# RELIGIOUS CONVERSION MOVEMENTS IN SOUTHERN DISTRICTS OF TAMIL NADU : KANYAKUMARI AND TIRUNELVELI

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of the Degree of
**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

## M. RAMA KRISHNAN

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067
**1983**

# JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
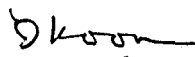
## CERTIFICATE

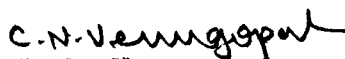This dissertation entitled "Religious Conversion
Movements in Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu:
Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli" submitted by Shri M.
Ramakrishnan for the Master of Philosophy has not been
previously submitted for any other Degree of this or
any other University. We recommend that this
dissertation to be placed before the examiners for
their consideration for the award of M.Phil. degree.


Dr. C.N. Venugopal
Adviser

Dr. T.K. Oommen
Chairman

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Jawaharlal Nehru University,
NEW DELHI.
January 3, 1984.

(M. RAMAKRISHNAN)

# CONTENTS

*

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION: SOME THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

A Social movement is an organised effort on the part
of a section of society to bring about a change in any or
all aspects. Movements in India can be identified mainly
at two levels - structural and cultural. At the structural
level, there are political and economic movements. The
types of movements at the cultural level are religious and
secular. Within the religious movements, there are several
types of movements such as revivalistic, protest-oriented
and reformist.

In this respect mass conversions can also be viewed
as a movement against social oppression and social inequality.
In many places mass conversions have been responsible for
the rapid cultural transformation. Cases have also occur-
red in several places wherein mass conversions have brought
a severe disorganisation of society. As a consequence,
often cultural disintegration and communal disharmony have
taken place in society.

In India all social relations are inevitably suffused
with religious ideas and acts. Hence social movements are
often couched in religious terms, and personal frustration
and social dissatisfaction are frequently expressed through
religious strivings. In India the rise and spread of

Buddhism, Christianity and Islam have provided avenues for vertical social mobility of the lower castes in Hindu society. In this process of mobility, religious conversions have played a notable part. Religious conversions in India are mostly mass conversions because group is more important than the individual. Hence these two terms may be regarded as interchangeable. Individual conversions are far and few in the Indian context.

Religion is linked with other elements in society in a complex way. The sociology of religion is a study of the significant, and often subtle, relationships which prevail between religion and social structure, and between religion and social processes.[1]

So far sociologists have undertaken three main types of religious study.[2]

1. They have studied religion as a central theoretical problem in the understanding of social action;

2. They have studied the relation between religion and other areas of social life, such as economics, politics and social class;

3. They have studied religious roles, organisation and

---

1. Thomas F. O'Dea, The Sociology of Religion, Prentice Hall of India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1969, p.117.

2. International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, vol.13-14, p.406.

movements.

Durkheim[3] has shown causal relationship between social structure and religious beliefs and practices. According to him ideas or formal beliefs are reflections or symbolic indications of other phenomena. According to him, the main role of religion is to celebrate and sustain the norms upon which the integration of society depends. Emphasising the social character of religion, Durkheim has pointed out that the objective of religion is to give concrete expression to the beliefs of the group. For him religion strengthens the unity of the group; it promotes social solidarity.

Max Weber[4] made a comparative study of the relationship between religion and society. Weber's primary interest was in religion as a source of the dynamics of social change and not as a source of stability of societies; his study was oriented to the social causes, influences, social effects and interaction of religion upon group life. He established a causal relationship between spiritualism and materialism.[5] Weber argued that the protestant ethic is antecedent to modern capitalism and that it was an important

---

3. Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (translated by Joseph W. Swain), London, 1915.

4. Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion (translated by Epharaim Fischoff), Boston, Toronto, 1963.

5. Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (translated by Talcott Parsons), London, 1930.

factor in its development. More precisely his thesis says
that the accumulation of wealth on the one hand and restric-
tion on consumption on the other hand led to the rise of
modern capitalism in the West. Weber analysed the role
of religion as an independent variable influencing action
throughout history.

The work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann[6] is also
an important development in the sociology of religion.
They see the study of religion as part of the more funda-
mental enterprise of the sociology of knowledge. Peter
Berger and Luckmann focus their analysis on the relationship
between human religion and human world-building. Religion
helps to build, maintain and legitimize universe of meaning.
Berger and Luckmann write, "Throughout human history religion
has played a decisive part in the construction and maintenance
of universes".[7]

O'Dea says that in established societies, "Religion is
one of the important institutional structures making up the
total social system". In terms of functional approach to
religion O'Dea defines religion as "The manipulation of
non-empirical or supraempirical means for non-empirical or

---

6. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, "Sociology of Religion
and Sociology of Knowledge", in Robertson (Ed.), Socio-
logy of Religion, Penguin Book, Harmondsworth.

7. Ibid., p.68.

supre-empirical ends. According to O'Dea religion is
intricately related to social structure and to the processes
of social change. This relationship may have a positive
or a negative functional significance.[8] He expressed that
Religion is both affected by, and affects, social conditions.

According to Radcliffe-Brown, any religion is an
important or even essential part of the complex system by
which human beings are enabled to live together in an
orderly arrangement of social relations. Religion involves
practice as well as belief. Anthropologist Edwards Burnett
Tylor and Herbert Spencer set out a conception of the
relations between religious belief and practice that gave
clear primacy to the first.

Religion is a set of symbolic forms and acts which
relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence. A
religion is never simply a set of beliefs; it always also
involves prescribed ritual practices and a definite insti-
tutional form.

For Durkheim[9] religion is a system of representations,
mythical in character, which primarily functions to ensure
the cohesion and reproduction of social formulation. So in

---

8. For a fuller understanding of functional and dysfunc-
tional aspects of religion, see Thomas F. O'Dea,
op. cit., pp.14-25.

9. E. Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious
Life, op. cit., p.53.

Durkheim's view religion is a product and an expression of social life. He is of the opinion that religious representations are collective realities.

Simmel views one of the sources of religion is human relations which themselves are non-religious. "I do not believe that the religious feelings and impulses manifest themselves is religion only....."[10] Thus in Simmel's view, religion is an outgrowth of human relations.

Marx saw religions are nothing but illusory.[11] He further says that these illusions can be eliminated by improving economic conditions from which these illusions arise. Thus for Marx, the underlying conditions responsible for religious beliefs are ultimately economic.

"Proselytisation" and "conversion" are two terms commonly used in India for the processes whereby people change their religious faith. In fact there is a difference between these two terms. Proselytisation is generally understood as persuading the people of one religion to change their religious affiliation to another, by economic,

---

10. George Simmel, "Sociological Approach to Religion", American Journal of Sociology, November, 1905, p.360.

11. For a Marxist theory on Religion, see C.M.P. Oniango, U.A. "Theory of Religion, Ideology and Utopian in Marx", Philosophy and Social Action, vol.VIII, No.4, 1982, pp.9-15.

social or political inducements and not because of spiritual
illumination. For, proselytism is a change from one group
to another without any necessary change in character and
life. It is a change of label but not of life. Conversion
on the other hand, is a change in character in life followed
by an outer change of allegiance corresponding to inner
change.[12]

A psychologist has defined conversion as "the birth
of a new dominant affection by which the God-consciousness,
hitherto marginal and vague becomes focal and dynamic".[13]
W.H. Clark[14] defines religious conversion as that type of
spiritual growth or development which involves an appre-
ciable change of direction concerning religious ideas and
behaviours. Most clearly and typically, it denotes an
emotional episode of illuminating suddenness, which may be
deep or superficial, though it may also come about by the
more gradual process. Clark identifies three basic stages
in this type of experience.

(a) A period of unrest, conflict and mental struggle,
including a sense of unworthiness, and for some, 'a convic-

---

12. E. Stanley Jones, Conversion, Me MLIC, Hodden se Stou-
    ghton Ltd., Great Britain, 1960, p.5.

13. Ibid., p.10.

14. W.H. Clark, The Psychology of Religion: An Introduction
    to Religious Experience and Behaviour, Me Millan,
    New York, 1958, p.191.

tion of sin';

(b) The climax, involving surrender and relaxation; and

(c) A sense of peace, release and inner harmony in which the convert feels at one with god, his sins forgiven, his problems solved and his miseries fled away.

Conversion in the spiritual psychological sense means the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.

