of this district. Hence the researcher chose this area to conduct the study soon after independence many scheduled caste leaders from northern Belgaum came under the influence of the charismatic leader Babasaheb Ambedkar and converted to Buddhism. Many scheduled caste families followed them now we find second and third generation Neo-Buddhism. Many have changed their names and surnames accordingly.

Though they are generally educated, a majority of the respondents still live below the poverty line. A large number of Neo-Buddhist respondents are engaged in the occupation of coolies.

Since large number of respondents are engaged in the occupation of coolies, their income is also very low. A majority of the respondents are earning below Rs. 10,000/- per annum. Therefore many of them are economically better off than their forefathers, but they are relatively poor.

The respondents still prefer to live in joint families, which provide more labours for work. Moreover, even today joint families are prevailing in villages, irrespective of the influence of modernization, urbanization and industrialization.

In the present study, a majority of the respondents belong to Holey a castes, which is more populous than any other scheduled castes in Karnataka just as Mahars in Maharashtra.
Due to modernization and urbanization the wide gap between upper castes and scheduled castes is declining. As a result the social intercourse between different castes increasing. Social relationships between all castes are improving. The concepts of purity and pollution are gradually declining. Though not all, a majority of the Neo-Buddhists are living amicably with the wider community. Their social status has improved considerably in the last two generations and the neo-Buddhist do not face discrimination.

The study also reveals that a majority of Neo-Buddhists have positive attitude towards family welfare programmes. Hence they are trying to minimise the size of the family to maintain economic stability and to provide basic amenities to the all members of the family. The small family norm has been generally accepted.

So far as the conversion process is concerned the following are the notable results of the study.

A large number of respondents, irrespective of their educational level, occupational structure and income level have given a preference to deification of Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Buddhist Philosophy. The magnetic appeal of Ambedkar is very strong and visible in each neo-Buddhist home. He is respected as the saviour of the scheduled castes and is therefore enshrined in their hearts and home.

Generally the first generation of Neo-Buddhists faced a lot of social and cultural problems, both to understand the essence of Buddhist philosophy and to adjust to a new social and religious environment. However, this is not the case with second and succeeding generations, who
have grown up in Buddhist culture. They understood the rituals of Buddhism. As a result the Buddhist philosophy is becoming more popular among the ex-untouchables.

Among the Neo-Buddhists, the head of the family is acting as the main inspiration for conversion to Buddhism of its members. Family is a basic unit of society and its influences is to be seen on almost all activities of its members. Thus in the present study the family members are seen to be influencing towards conversion the other members to Buddhism. In the study no significant relationship between education level and the inspiring agency to convert Buddhism is observed. Because irrespective of educational qualification, all the respondents are very much influenced by their family members. They were persuaded to get emancipation from the caste ridden vicious circle to secular system of Buddhism through conversion.

Although there are many doctrinal differences between traditional Buddhism and neo-Budhism every one follows the rituals and the tenets of Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism has eight noble paths, five percepts, ten primitas, three refuges and twenty two vows, which were prescribed by Dr. Ambedkar for neo-Buddhists, within the World Federation of Buddhists. The present study reveals that nearly all the neo-Buddhists, except a very few, follow the rites and rituals of Buddhism very strictly in their every sphere of life. The study shows that there is no significant relationship between education level and strict following of Buddhist culture and rituals.
Marriage is an important soul institution, it is not called Samskara in Buddhism. Marriage ceremony is conducted as per the rites and rituals of the particular religion. The neo-Buddhists, who were untouchables and who converted to Buddhism by taking twenty two vows are now following the marriage system of Buddhist rituals very strictly.

Moreover the neo-Buddhists during their conversion to Buddhism, converted with "Diksha ceremony" conducted by a Bhikku. After their conversion they no longer have faith in Hinduism. Prior to conversion neo-Buddhists being Hindus were visiting Hindu temples and worshipping gods and goddesses. While their embracing they have to take one of the vows that they shall not recognise Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara as gods and shall not worship them nor shall they visit any temples. They are to believe in only the eight fold path of Buddhism. Hence they are strict followers of Buddhist philosophy and do not worship Hindu gods or go to temples.

A majority of the neo-Buddhists do not celebrate any Hindu festivals other than Buddha Jayanti, as they are following the rites and rituals of Buddhism in their life. Every neo-Buddhist has taken an oath that he will pledge to conduct himself thereafter in accordance with Buddhist Dhamma.

Everyone is identified through a name. The name is an anchorage point of 'self' to identify a person in the community. Since everyone belongs to one of the religions his identification also is done through his religion. The neo-Buddhists also have their separate identity among Buddhists and among scheduled caste community. The respondents argued that they do not want to be called themselves "Neo-Buddhists". Further they want to be
called directly as Buddhists. They are of the opinion that if they are to be called neo-Buddhists, it creates discrimination among all Buddhists itself. Hence the neo-Buddhists have keen interest in identifying themselves only as “Buddhists”. They have adopted Buddhist names. Many have changed their names officially and have registered themselves in the new names.

The converted always try to attract other people towards their religion and to show the superiority of their new religion. Hence the present study reveals that a majority of the neo-Buddhists are making strong efforts to converts others to Buddhism. Moreover they are making efforts to convert the members of their own earlier caste people. Convincing about the benefits of neo-Buddhism to their own caste members is very easy to them than the members of other sub-castes.

Thus neo-Buddhism is a strong religious movement. It is growing stronger with missionary zeal. It is a socio-economic and ethic oriented religious movement, wherein spiritual bliss and mundane prosperity are interwoven with each other so much, it is difficult to separate one from the other.

