CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

This chapter summarises the main findings related to the causes and effects of religious conversion of Pallars to Islam and their socio-economic conditions in the villages, namely Kurayur, Kandai and Anaikkaraippatti in Madurai District of Tamil Nadu. These villages have similarities in terms of social identity of the converts to Islam, i.e., all the converts hailed from PALLAR community.

The sample for this study was selected from these three villages. Two hundred respondents belonging to PALLAR converts to Islam were randomly selected from these villages to study the causes and effects of religious conversion on their lives. The respondents included in the sample were small farmers, agricultural laborers, traders, self-employed and housewives. Interview schedules containing questions related to the socio-economic conditions, years, modalities, factors and effects of conversion were prepared and administered by the researcher to collect data to assess the changes among the respondents.

It is seen from the present research that conversion to Islam among Pallars has brought about a certain visible changes in the lives of the converts. There have been some positive developments and spectacular improvements after their conversion to Islam. Their conversion has effected changes in socio-religious and cultural life.
It is due to the sensitivity of this research topic that male respondents were higher than female respondents in the villages under study. The majority of the respondents belonged to the age group of 36 – 50 years due to the fact that this age group was very much open and willing to reveal their conversion experiences, sensitivity of the conversion issue and the effects of conversion on their life. The majority of the respondents were literate. The dominant type of family among the respondents was the nuclear one. There was economic improvement after their conversion to Islam. Only a few respondents changed their occupation.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents converted to Islam in the 1980s, followed by individual conversions. Multiple causes like untouchability, conviction in religious faith particularly in Islam, parents’ influence, and marriages have led to conversion among Pallars. The decision for conversion was taken at parents’ as well as individual levels though conversion occurred along caste lines. Many Christian Pallars have also converted to Islam. The pattern of conversion of Pallars to Christianity was repeated in conversion to Islam in the 1980s.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents were happy and satisfied with their conversion to Islam. Their commitment to Islamic tenets was visible and commendable. Their conversion to Islam led to a profusion of desirable Islamic traits like reading the Quran, performing Namaz, attending Zuma (Friday prayer), fasting during Ramzan, Zakat (alms giving during Ramzan month), consciousness about ritual ablutions, cleanliness, piety, fraternity, equality etc. Their style of life, customs, and modes of life approximated
those of traditional (other) Muslims. They were very strong in their Islamic persuasion. Their conversion has definitely helped them to experiment with an alternative spirituality as opposed to Hinduism. Converts were integrated with other Muslims at social, cultural, and denominational levels. Islam naturally developed an egalitarian way of life, brotherhood etc. Islam also proved to be a religion that gave them self-respect, dignity and self dignity. This invariably led to egalitarianism in Islam. Due to the influence of Islamic teachings, the visiting of dargah - the tombs of mystic Islamic saints (Sufis) - was not popular among the respondents. Conversion to Islam introduced Arabic - the language of the Quran - to the respondents and they defined themselves as Muslims. Conversion in some way made these Pallar converts to Islam de facto Muslims rather than de jure Muslims.

The converts felt satisfied that their right to equality of treatment had been indicated after conversion to Islam. Conversion raised them from the objective condition (false consciousness) to the subjective realization and gave them a new subjective identity, i.e., Muslims. Conversion fulfilled their aspirations. There was true status enhancement after their conversion to Islam. They have found inclusive receptiveness among the traditional (other) Muslims. There was an absence of differences among the respondents and other Muslims. Most respondents were treated fairly as Muslims by the traditional (other) Muslims. The majority of the respondents have good social intercourse with the traditional (other) Muslims. Most respondents were treated as Muslims within their own generation by caste Hindus. There was marked improvement in their
relationship with caste Hindus after conversion to Islam. Conversion effected a structural change since it has altered their relationship with caste Hindus. Their conversion modified the stigma of resting on their caste and untouchability. Caste based discrimination declined greatly. Due to conversion to Islam, impolite addressing [inferior tallings] by upper caste Hindus has changed. With regard to the practice of untouchability and caste based discrimination, the converts achieved satisfaction. A psychological freedom from the sense of being polluted was a major achievement of every conversion. After conversion, they have got rid of their age old inferiority complex. The rationale for conversion was psychological. Conversion to Islam raised converts distinctly in the social scale and the converts were treated with due respect by caste Hindus.