T.M.P. Mahadevan says that "real conversion is vertical, i.e. from the lower to higher conception of God, and not horizontal, i.e. from one formal faith to another".[15] and he holds that the spiritual growth is from the crude forms of worship to the highest contemplation of God. In the existing Western literature, conversion is generally defined as spiritual re-generation, as the re-orientation of the soul, or psychic transformation. But in India much of the incidence of conversion has been group based as well as motivated by socio-economic considerations. In the case of Mass conversions, religion is used as a device, perhaps a force to counter other forces.

---

15. Quoted from Brojendra Nath Banerjee, Religious Conversions in India, Harnam Publications, New Delhi, 1982, p.17.

Mass movements are decisions by groups to change their faith in favour of a new religion and assure 'the consequent preservation of the convert's social integration'.[16] Pickett who studied Christian Mass movement says "Whenever a group, larger than the family accustomed to exercise a measure of control over the social and religious life of the individual that compare it, accepts the Christian religion (or a large proportion accepts it with the encouragement of the group), the essential principle of the mass movement is manifest.[17]

There are some qualitative differences between individual's change of faith and mass conversion.[18] The following chart shows the differences, in an ideal-typical sense.

| | Individual Conversion | | Mass Conversion |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Conversion is personal action done with the power of God. | 1. | Mass movement is a collective action induced by some outside force. |
| 2. | Arises out of religious conviction. | 2. | Arises out of non-religious motives. |
| 3. | It is a gradual process | 3. | Mass movement erupts all on a sudden. |

---

16. Quoted from George Mathew, "Politicisation of Religion Conversions to Islam in Tamil Nadu", Economic and Political Weekly, June 19, 1982, p.1028.

17. J. Waskom Pickett, Christian Mass movements in India, The Abingdon Press, New York, 1933, p.22.

18. Sante De Sanctis, Religious Conversion: A Bio-Psychological Study, translated by Helen Augur, London, Kegan Paul, 1927, p.25.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4. | Here convert attains some spiritual satis-faction. | 4. | Converts attain some social satisfaction. |
| 5. | Reconversion does not take place. | 5. | Reconversion of the converts is possible. |

Recently scholars of different discipline have focused attention on the phenomena of mass conversion. Theories, so to speak, of different kinds were advanced to account for this phenomenon. Some were descriptive and investigative (as to what actually happened in a given setting) in their approach. Some were diagnostic and prognostic (as to what has caused and what could be done to check this, and so on).

Studies on recent mass conversions clearly point out that conversion phenomenon could be studied more effectively with in a general conceptual framework of social movement (Fernandes, 1981; Beatrice Miller, 1969; Hardgrave, 1969). This framework has been fruitfully employed by Fernandes in his study on South and North-West Indian cases of mass religious conversions to Christianity.[19] The principal premise, upon which he has constructed his conceptual model, is that mass conversions are collective attempts to elevate the group position in the hierarchically stratified system of a given society. As a general model of social mobility

---

19. See Walter Fernandes, Caste and Conversion Movements in India, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1981.

Fernandes framework partially accounts for the conversion phenomenon in Meenakshipuram.

Beatrice Diamond Miller analysed the conversions of Mahars in Maharashtra.[20] She argues the Mass conversion as a revitalization movement. In her study she has shown that the Buddhist conversion movement in India as an example of a true revitalization movement. In short, she views, revitalization movements may well represent the rapid acceptance of a multiple innovations. According to her a successful revitalization Movement passes through six phases. At the final stage the revitalization movement becomes itself the new 'sleady state'. The focus of the movement now is to protect the new status quo. At this point there is no longer a 'revitalization movement', but presumably a 'revitalized socio-cultural system'. She observes, in the case of Buddhist movement, this last phase is far from realization.

Miller has also analysed briefly some of the important events that preceded Conversion of Mahars. She has referred to the events related to the activities of Ambedkar. According to her events shape the direction of a movement.

20. Beatrice Diamond Miller, "Revitalization Movements: Theory and Practice, as evidenced among the Buddhists of Maharashtra" in M.C. Pradan (ed.), Anthropology and Archaeology, Oxford University Press, 1969, pp.108-25.

S.L. Sharma[21] made a systematic study on conversion
movement. According to him, conversion has three processes,
namely, spiritual action, temporal action and protest action.
Sharma points out that in India conversions are not born
out of spiritual longing. He says that it connotes mere
change of community affiliation rather than spiritual orien-
tation. For him the present spate of Harijans' conversion
to Islam in Meenakshipuram is protest-oriented. His view
is that some element of protest has always been a part of
conversions in the past, but never before has the protest
orientation has so articulate and pronounced as this time.
Analysing the conversions in Meenakshipuram, he presents
a structural explanation to the phenomena of Mass conversion.

Sharma has analysed conversions in the light of the
background and motives of the convertees. He has also
looked at it from the point of the goals and aspirations
of the converters. Turning to the role of the converter
he says that no event of conversion, particularly mass
conversion, can ever materialise without the active role
of the converter religious group.

S.L. Sharma classified all the explanation of the
present case of conversions into two theoretical perspectives.[22]

---

21. S.L. Sharma, Conversions, Seminar, Nos. 257-268,
    January 1981.

22. Ibid., p.32.

They are (1) Functionalist (2) Marxist. The functionalist explanation tends to stress the importance of systemic deficiencies in the background of converters, while the Marxist perspective is supposed to highlight the role of exogenous factors, thus bringing to attention the role of converter.

George Mathew has devoted his attention on the study of conversions to some extent.[23] He brilliantly analysed the concepts of conversions and has given a working definition of the concept. He terms conversion as "a process whereby people move out of one religious community into another with or without a spiritual transformation and the perceived advantage of adopting a new religion". He has also looked analytically of mass conversions in Tamil Nadu from different angles. He observes that conversions had taken place as part of the proliferation of an ideology which questioned the status quo. He again says that the lower castes in the caste hierarchy have used religion through the act of conversion against the upper castes (who have used religion to maintain status quo) to change their social position.

---

23. George Mathew, "Politicisation of Religion: Conversions to Islam in Tamil Nadu", Economic & Political Weekly, June, 1982.

## Background of Indian Conversion Movement

No region of India has been left untouched by mass
movement. Conversions from Hinduism to non-Hindu religions
have been a regular feature in Indian society. In India
mass movements at first started on the coastal areas of
South and later spread into other areas. In many cases
converts came in caste groups. It is an open truth that
people from the depressed castes have been attracted to
the new faiths more than the upper castes.

In the history of Indian mass movements, the operational
conversions added to the strength and the number of mass
movements. In the earlier times, the pro-conversion policy
of the various colonial rulers has led to the mass conversions
to Islam and Christianity. For example, the rigid imposi-
tion of 'Jisya' by the Mughal rulers on their subjects made
many Hindus enter the fold of Islam. The liberal treatment
of Christians by the Portuguese Government in Goa resulted
in mass conversion to Christianity.

Pickett's[24] study shows that the mass movements in
India occurred among people who felt themselves oppressed
and exploited. He accepts that mass movements in India are
based on non-religious reasons. It is also true that many
mass movements had their birth during the time of famine

---

24. J. Washom Pickett, Christian Mass Movements in India,
The Abingdon Press, New York, 1933, p.63.

and droughts. This is because during such exigencies the material incentives were offered to people to change their faith.

Oddie[25] finds that mass movement began among the more economically independent and only later spread to the weaker section. Forrester[26] also carries the same view.

Numerous mass movements from the depressed classes arose during the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Forrester views that depressed classes mass movements were a result of unprecedented restlessness among the depressed classes.[27] It cannot be disputed that a number of mass movements in the recent past have erupted as solution to the lower class frustration. A good example for this is that under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar, half of million Harijans embraced Buddhism in 1956. This has happened because Ambedkar believed that the emancipation of the Harijans from the dominance of the caste Hindus can only be achieved if they moved out of Hinduism. Parvathamma in

25. G.A. Oddie, "Christian Conversion among Non-Brahmins in Andhra Pradesh, with Special Reference to Anglican Missions and the Dornakal Diocese, 1900-1936", in G.A. Oddie (ed.), Religion in South Asia, Curyon Press, London, 1977, pp.64-70.

26. Forrester, Caste and Christianity: Attitudes & Policies on Caste of Anglo Saxon Protestant Missions in India, London, 1980, p.79.

27. Ibid., p.85.

her study also shows that Hinduism itself is responsible
for the eruption of many mass movements in India.[28] She
says that the Hindu social system based on social inequa-
lities and rigid hierarchical social structure is responsi-
ble for this.

