CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Statement of the Problem

Religious conversion is a socio-psychological remedy for the current practice of cruel subjectivity of Scheduled Castes. It is assumed that change of religion might result in a new identity and a social inclusiveness. It is a social strategy to threaten traditional values of a dominant religion and power structure. In the 1980s, there was unprecedent restlessness among the Pallars, one of the dominant Schedule Caste communities in South India. They were enlightened by the new ideas of equality and freedom that they acquired through modern education. They were also unable to accept the inherent discriminations and never wanted to be docile and subservient to higher caste Hindus. The social exclusion of the Pallar community in the context of several movements for social justice resulted in the frustration of the Pallar community. Along with this frustration and deprivation, the Pallars' passion for equality (Deliege: 1997) led them towards Islam. Many Christian Pallars also embraced Islam as Christianity had failed them in the matters of equality.

Caste and untouchability are the causes for their mass conversion. The equalitarian ideology preached by the Pallar converts who had already embraced Islam, the social freedom enjoyed by converted relatives and the failure of Dravidian politics to bring social justice to the Pallars were also important causes for this conversion. Historically,
patterns of Dalit conversion to either to indigenous religions like Buddhism, Jainism, or to exogenous religions like Christianity, Islam, Bahai vary. Religious conversion, at least to Islam and to Christianity, represented a rejection of a hierarchy that kept them down. Christianity and Islam acted as alternative avenues to raise their status. Islam and Christianity served as positive reference ups to emulate. Conversion to Islam was a significant point of departure for Pallars. They stepped out of the Hindu social system by this single act, more decisively than other modes like Sanskritisation, access to modern education and new upational roles in urban centers etc. There will be a marked Hindu Backlash when lits are converted to Islam and Christianity. Today Pallars no longer resort to mass version as a protest against caste system and untouchability. They have begun to fight their rights within the Hindu social order. The various factors like democratization of ional society, Schedule Caste emancipation and empowerment through education and ervation, the emerging new identity based Pallar politics and mobilization (Mosse: 94, Wyatt: 2010), Dalit militancy and caste conflicts along with proliferating Dalit ature suppressed the phenomenon of mass conversion of Dalits or Scheduled Castes non-Hindu religions in general and Pallars in particular (Manikumar: 2001 Zelliot: 01).

3. The Need for the Study

In spite of the great sociological significance, micro level studies focusing onigious conversion are very limited in Indian Sociology. Hence, a comprehensive study

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conversion experiences, causes, changes and the impact of a new religion on socio-cultural, economic and moral level of the converts and the difficulties faced in the new religion are warranted. The present study intends to fill this gap. Comparatively speaking, intensive studies on the Pallar converts to Islam are conspicuously absent. More unfortunately, there have been very few systematic attempts to explore the post-religious conversion experience, continuity and changes. A broad and comprehensive study is needed before any specific conclusions can be drawn with regard to the conversion to Islam by Pallars. Against this background, a study of religious conversion to Islam and its impact is not only sensitive but also acquires sociological significance hence, this study is very relevant. The scope of this research encompasses an analysis of change as well as continuity at the behavioural and the socio-cultural level. The new religious identity which has arisen with conversion, economic expansion, degree of advancement in socio-economic and cultural level, marriage and kinship patterns and other religious beliefs are analysed.

The Significance of the Research

This study is aims at understanding the causes and the consequences of the conversion to Islam by Pallars in three villages of Madurai District in Tamilnadu. The post-conversion experiences of Pallars turned Muslims have not been studied in depth the available information on this subject is, therefore, very scarce. Hence, a broad comprehensive study is needed before any specific conclusion can be drawn with regard to conversion to Islam among Pallars. So, the present study attempts to examine

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the causes and consequences of the religious conversion of Pallars to Islam. This study is sociologically significant and may prove an important contribution to current sociological literature on religious conversion.

4. Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the present research is to identify the causes for the conversion to Islam among Pallars and to analyse the impact of the conversion among them. The important objectives of the study are:

To describe the socio-economic background of the Pallar converts to Islam in the sample villages of Madurai District.