Non-converted Hindu Pallars treated the Pallars converted to Islam with dual social identities: (1) as their relatives with old social identity and status [Pallars] and (2) as Muslims. But majority of the respondents considered their current social identity and status as Muslims. The relationship between the converted and non-converted Hindu Pallars was cordial and normal though some felt social exclusion between them. Socially the converts have an edge over Hindu Pallars in social status climbing. Occupational mobility was found among the converts and some of them went abroad after conversion. Many marriages took place between the converts and traditional (other) Muslim families after conversion to Islam. Majority of the respondents reported that converted women were fairly treated in Islam. Some members in the families of the respondents still
remained in their old religion [Hindus]. After conversion to Islam, the respondents adopted the habit of beef eating which was unusual among non-converted Pallars.

Conversion to Islam touched the core of the caste system since the converts were called as Labbai Muslims and de-scheduled from the lists of Scheduled Castes (Pallars are included in the lists of Scheduled Castes) and thereby being liberated from the caste syndrome. The change of social identity from Pallar to Labbai Muslim, in a sense, was a great achievement for the converts who embraced Islam to shed the odium of stigma being called Pallans in those days. This study proved the influence of reference group behavior as traditional (other) Muslims and already converted relatives introduced Islam to the majority of the respondents. Pallars conversion to Islam also provided an alternative to Sanskritisation. Truly, Pallars’ conversion to Islam became meaningful and proved to be a pivotal source of social change and to be ‘open sesame’ for converts. Since overwhelming majority of the converts have fulfilled their aspirations after their conversion to Islam, their conversion to Islam amounts to modest success.

MAJOR FINDINGS

I. Socio-Economic Conditions

Out of 200 respondents, 80 % are males and 20 % are females. The study indicates that the male population is higher than the female population in the villages under study. It is also seen that males are higher than females among converts.
Out of 200 respondents, 45% belong to the age group of 36-50 years; 26% belong to the age group of 21-35 years; 23% belong to the age group of 51-65, and 6% belong to the age group of 66 and above years. The present study shows that majority of the converts (45% and 23%) belong to < 50 years age group. This age group is very important in determining the process of conversion as they aspire to escape from social discrimination, untouchability and increased violence. Moreover, they are oriented towards social equality and justice.

Out of 200 respondents, 89.5% of the respondents were married and 10.5% of the respondents were unmarried. The lower percentage of unmarried among the respondents could be attributed to the generally accepted fact that Muslims in India marry at an early age.

Out of 200 respondents, 26% have studied upto primary level; 25.5% upto middle school; 22% upto higher secondary/PUC; 16% upto high school, and 4% upto collegiate level. Only 6.5% of the respondents were illiterate. Thus, the study shows that the literacy level among the converts is not as low as believed that the literacy rate among Muslims in India is very low.

With regard to the type of family, 94% of the respondents belong to nuclear family and 6% belong to joint family. The findings reveal that the pre-dominant type of family among the respondents was the nuclear one.
The family size of 67.5% of the respondents was between four members and six members. 26.5% of the respondents' family size was less than three members. Six percentage of the respondents' family size was above seven members. The findings show that the family size in the villages selected for the present study is almost bigger.

The occupation of the respondents reveals that nearly half of the respondents were engaged in agriculture. Out of 200 respondents, 30% were farmers; 20% were housewives; and 18% were agricultural labourers. Thirteen percentages were self-employed and engaged in business and trade. Seven percentages of the respondents became Imams (priests). Six percentages were industrial labourers; and government services and private employment share 4% and 2% respectively.

It is found that the income of 43.5% of the respondents was between Rs.1001 and 5000; 25.5% have Rs.1000 and less, 21% had Rs.5001-8000, 6% had Rs.8001-10,000 and 4% had Rs.10,001 and above. It is clearly evident from the data that, out of the total sample, the lower income group earning up to Rs.5000 formed the majority among the respondents.