(a) Conversions to Christianity

For nearly a century Christians have been the fastest
growing religious community in India. From 0.71 per cent
of the population in 1881 they rose to 2.6 per cent by
1971. Again, whereas the population of India grew by
24.8 per cent between 1961 and 1971, that of Christians
increased by 32.6 per cent. The great majority are to be
found in the South.[29]

In fact Christianity received most of its members
through mass conversions. Pickett estimates that more than
half of the Roman Catholics in India have descended from
converts, and in 1930 it has been estimated that 80 per cent
of Protestant Christians are products of conversions.[30]
The greatest number of conversions to Christianity occurred

28. C. Parvathamma, "Conversion Movements among the Untou-
    chables" in Jose Kananaikil (ed.), Scheduled Castes
    and Struggle against Inequality, Indian Social Insti-
    tute, New Delhi, p.110.

29. Lionel Caplan, "Social Mobility in Metropolitan Centres:
    Christians in Madras City", Contribution to Indian
    Sociology, vol.11, No.1, 1977,

30. Pickett, "Christian Mass Movements in India", op. cit.,
    p.313.

among the depressed classes. In the recent times lower
caste conversions to Christianity have been more Protestant
than Catholic.

Forrester writes, "....whereas Roman Catholic Missio-
nary strategy was directed largely towards group conversion,
the Protestants, who looked for individual decisions,
attracted far more mass movements, for, the tolerant Roman
Catholic attitude to the Caste system made conversion to
Catholicism a less plausible escape from that system than
conversion to Protestantism".[31] Vasco-de-Gama's arrival
in Calicut in 1498 marked the beginning of conversions to
Roman Catholic Church. In both Goa and Bassein (North of
Bombay), under Portuguese government's pressure the Hindu
caste groups embraced Christianity.

Several interesting mass movements started in Tamil
Nadu and they were for freedom for oppression and social
restrictions. The earliest and the greatest mass movement
was that among the Paravars (a fisherman caste) in 1532 in
Tamil East Coast. At this time about 20,000 Paravars had
been converted enbloc to Roman Catholic Church. In Madurai,
many Sudra and Paraiah castes were converted to Christianity
by the Jesuits missionaries in the 17th and 18th centuries.

---

31. Forrester, op. cit., p.73.

By 1700 there was a Christian Community of 100,000 in
Madurai. Around this time similar mass movements also
took place in Veerapoly and in Quilon districts of Kerala.

The most powerful mass movement in Tamil Nadu was
the one by the Nadars for the right of women to cover their
bosoms in the nineteenth century. Among the Nadars, the
Church Missionary Society at Tiruneveli and the London
Missionary Society in South Travancore came to work and
were successful in converting 10,000 Nadars into the
Protestant Church between 1820-35.

The years between 1870 and 1930 was the real period of
Christian mass movements.[32] The American Baptist Mission
and the Church Missionary Society began to work in Andhra
Pradesh in 1870s and met with a favourable response from
the untouchable segments of the population.[33] In the 20
years period between 1881 and 1901, the number of Christians
in Telugu Country alone rose from 78,000 to 2,25,000 and
virtually all converts were Malas and Madigas.

The United Presbyterian Mission in Punjab began its
work at Sialkot in 1855 and between 1870 and 1914 the
greater part of the Chuhra Community (an outcaste) in

32. H.C. Perumalil, Christianity in India: A History in
Ecumenical Perspective, Prakashan Publications,
Alleppy, p.268.

33. Oddie, op. cit., p.69.

that area had been brought into the Church.[34] The Christian Missions have also influenced on the tribal people. The Lutheran Missionaries came to Chota Nagpur in 1845 and worked among Oarons and Mundas. The growth of the Church was so rapid among the Nagas that by 1950 the Christian population among the Nagas was around 50,000. In the earlier part of the twentieth century mass conversions took place in Assam. About 59,000 Christians were reported in the 1931 census in the Assami Hills. Besides these mass conversions occurred among the Santals of Bihar and Bengal and the outcastes of Gujarat.

### (b) Mass Conversions to Islam

Much of the expansion of Islam in India, before the modern era of Christian Missions took place through mass movements. Islamic proselytisation began in South India ever since sixth century A.D. The Arabs who had settled on the West coast married women of lower castes and initiated conversions.

By overt and convert methods, the Mughal rulers made many Hindus to embrace Islam. The first conversion by political pressure happened with the conquest of Sind and

34. Stephen Neill, The Story of the Christian Church in India and Pakistan, published by the Christian Literature Society, Madras, 1972, p.118.

Multan between 711 and 713 by Mohammed bin Qusim.[35] The
Hindus and Buddhists who did not embrace Islam were accorded
the status of dhimmis (protected subjects) and they had to
pay Jizya in addition to other taxes.[36] During this period
many Hindus embraced Islam for their survival.

The Muslim missionaries brought in by the invaders
carried out peaceful means of mass conversion. A section
of Muslims in Tamil Nadu called Ravuttans (they are now
found in Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli, Madurai and North Arcot
districts of Tamil Nadu) were converted in groups by the
missionary - Syyid Nathar Shah.[37]

The Mappilas, a large Muslim community now found on
the West Coast of Malabar, had grown through intermarriage
with and conversion of lower castes. The outbreak of
Mappila Rebellion in Malabar brought lower castes into the
fold of Islam.[38] On the West Coast Mukkuvares (a fisherman
community), Tiyans (Toddy tappes) and Cherumans have been
converted to Islam.

---

35. S.A.A. Rizvi, "Islamic Proselytisation" in G.A. Oddie
    (ed.), op. cit., p.14.

36. Ibid., p.15.

37. For a detail of Muslim Missionaries work, see Murray
    T. Titus, Islam in India and Pakistan, Y.M.C.A. Pub-
    lishing House, Calcutta, 1959.

38. Stephen F. Dale, The Mappilas of Kerala: Islamic Society
    on the South Asian Frontier, Oxford University Press,
    New York, 1980, p.31.

In the recent years mass conversion to Islam took place in Tamil Nadu. The convertees are all exclusively from Harijan Community.

In North India also mass conversions occurred among the lower castes. In Gujarat, in the 12th century mass conversions occurred among Kanbis, Kharwas and Koris. In Punjab not fewer than 40,000 Chuhras and Chamar community embraced Islam, during the first decade of this century.

## Concepts of Protest, Social Mobility and Social Identity

### (a) Protest:

Protest is an attack on the prevailing system in an intellectual or organised way. Viewed against this is Revolution which is a sickness in society, a breakdown of the social order, general demoralisation and civil war.[39] Protest is based on every man's desire to be free. It is to be noted that most political and social changes of twentieth century have been accelerated by various protest movements.

Protest is a means by which unhappy, frustrated and exploited people can find at least momentary satisfaction.[40]

---

39. Norman P. Cantor, Age of Protest, Dissent and Rebellion in Twentieth Century, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1970, p.2.

40. Qoted from Joseph Mathew, Ideology, Protest and Social Mobility among Mahars and Pulayas: A Comparative Study A Ph.D. Thesis submitted to the Jawharlal Nehru University (unpublished), 1982, p.6.

Bailey says that there is a considerable evidence that worst violence in India in the last twenty years erupted from middle class grievances.

The educated are more prone to protest. The various conditions of relative deprivation also lead to protest. Protest as a collective action, thus involves factors such as agents of protest, reasons of protest and modes of protest which are inter-related to bring about social change in society.

The recent mass conversions in Tamil Nadu also possess all the Characteristics of a protest movement. Sociologically speaking, the study of mass movements is no doubt a study of collective behaviour more particularly the forms of protest on the actions of obviously oppressed. It is a collective attempt to establish a new order of life in the name of a generalised belief.

(b) Social Mobility:

Social mobility is/necessary dynamic process in any society. No society is completely static with nature. Some sort of movement of persons, groups and objects go on every time in society. This does not mean that there are no hinderances towards mobility. This movement of persons etc. through the social structure is called social mobility.

Sorokin defines it as any transmission of an individual

or social object or value, anything that has created or modified by human activity from one social position to another.[41]

The ideas of mobility and stratification are rooted in the structure of caste and class. Class is modern entity composed of endogamous groups; caste is a traditional phenomenon which is socially bounded on all sides. Several studies on caste and class groups in the Indian context, substantiate the fact of social mobility among them in rural and urban settings.[42]

Social mobility takes place by means of various avenues like "Sanskritisation", "referencegroup model" or political participation. Sanskritisation is a traditional Channel of mobility for the lower class. Today the lower class people rely heavily on conversions to move up in the status scale.