To find out the causes for the conversion among Pallar converts.

To study the effect of conversion among Pallar converts.

5. Survey Research

A survey was conducted in three villages, namely Kurayur, Kandai and naikkaraippatti of Madurai District in Tamil Nadu, which witnessed mass conversion of Pallars in the 1980s. The present study attempts to find out the causes and the socio-religious and cultural implications of conversion to Islam among the Pallar community.
Figure: 3.1 Map Showing Madurai District
Figure: 3.2 Map Showing Taluks of Madurai District
6. Field Setting

Figure: 3.3 Map Showing Location of the Study Area
The three villages, namely Kurayur, Kandai and Anaikkaraippatti are located in Tirumangalam taluk of Madurai district, Tamil Nadu. Kurayur is a multi-caste village. The total population of this village belonging to various castes is 5003 and, out of this, 138 are to Pallars and Chakkiliars. The rest of them belong to various upper castes, namely Thevars, Acharis, Chettiaris, Kuyavars and Ambalakkarars. In 1980, 350 people belonging to the Pallar community embraced Islam in Kurayur. Kurayur was the first village to witness mass conversion of Pallars to Islam in the 1980s. In this village, conversion to Islam was introduced by a former district health officer who felt discriminated against and humiliated because of his caste identity, i.e., Pallar. Subsequently, he embraced Islam under the advice of an Imam in Kilakkarai in Ramnad District who happened to be the maternal uncle of Immanuel Sekaran, a militant leader of Pallar Community in Ramnad District. After that many Pallar families converted to Islam in this village. The concept of conversion to Islam spread to Kandai due to more incidents of marital alliance between the Pallars of Kurayur and Kandai. The conversion of their marital allies in Kurayur influenced the Pallars of Kandai, who already suffered under the caste system, though they were relatively well off.

Kandai is also a multi-caste village. The total population of this village is 1084 and 776 belong to the Pallar community. The other communities are Valayars, Acharis and Chettiaris 25, 3, and 2 respectively. In 1980, 250 people belonging to the Pallar community converted to Islam.
Anaikkaraippatty is a single caste village located near Peraiyur town under the eastern Ghats in Madurai District. There are 5000 people, all belonging to the Pallar community. In 1981, 240 Pallars converted to Islam. In all these three villages, like before the conversion to Islam, both converted and non-converted Pallars maintain their traditional kinship relationships though they are divided on religious lines. Another important aspect of the conversion to Islam in the 3 villages is that Christian converts among Pallars also converted to Islam.

1. Sample

There were 840 Pallars who turned to Islam from the three villages. 200 respondents from first generation converts were selected randomly for case study i.e., 80 respondents from Kurayur, 60 respondents from Kandai and 60 respondents from Anaikkaraippatty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the village</th>
<th>Total converted Pallars</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kurayur</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandai</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaikkaraippatti</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Data Collection

The data were collected through a structured interview schedule. Informal interview was also conducted. The interview schedule contained questions related to socio-economic background of the Pallar converts and causes and consequences of their conversion. The data on these variables were collected and analysed through appropriate statistical tools such as frequency and percentage.
9. Tools of Data Analysis

After the field survey, the data collected from the respondents through the interview schedule and informal interviews were computerized using SPSS. The analysed data are presented in tables.

10. Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into five chapters.

Chapter 1: Deals with the definition of the term conversion, background and nature of lit conversions in India, types and theories of conversion.

Chapter 2: Presents review of literature. In this chapter an attempt is made to review the existing studies related to issues, causes and implications, continuity and changes after conversion. The reviewed literature is classified based on the main issues studied in order to identify the gap in the existing literature.

Chapter 3: Deals with the statement of the problem, need for the study, objectives and methodology of the study.

Chapter 4: Presents the analysis and interpretation of the data. In this chapter an attempt is made to analyse and interpret the data on different variables related to conversion and changes.

Chapter 5: Presents the summary, conclusion, major findings and suggestions.