With regard to the distribution of land holdings among the respondents, 38.5% of the respondents were landless; 31% owned lands < 2 acres. Among the respondents, 18.5% owned 3-4 acres. Six percentages owned 5-6 acres; 4% owned 7-9 acres and 2% of the respondents owned above 9 acres. The land ownership patterns among the converts reveals that they are economically independent to a great extent and thus it can be
concluded that the landownership might have influenced the conversion among Pallars to seek high social status.

Forty two percentages of the respondents lived in lime baked houses; 33 % lived in tiled/asbestos/tin roofed houses; 12 % lived in huts; 11% lived in concrete houses and two per cent lived in mosaic houses. The findings clearly show that the converts live either in lime baked houses or in tiled/asbestos/tin roofed houses.

I. Years, Modalities and Factors Involved in Conversion

Out of 200 respondents, 87.5 % converted to Islam in 1980; 3.5 % in 1983; 3.5 % in 1990; 2 % in 1999; 1% in 1985; 1% in 1988; 0.5 % in 1981; 0.5 % in 1993, and 0.5 % in 2000. It is seen from the data that a large scale conversion among the Pallars took place from 1980-1990 mainly because of the violence against Pallars in the whole of southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

Forty four percentages of the respondents converted to Islam due to untouchability practices, discrimination and violence; 29 % converted due to religious belief in Islam; 24 % converted due to their parents’ influence and only 3 % for marriage purposes. Hence, the findings reveal that mainly social causes are involved in the conversion among the Pallars in the villages selected for the present research.

Out of 200 respondents, 51.5 % reported that the decision regarding conversion was taken by their parents because they were all children at the time of conversion. 27.5
he respondents stated that they decided on their own to follow Islam. Twenty one
stages reported that the decision for conversion was taken by both parents and
en. But no respondent stated that the caste panchayat played a role in making the
on for conversion though conversions occurred along caste lines. The findings
on the data reveal that, though conversion of the respondents occurred along caste
either the caste panchayat nor the political associations have any significant role in
cision making process for conversion to Islam.

It is found that out of 200 respondents, 70 % of the respondents are introduced to
by the neighbouring Muslims, and 19.5 % of the respondents are introduced to
by their converted relatives. Only 10.5 % of the respondents are introduced to
through Islamic literature and preachers.

Regarding the conversion of Pallar Christians to Islam, only 19 % of the
ents are converts from a Christian background. Thus, the findings show that
rs who had already converted to Christianity embraced Islam due to the factors of
 caste discrimination and pastoral neglects in the selected villages for the present
rch.

**Effects of Conversion to Islam**

Out of 200 respondents, 76 % were extremely happy about their conversion.
ten percentages were happy. Six percentages were a little happy and 3 % of the
ents were confused about their conversion. But no respondent was worried about
their conversion to Islam. The present study shows that the converts are happy about their decision to change religious identity and to become Muslims.

With regard to the habits of reading the Quran, 88.5% of the respondents have the habit of reading the Quran; only 11.5% do not have the habit of reading the Quran due to illiteracy and age factors. This shows the respondents' religious integration and involvement in new religion.

Out of 200 respondents, 58.5% preferred to perform Namaz (prayer) in mosque, 17% in the home, 12.5% in both mosque and place of business, trade and agricultural land, 6% in the place of business, trade and agricultural land and 6% either in mosque or at home. The findings reveal that respondents perform Namaz, and thereby they are integrated with the Ulema, the Islamic community of the world.

Out of 200 respondents, 73.5% observed fasting for 30 days during the Ramzan fast and 26.5% observed Ramzan fast only for 13 days. It is evident from the study that converts are committed to adopt and profess the ritual practices of their new religion i.e., Islam.

Regarding pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca, 98% of the respondents have not visited Mecca whereas only two per cent have visited it. It is found that poor economic standing, new entry into Islam and time factors are not conducive for the converts to take up pilgrimage to Mecca.
Out of 200 respondents, 91.5% answered in negative when they are asked about their visit to nearby pilgrimage centres; only 8.5% of the respondents went to nearby pilgrimage centres like Sikandar Hill in Madurai, Nagoore Dargah in Nagapattinam, Erwadi Dargah in Ramnad, Kovalam Dargah near Chennai etc. The findings reveal that, due to the influence of Islamic teachings, visiting dargah - the tombs of mystic Islamic saints (Sufis) - was not popular among the respondents.