---

41. P.A. Sorokin, Social and Cultural Mobility, Free Press, New York, 1954, p.133.

42. For studies in the rural setting, see Andre Beteille, Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjur Village, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1965; P.G. Bailey, Caste and Economic Frontier, Manchester University Press, 1957; N. Lynch, The Politics of Untouchability: Social Change and Social Mobility in a City of India, University Press, Columbia 1969. For studies in the urban setting, see M.S.A. Rao, Urbanisation and social change: A study of Rural Community on a Metropolitan Fringe, Orient Longman, Delhi, James Berna; Industrial Entrepreneurship in Madras State, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1960.

(c) _Identity_:

Identity as a concept must be empirically grounded in social interaction. It is manifested in overt behaviour with in a social framework.

Identity is intrinsically associated with all the joinings and departures of social life. To have an identity is to join with some and depart from others, to enter and leave social relations at once. To change an identity is to change the manner in which one sees one self, one's referencegroup, and role-set.[43]

To Berger, Identity, with its appropriate attachments of psychological reality, is always identity with a specific, socially constructed world.............one identifies oneself, by being located in a common world,[44]

## Scope and Objectives of the Study:

Conversions in Tamil Nadu have become a pressing problem in our society. This has also attracted the attention of many scholars. Scholars of different disciplines have treated differently the problem of conversions. Sociologists assaign primacy to the social causes of conversion, some economists

43. For detail, see Hans Mol (ed.), _Identity and Religion, International, Cross-Cultural Approvals_, SAGE Publications Limited, 1976.

44. Peter Berger, "Identity as a Problem in the Sociology of knowledge"in R.N. Bellah (ed.), _Religion and Progress in Modern Asia_, New York, Free Press, 1973, p.275.

stress on the sudden rise of economic occurrences, yet others from politics find political motivation behind the conversion. But no one is interested in finding the real cause (or causes) and suitable remedy to this problem. Moreover only rare historical sociological studies have dealt with mass conversions.

In view of the foregoing it is necessary to make an analytical study of conversions as well as the cause and effect of the phenomenon. Our study examines the question of conversion with in the framework of socio-economic phenomenon. In this study an attempt is made to understand the recent conversions from the perspective of past events. Here our purpose is to study mass conversion as a function of the interplay of both push and pull factors.

Although, for reference, I often quoted mass conversions that have occurred outside Tamil Nadu, the study is mainly limited to the Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli districts and to a smaller extent Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu. In these districts, mass conversions have been taking place in a planned and concerted manner. Spatially these two districts are in the vicinity of Kerala. Moreover these areas are known for the outmigration of Harijans to Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Furthermore, even the social structure in these two districts is different from that the rest of Tamil Nadu due to several factors.

## Source of Data:

As stated earlier the available literature on conversions
in Tamil Nadu is both scanty and of different orientations.
Only a few published works have touched some sociological
aspects of the problem with which we are concerned. Several
writings on conversions related to other states have helped
in providing a background information to the present study
of religious conversions in Tamil Nadu. The present study
is largely based on available published works, monographs,
newspaper reports, periodicals, census data etc.

It is necessary to emphasize here that the Meenakshi-
puram village had remained isolated for a long time. However,
after the conversion episode (19 February 1981) various
religious and social leaders and government officials
visited the neglected village. They enquired the problems
of the Harijans in that area and published in various resea-
rch journals. This became relevant for our subject under
study. No doubt a study which is primarily based on secon-
dary sources will have its own limitations.

## Chapter Scheme:

The first chapter has attempted at a conceptual view of
religious conversions. The purpose of the second chapter
is to present some salient aspects concerning the social
background of depressed castes in Tamil Nadu in a socio-

historical perspective. It also presents an interesting picture of the Hindu, Muslim Missionaries' proselytising activities among the depressed castes in the state. The chapter concludes with the analysis of a background of Meenakshipuram Harijan converts.

Chapter three provides an analysis of social mobility among the Nadar and Harijan converts. More particularly it concentrates on the nature of social mobility that has occurred and how far the two groups, with their conversion, succeeded in breaking the traditional restrictions and occuring a marginal status.

The fourth chapter examines how tension and conflict manifest themselves in the form of conversion. In this chapter the nature of relationship between the Scheduled Castes and the caste Hindus in Tamil Nadu, some recent events and conflicts are mainly loooked into.

Conclusion consists of some objective conditions which encourage people to opt for conversion. It also contains some concrete solutions to stop the wave of religious conversions.

# CHAPTER II

## SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF
## DEPRESSED CASTES IN TAMIL NADU

### The Caste System in Tamil Nadu:
### A Socio-Historical View

Tamil Nadu has been known for its rigidity and complexity of caste structure. The caste rules are observed rigidly by the various upper, middle and lower castes. Historically caste feelings became strong among the Tamilians during the Pallava (300-630 A.D.) and Chola (850-1279 A.D.) periods[1] and are still dominant in many respects. The peculiarity of caste system of Tamil Nadu is the grouping of castes as the Right-hand (Valangie) and the Left-hand (Idangie) noticed in the early eighteenth century. Senart says these two were two sects corresponding roughly to agricultural and artisan castes. Ghurye notes the right hand faction had sixty castes in it and the left hand ones had only six. Brahmins were associated with the right hand section. And for a number of years the bulk of the economic resources, authority and privilege have been monopolised by this superior caste in Tamil Nadu.

During the past few decades, due to the political and

---

1. K.K. Pillay, The Caste System in Tamil Nadu, University of Madras, 1977, p.66.

economic reasons there occurred some changes in the caste
structure of Tamil Nadu. The modern scholars have identified
three broad divisions of caste system in Tamil Nadu viz., the
Brahmins, non-Brahmins and the Harijans. Among the Brahmins
exist various endogamous divisions. The non-Brahmin segment
consists of various Sudra castes. Some of them are the
Vellalas, Mudaliars, Naidus, Chetties, Gounders, Kallars
etc. Many of these Sudra castes are land owning castes and
have occupied a middle ranking status in economic and social
terms.

The Harijans are the Adi Dravidars some of whom are
Pallars, Paraiahs, Sackilis etc. They are untouched by the
higher elements of Hindu culture. They are socially and
economically depressed. This privileged section also
observes their own caste rules.

In the recent times, a considerable proportion of
Brahmins have migrated to Metropolitan Centres in search of
employment opportunities and have settled there. Now the
non-Brahmins, like the Kallars took up the power from the
Brahmins and exercise more control over the Harijans. Andre
Beteille[3] who studied the relations among the Brahmins, non-

---

2.   G.S. Ghurye, Caste and Race in India, Popular Book
     Depot, Bombay, 1961, pp.358-59.

3.   Andre Beteille, Caste, Class and Power, Berkeley,
     University of California Press, 1971, p.8.

Brahmins and the Harijans has referred to such transfer of
economic and political power from one dominant caste (the
Brahmins) to another (the Kallars and the Vellala groups of
castes among the non-Brahmins). Some other scholars like
K.C. Alexander have also noted the increasing dominant
character of the local non-Brahmin peasant castes in Tamil
Nadu. To support this view Hutton reports as early in 1931
Kallars of Ramnad propounded eleven prohibitions for the
depressed classes in that area.[4]

It is interesting to note here that in Tamil Nadu the
competition for status is often high between the castes which
are adjacent to each other in the caste hierarchy. The
Vellalas in Tamil Nadu often attempted to raise their status
equal to that of the Brahmins. By giving up meat-eating and
by wearing the sacred thread and having their own family
priests and performing rituals and ceremonies many Vellala
castes have been Brahminised.[5] Hardgrave[6] argues that Nadars

---

4. J.H. Hutton, Caste in India (3rd Edn), Oxford University
   Press, Bombay, 1961, pp.205-06.

5. The District Gazetteers of the Southern Districts, pub-
   lished in the 19th Century mention that there had been
   a close competition between the Brahmins and Vellalas
   for social prestige wherein the former were looked upon
   as alien imigrants.

6. Robert L. Hardgrave (Jr.), The Nadars of Tamil Nadu: The
   Political Culture of a Community in Change, University
   of California Press, Berkeley, pp.110-15.

or Shanars of Tirunelveli fought for the status of Kshatriyas. The Maravars and the Nadars always hated each other. Among the untouchable castes, the Pallars always claimed a higher status than the Paraiahs. The Pariahs demanded equal status with the Pallars. The competition for higher status often resulted in conflicting relationship between the castes involved. This is believed to be one of the major reasons for the eruption of many conversion movements in Tamil Nadu.