The conversion to Buddhism marks the inner change of a person from low moral conduct to a better one. It is the social change from a low to a high status. Neo-Buddhism attempts to overcome the problems of untouchability leading to social ostracism, gross ignorance and degraded social status. Neo-Buddhism came as an antidote to this sad state of remaining the lowest forever. With the attempt to achieve social equality by the scheduled castes with wider community through conversion one finds a gradual economic prosperity taking takesplace.
The conversion to Buddhism bears tremendous impact on the scheduled castes. It has united and developed a sense of oneness. They are trying to establish a casteless society on the principles of Buddhism. They are extremely proud of Buddhism and they are attempting to lead a dignified and honorable life in the society. The neo-Buddhists have got rid of their inferiority complex by obtaining a fresh identity and a newly acquired confidence. They have completely shed superstitions. There is a new cultural and social renaissance which has transformed the youth. Only hard work, education and a rational approach would bring progress, they believe.

The conversion from one religion to another makes one to feel that something different from that the original religion has been achieved. To the downtrodden convert conversion is the only hope that society gives equal treatment, feel better and breath freely. The present study shows that the neo-Buddhists feel a sense of liberation from the bindings the castism. It gives them a sense satisfaction in their decision at a proper time. They feel that still there is new experience in future and would achieve still better statuses and positions in coming days. They are in the good mood about their future life, where the social, economic, cultural, political and religious circumstances are moving in a positive direction so far as the future life of the neo-Buddhists is concerned.

Buddhism is based on the principle of equality and fraternity, which developed as an opposite religion to Hinduism. The neo-Buddhists believe the principle that all human being are equal. Neo-Buddhists shall endeavour to establish equality. Moreover they embraced Buddhism to
achieve equality and equal status within the society. Because since time immemorial the scheduled caste people are being exploited by caste Hindus. They thought that Buddhism is an egalitarian than Hinduism. The study reveals that a majority of neo-Buddhists are enjoying high status in the society. They are not just enjoying the equal status with other Hindus, but more superior to Hindus. This is revealed by the respondents in the present study, which is somewhat doubt. They themselves may think superior to other Hindus. The free movement without any fear and hesitation made them to feel more higher status than upper castes.

Conversion has brought about changes in the life of the people. The changes have taken place in the social, educational, economic, political and religious fields. They are enjoying high social status. The higher education is more acquainted with them. Some have changed their occupations and engaged in other, which proved the economic achievement. Politically some neo-Buddhists are working as members of Gram Panchayats. Religiously speaking they have faith only in Buddha Jayanti and forgotten the old family gods and Goddesses. Hence the number of festivals is very less.

As it is known that the conversion has brought about social changes among neo-Buddhists. There social changes include the changes in the relationships with the upper caste people. Prior to conversion no such social relations were established where physical touch and even the shadow of the untouchables made the upper caste people polluted. But recently such concepts of purity and pollution are on decline. The present study reveals that the relationships between neo-Buddhists and caste Hindus are
changing as a result of conversion to Buddhism. They have established
hormoneous and good relationships with upper caste people, which shows
that the practice of untouchability and castism are declining in modern
society.

Since a good and hormoneous relationships have established between
neo-Buddhists and upper caste people the frequent visits of neo-Buddhists
to the residences of their upper castes and vice-versa are increasing. Now
they are working together, dining together, studying together and even
intercaste marriages are also increasing in modern days.

Indian society is based on caste hierarchy where the marriages are
endogamous. Almost all marriages happen within this own caste only and
not even within sub-castes. Inter caste marriages were not encouraged, but
today they are on increase. Even among sub-castes of scheduled castes also
marriages are prohibited. But when they converted to Buddhism, all the
sub-castes of scheduled castes are assimilated in Buddhism and caste
identity vanished, where the marriages among all the Neo-Buddhists,
irrespective of their original sub castes are quite common. As they converted
to Buddhism all the Neo-Buddhists, irrespective of their original sub castes
are quite common. As they converted to Buddhism all the Neo-Buddhists
considered themselves one and there is uniformity in all of their practices
and rites and rituals.

The study also revealed the correlation between the education level of
the Neo-Buddhists and marital relationships between converted sub-castes.
As the level of education increases the positive opinion regarding marriage
relations between converted sub-castes. As the level of education goes down the respondents opinion in respect of marital relationships among converted sub-castes also decreases. This also reveals that higher the level of education lower is the feeling of castism, which is proved by the study.

Conversion indicates alround change in the total life style of the people and adoption of new religious life style in their day to day life. This happens in every conversion from one religion to another. One starts to imbibe and follow the rites and rituals of new religion, which does not indicate the complete disappearance of the life styles of old religion. But in the present study the Neo-Buddhists follow the rites and rituals of Buddhism in their marriage ceremonies.

As the marriage system varies after conversion the naming ceremony and nomenclature also change as per Buddhist culture. They changed their names and surnames, which help them to identify themselves the members of Buddhism.

The policy of reservation is a device to eradicate the bad socio-economic conditions of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, mitigate the miseries of centuries and assimilate them into the mainstream of national life. The various constitutional guarantees for the SCs and STs include economic, educational and social programmes of development as well as the policy of reservation of seats in education, in legislature and of posts of public services, both under the central and state governments. Now the Neo-Buddhists also are enjoying reservation benefits, which has helped them to raise their social, political and educational status in the society. The
interdining between neo-Buddhists and upper caste people are quite common.

Thus the present study revealed that there are so many changes occurred so far as social and religious life of the Neo-Buddhists are concerned. By embracing Neo-Buddhism the downtrodden untouchables did and do reduce the sociological problems of India considerably, though it tends to lead to law and order problems, sometimes.