Out of 200 respondents, 47.5% reported that they performed circumcision to their sons at the age between three and seven years. Among the respondents, 26.5% of the respondents said that they do circumcision before seven years. Twenty six percentages reported that they perform circumcision at the age between one and three years. Circumcision is a religious practice among Muslims. The findings show the practice of circumcision among the converts.

Out of 200 respondents, 54.5 are not familiar with Arabic and Urdu. Among the respondents, 31.5% could only speak Arabic and the remaining 14% of the respondents were able to speak, read and write Arabic. But none of the respondent was familiar with Urdu (reading, speaking and writing). The findings show that conversion to Islam introduced Arabic, the language of the Quran, to the respondents.

Out of 200 respondents, 91.5% stated that they do not have any difficulty in understanding and observing the tenets of Islam. Only 8.5% of the respondents felt difficulties in understanding and observing the teachings and tenets of Islam.
Eighty one percentages of the respondents reported that neighbouring traditional Muslims encouraged and supported them on the day of conversion; 19 % of the respondents replied that they welcomed them warmly on the day of conversion. None of the respondents reported any resistance or disliking from the neighbouring traditional Muslims. The study reveals the inclusive attitude and receptiveness among the neighbouring traditional Muslims.

Out of 200 respondents, 96.5 % commented that they have a feeling of fulfillment of their aspirations after conversion and only 3.5 % of the respondents answered negatively about the fulfillment of their aspirations. The study shows that the conversion to Islam among Pallars have fulfilled their aspirations, social equality, high social esteem and better social identity.

Ninety seven percentages of the respondents opined that conversion to Islam have truly improved their present social status as Muslims; 3 % of the respondents are negative as far as their present status as Muslims is concerned. It is evident from the study that there is an improvement/change in the status of the converts after conversion to Islam.

Ninety nine percentages of the respondents denied the existence of social discrimination by the neighbouring traditional Muslims and only 1% of the respondents reported the existence of social discrimination and differences between them and neighbouring traditional Muslims. The study reveals the existence of social equality, brotherhood and fraternity between the converted Muslims and the traditional Muslims.
The present study indicates change in attitude of the high caste Hindus towards the converts. Among the respondents, 88% felt that high caste Hindus treat them as Muslims after their conversion to Islam, 9% are treated with dual identities as untouchables and Muslims and only 3% of the respondents stated that they are treated as lower caste. Hence, it is found that most of the respondents are treated as Muslims by caste Hindus.

Ninety seven percentages of the respondents reported that there is a marked change in their relationship with caste Hindus after conversion to Islam and only 3% of the respondents said that there is no marked improvement in their relationship with caste Hindus. Hence, the study reveals improvement/change in the respondents’ relationship with caste Hindus.

Out of 200 respondents, 49% revealed that their relatives (non-converted) treat them as Muslims and Pallars; 47% of the respondents reported that they are treated only as Muslims and 4% of the respondents stated that they are still treated as Pallars i.e., with old caste identity. Hence, it is found that non-converted Pallars treat the respondents (converted Muslims) with dual identity as Pallars and Muslims.

Seventy one percentages of the respondents perceived their social status as Muslims is far better than that of non-converted Hindu Pallars, 26% of the respondents perceived that their status is more or less equal to that of Hindu Pallars and only 3% of the respondents felt that their status is no way better than the non-converted Pallars.
Hence, it is concluded respondents (converted) have high social esteem with their new social identity and status as Muslims.

Seventy three percentages of the respondents have cordial relationship with the traditional (other) Muslims, 24 % of the respondents had good relationship and only 3 % of the respondents said that they have neither good nor bad relationship with them. But no respondent complained that they have bitter or strained relationship with the traditional (other) Muslims. It is revealed that the respondents have good social relationship with other Muslim population.