## Social Conditions of Depressed Classes in Tamil Nadu in Traditional Hindu Society

The bulk of the depressed classes population in Tamil Nadu consisted of Pallars and Paraiahs. Spatially they were segregated and forced to live at the periphery of the village just as the social position of the Harijans was at the periphery of the Hindu social order.[7] Their settlement was called by a separate term "Cheri" and Cheries viewed ritually polluting to all caste Hindus. In fact they were kept in a servile position. Thurston notes that in times prior to British rule, the whole Paraiah community, without exception, were slaves of the superior castes.[8] Even today some of these people are being employed as pannaials (attached labour) by the land-

---

7. Quoted from S.L. Sharma, Conversions, Seminar.

8. Edgar Thurston, Ethnographic notes in Southern India, Cosmo Publications 1975, Delhi, p.125.

holding caste Hindus. They were compelled to take up jobs which were considered to be mean and polluting to all the upper castes. The three communal servants viz., the grave diggers (Vettyan), watchman (Talayari) and scavangers (Thotty) are exclusively from the Paraiah community.[9]

A paraiah cannot work as a domestic servant for he defiles all he touches. In south of Tamil Nadu we can note that some of the lower Sudra castes e.g. Nadars also suffered all the degradation of a lower caste. In south Travancore, customs forbade Nadar women from covering their breasts. The Nayars of south Travancore always kept the Nadars under their subjection. Nadars were not even permitted to carry umbrellas, to wear shoes or golden ornaments, to carry pots of water on the hip, to build houses above one story in height, to milk cows.[10]

In South Travancore excessive taxes were imposed on Nadars. Jesudas noted that the Nadars paid poll-tax not only for members who were alive, but also for the dead. The Sirkar pattam tax was collected from the Nadars by the government on trees from which they drew toddy to earn their livelihood.

---

9. E. Thurston, Caste and Tribes of South India, Government Press, Madras, 1909, p.115.

10. M.A. Sherring, The Tribes and Castes of Madras Presidency, Cosmo Publications, 1975, pp.182-87.

The revenue accounts of Travancore for 1807-08 show that
the government collected rupees 88,044 as poll tax; Sirkar
pattam tax amounted to rupees 18,523, while the poll tax on
Chetties and other castes amounted to only rupees 4,624.
The manner in which the tax was collected angered the Nadars
more than the amount of the tax, although they kept quiet.[11]

There was a peculiar custom of Ulium service (work
without pay) was practiced in South Travancore. The Nadars
and the members of other depressed castes were supposed to
do the service of Ulium to the government and in the houses
of caste Hindu landlords on Sundays.

The persons of depressed classes in Tamil Nadu were not
permitted to approach those of higher status and fixed
distances were prescribed for each castes. Even a shadow or
sight of an untouchable was considered polluting to a caste
Hindu in Tirunelveli District. In Tirunelveli District, there
was a group of unseeables, a kind of washermen, (Purathavannan)
who served untouchables exclusively and thus they were doubly
polluted and were compelled to stay indoors during the day
time.[12] The Nayadis (an outcaste in Kerala) could not approach

11. R.N. Jesudas, A People's Revolt in Travancore: A Backward
    Class Movement for Social Freedom, Kerala Historical
    Society, Trivandrum, 1975, p.30.

12. N. Subramanium, The Hindu tripod and other essays, Modern
    Printers, Madurai, p.300.

the habitations and members of higher classes. In Tamil Nadu
a Paraiah polluted a Brahmin at a distance of 64 feet.[13] In
South Travancore a Nadar kept 36 feet away from a Nambutri
Brahmin and half of the distance from a Nayar.[14] The Nayadis
polluted a Brahmin by approaching him within a distance of
300 feet. The Pulayas stood at a distance of 90 feet from
the Brahmin and 64 feet from the Nayar.[15]

In the religious life also there was marked difference
between the upper caste Hindus and the outcastes. The
depressed classes were not allowed to enter into the major
Hindu temples. They were the worshippers of demons and female
deities. Sanskrit elements played a minor portion in their
religious practices. The Pallars and Paraiahs had "Valluvan"
as their priest. Pandaram, a non-Brahmin priest caste, served
for the Nadars.

## Position of Depressed Classes in Tamil Nedu During the British Period

History shows that in Madras Presidency the British
administrators took special interest on uplifting the Paraiahs.
In the state of Travancore and Madras the British Government

---

13. K.K. Pillay, op. cit., p.51.

14. Hardgrave, op. cit., p.57.

15. L.A. Krishna Iyer, Social History of Kerala, vol.I, Book Centre Publications, Madras, p.32.

took efforts to abolish the institutions of slavery.[16]
Thurston points out that in Malabar in 1792, the year in
which British rule commenced, a proclamation was issued
against dealing in slaves.[17]

The Western education and the Technology brought by the
British government had an impact on society. White collar
jobs were thrown open to all eligible persons, without
reference to caste. But certain sphere of institutional
living (sphere of religion, and personal law governing family,
kinship, property and succession) remained intact under the
external impact. It is essential to note here that the
British government tried to uplift the depressed classes
and at the same time their laws permitted traditional caste
practices to a large extent. The Caste Disabilities Removal
Act of 1850 introduced by the government did not have much
impact on the practice of caste inequalities. G.S. Ghurye
feels that the Act did not remove the civil disabilities
existing between castes but facilitated conversion to another
religion or admission to another caste.[18]

The religious policy of the British government was more
or less protective in nature. The British government did

---

16. Ibid., pp.61-63.

17. Thurston, op. cit., p.443.

18. G.S. Ghurye, op. cit., p.273.

not want to touch the practice of Hindu social order in Indian society. M.N. Srinivas thinks that the Varna model became more popular during the British period "......it is my hunch that the Varna model became more popular during the British period as a result of variety of forces".[19] O'Malley holds the view that the British government, being an alien government, was naturally reluctant to interfere with customs based on religion.[20]

The Madras Manual of Administration described the Paraiahs of the Presidency as a community of hereditary slaves whom the British government had freed from a state of bondage and its concomittant legal disabilities but who were still at a low depth of social degradation.[21] Though the British Government tried to uplift the depressed classes it had no intention to bring about a general social reform of the depressed classes.

## Movements for the Upliftment of Depressed Classes in Tamil Nadu

During the 19th and 20th centuries several reform and revolutionary movements came up in Tamil Nadu to end the

19. M.N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, Orient Lonjman, Bombay, 1977, p.6.

20. O'Malley, India's Social Heritage, Curzon Press Ltd., London, 1976, p.112.

21. Quoted from S. Saraswathi, Minorities in Madras State, Impex India, New Delhi, 1974, p.147.

caste system. But historically every attempt to reform Hinduism or to attack on caste system in Tamil Nadu has not produced much positive results.

The Hindu reform movements were rather a defensive reaction to the Missionary influence among the depressed castes. The Arya Samaj founded in 1875, by Swami Dayanand Saraswathi, appeared in some of the strategic regions of Tamil Nadu where Christianity began to grow. Arya Samaj attempted to rectify the defects of rigidity within the Hinduism by giving a call to go back to Vedas. Arya Samaj sponsored a special programme 'Shuddhi'. The Shuddhi aimed at recoversion of Christian and Muslim converts into the fold of reformed Hinduism.[22] In North India Arya Samaj became a mass movement with its programme of Shuddhi. But in South India notably in Tamil Nadu Arya Samaj had very little impact. In Tamil Nadu it was not a movement which devoted to elevate the untouchables. It was not able to bring about social equality among its adherents.

The Theosophical Society founded in 1875 in New York, came to Madras in 1878. Mrs. Annie Besant took the lead of the society and started working among the depressed classes. The Madras Depressed Classes Mission was established in Madras in 1909 with the objective of educating lower castes and removing social disabilities. But the work of this

---

22. Harvey Dewitt, Insights into Modern Hinduism, Hery Hottseco, New York, 1934, p.116.

Association did not bring about any radical changes in the outlook of depressed classes.

Non-Brahmin Movement: Politics became the motive force for the non-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu. At first the revolt of the non-Brahmins against the Brahmin domination led to the formation of Justice Party in 1917. In the beginning the Justice Party won the support of the depressed classes as a movement for democratic liberation. But after winning the election in 1920, the non-Brahmin upper castes like Vellala, Chetty, Naidu alienated the depressed classes.

During the Justice Party's rule no member of the depressed classes found admission into the Central Legislature[23]. The depressed classes' members felt that the non-Brahmin replaced Brahmins in power and position. M.N. Srinivas rightly points out that even those revolutionary movements that have aimed at the overthrow of the caste system have ended up either becoming castes themselves or have reproduced the caste system within themselves (1952.31).

The Self-Respect Movement (Swayam Mariyathai Iyakkam) was started in 1925 in Tamil Nadu by Ramaswami Naicker. This was an athiestic and anti-Brahmin movement which aimed at uplifting the non-Brahmin classes by uniting them against

---

23. S. Saraswathi, op. cit., p.117.

the Brahmin domination.[24] Ramaswami Nicker later formed the Dravida Kazhagam in 1944 and the movement assumed political dimension. The anti-Brahmin movement later developed into anti-Hinduism. The effect of the movement did not reach in Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu where the Brahminical supremacy was high. This popular movement is now becoming a dying comet.

## Some Political Factors in Conversion Movement

Missionaries have built up a strong Christian community in India. Non-religious reasons and motives have been operative in a greater measure in the birth and growth of Christian Missionaries in India. The Portuguese brought Roman Catholic Missionaries for their Colonial expansion. The Roman Catholic Missionaries in Goa were controlled and directed by the Portuguese Government. In South India in major Catholic Churches the Bishops were directly appointed by the Pope.[25]

---

24. For details, see Ireschick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism 1916-1929, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969, pp.268-75. Also see P.D. Devanadhan, Dravida Kazhagam: A Protest against Brahminism, CISRS, 1959.

25. For detail, see Abbe J.A. Dubois, The State of Christianity in India during the early 19th Century, Associated Publishing House, New Delhi, p.29.

To some extent the missionaries exercised political power in order to effect mass conversion. Fransis Xaviour who visited the West Coast during 1541 wrote to the King of Portugal that the only hope of mass conversion in the West Coast lay in the use of temporal power of the state.

The British Government gave its full support to the Protestant Missionaries with a view to strengthening political power. Niyogi Committee report states that the growth of Protestant Church during the period of British Raj in India was due mainly to the great patronage and support the Church was getting from the government of India.[26]

The Missionaries were much tactful in carrying out the proselytising activities. Parvathamma says that the Christian Missionaries lived and worked among the potential converts to Christianity. All over India the depressed classes were the excellent target for the mass proselytising activities.

The Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu became a sensitive area where the influence of Missionaries has been powerful. The converts came mostly from the oppressed and exploited group.

_____

26. Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee, Madhya Pradesh, 1956, vol.I, Indore Government Regional Press, 1957.

Table 1: <u>Variation of Religious Composition in Four
Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu in 1961</u>
(Percentage to the total population of the
Districts)

|            | Kanyakumari | Tirunelveli | Ramanathapuram | Madurai |
|------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|---------|
| Hindus     | 59          | 81.37       | 88.11          | 89.60   |
| Christians | 37          | 11.91       | 5.39           | 3.74    |
| Muslims    | 4           | 6.71        | 6.48           | 6.26    |
| Others     | -           | 0.01        | 0.02           | 0.40    |
|            | 100         | 100         | 100            | 100     |

Source: Report of the Backward Classes Commission,
vol.II, 1970, Government of Tamil Nadu.

The peculiar situation which prevailed in Southern
districts of Tamil Nadu was the persecution of the Paravars
by the Arab pirates on the Coastal areas, the exploitation
of Nadars by the Nayar landlords in South Travancore and the
dominance of Kallars over Nadars in Tirunelveli. This
situation prepared a suitable ground for the Roman Catholic
and Protestant Missionaries for their mass proselytisation.
The Christian Missionaries had taken up the cause of these
downtrodden and the latter had found in them protectors and
defenders of their genuine rights. The protection given by
the Portuguese Government made many Paravars to accept
Christianity in 1532. Fransis Xaviour later worked among
the Paravars of West and East Coast and brought 20,000 in to
the Church.

Robert de Nobli, an important Jesuit missionary, came
to Madurai in 1605. He adopted new techniques to convert

the Brahmins. He allowed the converts to retain their old ways of living.[27] He was not successful in converting the upper castes. De Nobili turned his attention on lower castes. As a result many Sudras and Paraiahs were converted. There was a Christian Community of about 100,000 in the year 1700 in Madurai where Nobili and his Mission had been working.

We have seen that the Nadars' mass movement began in the early part of the 19th century. The Nadars who wanted to join the Church were exploited and to escape from social atrocity. It must be noted that in the early nineteenth century the Nadars of South Travancore were looking for a leader for their proper guidance. When Ringeltaube (L.M.S. Missionary) came to work among them and they find in him as their leader. Like Ringeltaube in South Travancore, Rhenius (C.M.S. Missionary) appeared in Tirunelveli around the same time. There arose a new chapter in the history of South Travancore and Tirunelveli districts. The missionaries who arrived in these area took a keen interest in the upliftment of the Nadar community.[28] The missionaries attracted the

27. Stephen Neill, op. cit., p.43.

28. For a detail of Christian Missionary Activities among the Nadars in South Travancore, see Jesudas, op. cit. And for a detailed study on Missionaries' work among the Nadars of Tirunelveli, see Caldwell, The Tinnevelly Shanars, Madras, 1849; Caldwell, Records of the Early History of the Tinnevelly Mission of the S.P.C.K. and S.P.G.F.P., Madras, 1981. And also, Hardgrave, op. cit.

Nadars by offering the much needed and awaited leadership in
the form of legal protection and advice, winning their cases
in courts, and exercising all possible influence for their
protection. As a result the Nadars began to think that they
could break the established custom of servitude by embracing
Christianity. Eventually they accepted the religion of the
missionaries who were powerful in their eyes. Thus the Nadars
first attracted the approved attention of the missionaries
and through them their religion.

## Offer of Material Inducements and Social Incentives

The offer of some inducements by the Christian missions
have often resulted mass movements. The efforts to improve
the material conditions of the converts have been a common
feature of both Roman Catholic and Protestant Missionaries.
Missions provided homes for poor Christian converts, issued
building materials, allocated food and clothes to those in
need and gave them occasional low interest loans to purchase
lands.[29]

The missions have provided employment opportunities to
many converts. The missions assisted a large number of Indian
converts for proselytistional work and provided them with all

---

29. G.T. Mackenzie, Christianity in Travancore, Trivandrum, 1907, p.165.

amenities. In Tirunelveli and South Travancore Protestant Missions sent many Nadar converts to Malaysia and Sri Lanka for plantation work. In the Mission run institutions Christians were appointed as teachers and staff. In Madras Presidency in 1871, 47 per cent teachers in Mission run schools were Christians and by 1901 there were 73 per cent. Thus the practice of giving employment to the convers produced a widespread belief among the common people that those who come forward for conversion would be given shelter and employment by the missions.

The significance of foreign money for Christian propagation cannot be ignored. Even today Christian Missions are directed, controlled and financed by some force from outside India. Pickett, in his study, noted "Christian missions have added to the wealth of India by large sum of money which they imported from foreign lands.... The economic benefits have come to many participants in Christian movement..."[30]

It has been detected by the Niyogi Committee that an amount of Rs.29.27 crores had been received in India during January 1950 to June 1954 by Missions from foreign countries. All this amount was spent in maintaining various Christian institutions, including constructions of Churches.[31]

---

30. Pickett, op. cit., p.235.

31. Niyogi Committee Report, op. cit., p.100.

On December 26, 1978, when O.P. Tyagi moved the "Freedom
of Religion Bill" in the Indian Parliament to check mass
conversion by fradulent means, and it was the various Christian
denominations unitedly protested against the bill.[32]

Social Incentives: Christian missions have done organised
social work for the sake of effective mass conversion. Missions
have also with their humanitarian attitude done a great deal
to alleviate the sufferings of the downtrodden.

The most powerful social incentive of the Christian
missions was the mission education. Through their institutions
of higher learning, missions imparted the gospel of Christia-
nity to a large number of people. The Christian missions
established many well organised schools and colleges which
became popular among the public. Today in Tamil Nadu every
district headquarter is having Christian Schools and Colleges.
In Nagercoil (Headquarter of South Travancore) the Christian
missions run two women's colleges and a co-education college.
The Madras Christian college in Madras, the American college
at Madurai, St. Xaviour college at Palayamkottai in Tirunelveli
district are some of the most popular Christian colleges,
which produced so many intellectuals.

The modern system of education brought in by the missions

---

32. _Economic and Political Weekly_, June, 1982, p.1030.

attracted all sections of society. And the most important incentive is that Christians were encouraged to attend mission schools by being charged lower fees than their non-Christian fellows, and where circumstances demanded, were excused payment altogether. In 1852, twothirds of all mission school boys in Tirunelveli were Christians. In 1884-85, when Christians were approximately 4 per cent of the population in Madras Presidency, they comprised 16.5 per cent of those in middle school and 10 per cent of all high school pupils.[33]

The missions have also opened various social and charitable centres like hospitals and dispensaries, orphanages and poor houses, rescue-homes and beneficient institution of every kind, including co-operative societies, agricultural and industrial training institutions. All these institutions have been the favourite medium of approach to the masses for conversion.