Eighty four percentages of the respondents have a very good relationship with non-converted Hindu Pallars, 11% have a good relationship and only 5 % of the respondents have neither a good nor a bad relationship with them. But no respondent reported that they have a bitter or a strained relationship with Hindu Pallar relatives. The findings reveal that most of the respondents have good relationship.

Eighty seven percentages of the respondents reported that they follow the same occupation even after their conversion to Islam and only 13 % of the respondents have changed their occupation. The above findings reveal that occupation of the respondents have changed after conversion to Islam.

Ninety three percentages of the respondents revealed that their family members are not employed in Gulf countries and only 7 % of the respondents answered
affirmatively. Therefore, the study shows that only a small number of the converts from the families of the respondents have gone for employment in Gulf countries.

Seventy six percentages of the respondents said that their families have marital alliance with the traditional (other) Muslims while 24 % of the respondents reported that their family did not have any such marital alliance with the traditional (other) Muslims. Hence, the findings show that marital alliances with the traditional (other) Muslims by the families of the respondents occurred after their conversion to Islam.

Seventy six percentages of the respondents have practiced distant marital alliance with the traditional (other) Muslims while 24 % of the respondents have cross-cousin marriages-the dominant marriage practice in south India. It is inferred from the findings that majority of the respondents established distant alliance with the traditional (other) Muslims.

Out of 200 respondents, 39.5 % have reported that Islam gave more equal treatment to Muslim women; 36% felt opined that Islam treated Muslim women equally; 18.5 % stated that Islam treated Muslim women somewhat equally and only 6 % of the respondents commented that Islam treated Muslim women unequally. It is found that majority of the respondents reported that converted women were fairly treated in Islam.

Seventy four percentages of the respondents reported that all the members of their families profess Islam, while 26 % of the respondents informed that some of their family
members still remain followers of Hinduism. The findings show that some family
members of the respondents still remain Hindus.

Out of 200 respondents, 36.5% adopted the habit of beef eating, while 63.5 per-
cent remained non-beef eaters even after their conversion to Islam. The finding reveals
that a fraction of the respondents adopted the habit of beef eating.

IV. Field Observations

It is found that all the respondents have changed their old Hindu names after
conversion to Islam. It is also found that all the converts have taken Arabic names
signifying the characters of the Quran or the pioneers in Islam. The change of names is
the hallmark of any process of religious conversion.

Further, the respondents often pronounce Kalema or shahadah, the declaration of
islamic faith. Kalema is one of the five pillars or principles of Islam. Every Muslim has
to utter Kalema to prove that he/she professes Islam. All the respondents also know the
meaning of it. A person is considered converted to Islam from the moment he or she
sincerely makes this Kalema or Shahadah.

All the respondents when they meet other Muslims, they salute them with Salaam
Aleikkum, Aleikkum Salaam meaning ‘peace be with you’. Addressing other Muslims
with these salutations signifies fraternity and equality among Muslims.
Majority of the respondents attend the Zuma, the Friday prayer. Zuma prayer is very significant among the converts and they attend this mass though their daily routine occupations are affected.

The informal interaction among the converts by the researcher revealed that the respondents do not believe in the ideologies of karma and dharma, fatalism, rebirth, astrology, omen, evil eye, sorcery, auspicious and inauspicious times, idol worship, polytheism etc which are the inevitable ingredients in their previous faith. The passion for a new egalitarian religion and their subsequent training in religious teachings have enhanced the converts spiritually and also converted them from being followers of polytheism to being believers in monotheism, the believer of one god - Allah. The converts also strongly believe in the concepts of heaven and hell, angels and demons, death and resurrection, sins and forgiveness and also Qayamat (Judgement day), important tenets in the Islamic faith. Islam has also instilled the ideas of equality and fraternity among the respondents since many of them reported that they would even marry the converted women from the lower castes like Paraiyars and Chakkiliars with whom Pallars normally do not have any social relationship and used to segregate themselves from them. But these findings show that conversion to Islam has altered exclusive attitude of the converts towards Paraiyars and Chakkiliars. A respondent in Anaikkaraippatti village married a Paraiyar converted Muslim woman from the neighbouring village.
Further, respondents informed that they follow the Hijri (Islamic) calendar only for the purpose of Ramzan fasts and other Islamic festivals. For all other purposes, they follow the English Gregorian as well as Tamil calendars. All the male converts wear skull cap, grow beards and keep their dhotis (lungis) down. Women veil their head with sarees, normally black sarees to mark their new status. Younger women and adolescent girls wear Burkha or headscarf.