Some other incentives which contributed for collective baptism were mission help in times of famine and drought, support against money lenders. In this sense, Christianity stood for many good things and meant a new life to the down-trodden.

All this social and charitable work of the Christian missionaries has contributed to the growth of Christianity

---

33. Lionel Caplan, "Social Mobility in Metropolitan Centre Christians in Madras City", Contribution to Indian Sociology, vol.II, No.1, 1977, p.285.

in all over the places. In different areas, different castes
(mostly from the lowest strata) responded quickly to the
missionary activities. Table 2 provides information on the
caste affiliation of Christian converts in Madras Presidency
during 1871.

Table 2: Castes of Catholic and Protestant Native
Christians in the Madras Presidency, 1871

|  | Roman Catholics | Protestant |
|---|---|---|
| Brahmans | 3,658 | 39 |
| Kshatriyas | 4,535 | 565 |
| Chetties | 3,444 | 375 |
| Cultivating Castes | 35,742 | 6,147 |
| Shephered Castes | 2,462 | 395 |
| Artisan Castes | 5,215 | 399 |
| Writer Castes | 143 | 25 |
| Weaver Castes | 5,027 | 595 |
| Agricultural Labourers (Vunnias) | 40,952 | 11,411 |
| Potters | 622 | 110 |
| Mixed Castes (Satani) | 6,861 | 1,586 |
| Fishermen | 14,459 | 278 |
| Shanans (Nadars) | 26,724 | 36,470 |
| Barbers | 906 | 420 |
| Washermen | 1,840 | 348 |
| Other Hindus | 49,389 | 3,369 |
| Paraiahs | 131,367 | 30,164 |
| Mahomedans | 17 | 5 |

Source: India, Census, 1871, Madras, p.112.

## Muslim Missionary Activities

In the past it was the usual practice of the Muslim
rulers to convert non-Muslims to Islam. Historians have
noted that the initial proselytisational drive of the Muslim
rulers was crude and ruthless. Many rulers enslaved the

Hindu prisoners of war and they were released after embracing Islam. The Mughal rulers were under the impression that by converting non-Muslim subjects in to their fold they could expand their empire. Many of the studies on Islamic proselytisation have referred to the use of force, discriminatory laws, threats and inducements of the Muslim Colonist.[34] Moreover, during their reign the money collected from the non-Muslim subjects was freely spent on the propagation of Islam. As the Portuguese did in Goa, the Muslim rulers depicted all kinds of malpractices to Islamise the local people in their reign.

The Muslim individual missionaries also played a notable part in the spread of Islam in India. These missionaries were encouraged and supported by the rulers. The missionaries who arrived in the North, slowly moved towards the South and attracted the attention of the lower castes by their preachings. Among the Muslim missionaries many took the responsibility of propagating of Islam and some others engaged in promoting the welfare of the community. A few succeeded in converting the local Rajas and through them their subjects. The most successful missionary were from the Sufi order.

---

34. Rizvi elaborately discussed the way in which the Muslim rulers converted local elites, including Brahmins and Tribal leaders, in the hope of securing their political allegiance. For detail, see S.A.A. Rizvi, "Islamic Proselytisation (Seventh to Sixteenth Centuries)" in G.A. Oddie (ed.), Religion in South Asia, Curzon Press, London, 1977, pp.13-31.

The Muslim population in Southeast of Tamil Nadu is large because of the greater measure of Muslim missionary activity there. The missionaries who reached these areas showed their sympathy for the downtrodden. The significance of missionaries' work in these areas was that they not only made many converts to their religion but also produced spiritual leaders within the community. These spiritual leaders worked for the advancement of the community.

Till very recently the Muslim community in Tamil Nadu and in some parts of Kerala had remained rather conservative. In Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts, most of the Muslims took to small business and many of them in course of time became wealthy merchants. Some went to Singapore and Arab countries and the money they sent back to their homes enriched their life. Previously secular education was neglected by even the rich stratum of the community. Now they have made progress in their secular education and government employment.

It is also important to note that in recent decades there has been a great awakening, pioneered mostly from with in the community. There are some philanthropists who have provided funds for starting educational and vocational institutions.[35] In Malabar region of Kerala there are a few

---

35. Report of the Backward Classes Commission, Tamil Nadu, vol.II, 1970, Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras, p.42.

intellectuals with in the community who have provided the
leadership. A great figure among them was Maulavi Abdul
Khadir (1873-1932) who exhorted his community to discard all
un-Islamic practices, to take to modern education and to play
an important part in progressive movements.

## Present Condition of Depressed Classes in Tamil Nadu

The central and the state governments have made elaborate
laws to uplift the depressed classes. The reservation of
seats in legislatures and in educational institutions have
brought about some changes in their economic life. In Tamil
Nadu one can notice that the changing economic status of the
Harijans has not led to any corresponding changes in their
social status. Moreover the steps so far taken by the govern-
ment to improve the status of the Harijans have incidentally
widened the gap betv en the touchables and the untouchables.
The traditional spatial isolation of Harijans is still prac-
ticed. They do not h ve sufficient opportunities to mix
freely with the caste Hindus. Even today the Harijans are
subjected to social discrimination. For example on the
matter of interdining, social mixing and other ritualistic
acts, the discrimination against the Harijans continues.

The Untouchability Offences Act is quite ineffective
in Tamil Nadu. A newspaper report comments the Untouchability
Offences Act in Tamil Nadu remains a dead letter.[36] Moreover

---

36. Indian Express (New Delhi), 31st June, 1981, p.5.

the executive wing of the government, the court of Justice and the police officials are generous and extremely considerate towards the privileged class.

In Tamil Nadu 42 landless labourers belonging to the Scheduled Castes were burnt to death including 20 children in 1968 in Kilvenmani Village (Tanjore District). Acquitting the landlords, the High Court said, most of them are rich men owing vast extent of land......It is difficult to believe that they themselves walked bodily to the scene and set fire to the houses.[37]

Thus the Scheduled Castes are still victims of exploitation and oppression. They continue to be the most neglected sections of our people.

## A Social Background of Meenakshipuram Converts

Meenakshipuram is a small village situated in the Tenkasi taluk of Tirunelveli district. The principal caste groups in the village were the Harijans and Thevars. The Thevars are the powerful force in the village. The village administration had been dominated by the Thevars of the village. On February 19, 1981 more than 1000 Harijans oppressed more by social atrocities than economic subjugation embraced Islam enmasse in the village. Following the Meenakshipuram

---

37. Statesman, New Delhi, 19 May, 1981, p.7.

converts, conversions took place in the neighbouring districts. Table 3 gives the number of total conversions reported in Tamil Nadu from February to September, 1981.

Table 3: <u>Conversions in Tamil Nadu February-September, 1981</u>

| 1981 | Name of Village | District | From | To | No. of Converts |
|------|-----------------|----------|------|-----|------|
| Feb. | Meenakshipuram | Tirunelveli | Harijans | Islam | 1000 |
| May | Veeravanur | Ramanathapuram | Harijans | Islam | 56 |
| | Maravakudi | Ramanathapuram | Harijans | Islam | 48 |
| | Meelamadai | Ramanathapuram | Harijans | Islam | 46 |
| | Ernampatty | Madurai | Harijans | Islam | 29 |
| June | Kurayoor | Ramanathapuram | Harijans | Islam | 300 |
| | Kurayoor | Ramanathapuram | Christians | Islam | 50 |
| | Kanday | Madurai | Harijans | Islam | 93 |
| July | Kurayoor | Ramanathapuram | Harijans | Islam | 192 |
| | Athiyoothu | Ramanathapuram | Harijans | Islam | 188 |
| | Elamanoor | Ramanathapuram | Harijans | Islam | 172 |
| | Nine villages of Thiruthurai poondi Mannargudi area | Thanjavur | Harijans | Islam | 180 |
| Aug. | Meenakshipuram | Tirunelveli | Harijans | Islam | 25 |
| | Veeravanur | Ramanathapuram | Harijans | Islam | 28 |
| | Persanbut | North Arcot | Harijans | Islam | 21 |
| | Ilamanur | Ramanathapuram | Harijans | Islam | 500 |
| | Aduthurai | Thanjavur | Harijans | Islam | 9 |
| | Athiyoothu | Ramanathapuram | Harijans | Islam | 250 |
| Sept. | Kidarankondan & Keelayur | Thanjavur | Harijans | Islam | 46 |
| | | | | Total | 3233 |

Source: <u>Economic and Political Weekly</u>, June, 1982, p.1026.