It is found that there are qualitative changes among the respondents towards smoking, drinking, cleanliness, dressing pattern, etiquette, morality, ethics, brotherhood etc. Converted Muslims totally gave up drinking and smoking. They eat the food with Hindu relatives at functions in case the meat is made of halal -sacrificed in the name of Allah or prophet. They celebrate all the Muslim festivals with joy and happiness.

It is also found that nearly one third of the total converts from the villages selected for the study reconverted to Hindu faith soon after their conversion to Islam. The reconversion took place because of the following reasons: frightening by their family deities in dreams and fear of losing government welfare measures like free education, reservation in government jobs, and other welfare schemes available for non-converted Pallars. It was also found that only those who converted for monetary or material gains reverted from Islam to their old faith as they did not receive them.

All the respondents sent their children to the Madarasa, a religious school attached with mosques where children are taught Islam to enrich them with the knowledge of Islamic values, the Koran, prayers, ritual ablutions, customs and ethics.
The children attend the *Madrasa* everyday in the evening after their regular schooling is over.

The converts in villages selected for the study have a *Jamaat*, an Islamic community association with office bearers. All the Muslims are members of the *Jamaat*, which governs the social relationship and settles the disputes among the converts. Leadership of the *Jamaat* is mostly taken over by the oldest person.

Women respondents opined that Islam treats women equally and protects from sexual exploitation which existed before conversion. But they also complained that after conversion they have lost their freedom of movement which they enjoyed and were not allowed to do *Namaz* equally with men in the mosque. Islam prescribes *mehr*, a bride price for Muslim women ensuring economic security when they get married. The converts from the villages reported that they practice mehr only as a social custom with a token amount of upto Rs.1000. But in reality, there is a rampant practice of dowry system among Muslims which is against Islamic principles. The custom of dowry among the Muslims is due to the influence of the culture of the Indian society. Though Islam allows able persons to marry upto four wives, only one respondent from the studied villages was polygamous. It was also found by the researcher that there are some converts use old caste identity to claim concessions from the government. Jayaram [1992] calls this double stint as Bridge actions.

196
The converted Pallars are no longer called as Pallar Muslims after conversion since Islam does not allow the practice and the continuation of previous caste identity and now they are called as Labbai Muslims. Since their caste name has changed from Pallars to Labbai Muslims, they were included in Backward Classes category for official purposes. The change of caste identity from Pallar to Labbai Muslim has not only erased the social stigma attached with their caste identity [Pallar] but also gave them a sense of better social status and identity.

SUGGESTION FOR RESEARCH AND POLICY

The following suggestions are made based on the findings of the present study.

1. Caste system and untouchability are the most important factors for religious conversions among Pallars. So, more structural changes in the caste system are needed to ensure social equality apart from providing reservation in employment, education, politics, welfare schemes etc.

2. Pallars Converted to Christianity had embraced Islam because they were subjected to various forms of social exclusion and discrimination within the church by other Christians. Hence, there is a need to abolish the social exclusion and discrimination of lower caste converts in churches.

3. The findings suggest that religious conversion served as one of the alternative avenues for status enhancement and instrument for social change among lower castes. As Pallars
conversion to Islam touched the core of the caste system by altering caste stigma as well as social identity, it has served as an alternative to Sanskritisation. Hence, religious conversion of lower castes to non-Hindu religions must be recognized as Alternative Avenue for social mobility in Indian society.

4. Since religious conversion of Pallars to Islam created no friction with either Hindu Pallars or caste Hindus, conversion of lower castes should not be treated as a source of contention to disturb communal harmony in society.

5. This research suggests a need for separate study to focus on the plights of the converted women since women respondents complained that they lost freedom of movement after conversion to Islam.