In Meenakshipuram more than 40 per cent of the Harijans
are well educated and many of them are well placed in govern-
ment services. Even among the converts there are doctors,
engineers, teachers, etc. Table 4 shows the educational
attainment of Harijans of Meenakshipuram.

Table 4: Educational Attainments of Harijans of
Meenakshipuram

| Educational attainment | Occupation/ Profession | Number |
|---|---|---|
| Professional: | | |
| M.D. | Doctor | 1 |
| M.B.B.S. | Doctor | 3 |
| B.E. | Engineer | 1 |
| B.Sc.(Agri.) | District Agricul- tural Officer | 1 |
| P.U.C.+ Teaching training | Secondary Grade Teacher | 7 |
| Science and Arts: | | |
| B.A. | District Superin- tendent of Police | 1 |
| M.A. | Nil | 2 |
| P.U.C./B.A./B.Sc. | Clerks | 10 |
| B.A./B.Sc. | Nil | 7 |

Source: Religion and Society, Bulletin of the
Christian Institute for the Study of
Religion and Society, vol.XXVIII,
December, 1981, Bangalore, p.28.

Economically also the Harijans of Meenakshipuram are
relatively better off than Harijans in other hamlets of the
state. Eighty families in a community of 180 Harijan
families owned land. Ninety per cent of the Harijans are
registered cultivating tenants of Thiruvaduthurai Muttlands

in the adjacent village. One third of the Harijans in the village are landless agricultural labourers. They were employed by the Muslim landlords of nearby villages, Thevar land owners and by some Harijan Land owners.[38]

At first the foregoing analysis confirms the view expressed by Oddie that a certain level of economic independence is necessary for mass conversion. In Meenakshipuram a certain level of economic independence of the Harijans and the critical awareness of the Harijans of their lowly position might have played a vital role for their mass conversion. The theory of relative deprivation tends to follow the same logic. It words that radicalism in action is more witnessed among the relatively deprived than among the absolutely deprived groups.

The press reports carried the news that the Harijans in Meenakshipuram lived in utmost disharmony with the oppressive Thevars. The Harijans were humiliated and persecuted by the caste Hindus in that area. The educated Harijans of Meenakshipuram have felt that their social status had not changed inspite of their high education.

The following are the major disabilities which the Harijans had suffered at the hands of Thevars in that village.[39]

1. A Harijan was expected to give due respect to a

38. Sunday Weekly, Calcutta, 7th June, 1981, p.22.

39. Indian Express, June 16, 1981, p.7.

Thevar whenever and wherever he came across anyone.

2. Harijans were denied the use of Public well. They
   were not permitted to wear chappals while walking
   through caste Hindu streets.

3. They were not permitted to sit with the caste Hindus.
   In tea shops tea was served to them in separate
   glasses and after drinking the tea, they had to
   wash the glass.

4. The caste Hindus did not permit the Harijans to take
   their dead along the main road.

This social background of the Harijans denote that their
changes of religion was the result of their aspiration for
liberation from social atrocism.

### The Influence of Social Pressure and Money Power in Meenakshipuram

No event of conversion particularly mass conversion can
ever materialise without the active role of the converter
religious group. Sharma points out that mere vulnerability
of the convertee is not enough for a conversion to take place.
The intensive activities of the converter is equally
imperative.[40]

Regarding the Meenakshipuram conversion many independent
observers have noted the outside force on the Harijans. The
gathering of 4000 Muslims in Meenakshipuram on the conversion

---

40. S.L. Sharma, op. cit., p.31.

day, the active participation of Muslim politicians in the conversion ceremony,[41] the working of South India Isha -athul-Islam Sabha in Tirunelveli district and the newly formed Equality and Brotherhood Association (Samathuva Sahotharathuva Sangam) have been noted as indicators of external force on the conversion of Harijans.

The Press coverages also focussed on some of these facts. The 37 years old South India Isha-athul Islam Sabha is said to have arranged 17,000 conversions in Tamil Nadu since its inception. And the Samathuva Sahotharathuva Samgam was formed mainly to bring about greater amity between Harijans and Muslims as a first step to the former's conversion.[42] The study of the Parliamentary Committee in its finding has said that many well-to-do Muslims were putting pressure on the rank and file Harijans to get converted.

Many have put forward the involvement of foreign money and material inducements in the recent Harijans conversion to Islam. No concrete evidence has been made to substantiate the foreign money theory. Yet the role of material induce-ment is not negligible. The extravagant amount of money spent (A feast was conducted for 6000 persons) on the conversion festival, the visible gifts (both in cash and

41. Indian Express, New Delhi, April 13, 1981, p.5.

42. India Today (Fortnightly), New Delhi, July 15, 1982, p.26.

kind) offered to the newly converted Harijans, a new pump
set drilled in the Harijans' area by the Muslims lend
credence to the belief that monetary inducements had a role
to play.  A study made by the fact finding committee of the
Sarva Desik Arya Prathinidhi Sabha has said that the reported
mass conversion of Harijans was the result of the undue
influence and the pressure of foreign money.

# CHAPTER III

## SOCIAL IDENTITY, SOCIAL MOBILITY AND
## SOCIAL ADAPTATION: SOME SUBSTANTIVE ASPECTS

## Social Identity

The concept of identity is concretely analysed by Mol
by defining religion as sacralisation of identity.[1] Davis
has written that religion gives the individual a sense of
identity with the distant past and the limitless future.[2]
Odea says religion performs important identity functions.
In periods of rapid social change and large-scale social
mobility, the contribution of religion to identity may become
greatly enhanced.[3]

In many cases, mass conversions signifies more a change
of social identity than of inner religiosity. Mass conversions
represent a quest for group affiliation rather than spiritual
elevation. Forrester notes that "a conversion movement is
like a kind of group identity crisis, in which the group
passes through a negative rejection of their lowly place in
Hindu society to a positive affirmation of a social and
religious identity".[4]

---

1. Hans Mol, Identity and Religion: International, Cross
   cultural approaches, SAGE Publications Ltd., California,
   1978, p.123.

2. Quoted from Thomas F. O'Dea, Sociology of Religion,
   Prentice Hall of Private Ltd., New Delhi, 1969.

3. Ibid., p.15.

4. Duncan Forrester, "The Depressed Classes and Conversion
   to Christianity, 1860-1960" in G.A. Oddie (ed.), Reli-
   gion in South Asia, op. cit., p.45.

Sometimes the change of identity through religion will result in transformation of personality also. If a group change its religious faith, they bring a new level of confidence with them. They acquire this new confidence through the organisational strength and security provided by the new religious faith. In South, the organisational activities of the Protestant Missions helped the Nadars to find a higher caste group identity. The important thing is that the Nadars and the Paravars in South by converting enmasse into Christianity succeeded in freeing themselves from the clutches of Zamindars and money lenders. Fernandes says that when the Nadars of Tamil Nadu were fighting for equality during the 'breast-cloth controversy', their baptism provided them with additional organisational strength to fight for their rights. They have found a new unity through the organisation of Church.[5]

## Religious Ideology and the Formulation of Identity

Religious ideology was often responsible for provoking the change of identity. The followers perceive interests in the new faith, identify their interests with those of the community and get organised for action. M.S.A. Rao points out that the problem of identity is intimately related to

---

5. Walter Fernandes, Caste and Conversion Movements in India, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1981, p.29.

ideology which is a symbolic system.[6]

The Brahmo Samaj provided a style of life which served as a factor of identity. The Arya Samaj established identity on the basis of certain symbols such as fire sacrifice and absence of idol worship, wearing sacred thread etc. The Ezhavas in Kerala through social mobilisation achieved a new higher status identity. This social mobilisation of the Ezhavas was possible due to the new religious ideology (philosophy and ritual) provided by Shri Narayana Guru Swami. The Christian ideology is basically rooted in Western patterns and customs. So the converts to Christianity identify Christianity with Westernisation. Hardgrave argues that the Nadars who changed their religious faith towards Christianity have adopted quickly the customs and cultural patterns of Christianity. This cultural change helped them to find a new identity.

The ideology of Islam is essentially egalitarian in nature. It provided the motive force for the relatively deprived sections of society to fight for their equal rights. The recent untouchable converts to Islam in Meenakshipuram also acquired a strong Muslim identity with the new ideology of social equality and universal brotherhood found in Islam. This change of identity has affected their social cultural

6.    M.S.A. Rao, Social Movements in India, vol., Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1978, p.192.

aspects.

## Relative Deprivation and Establishment of Identity

Relative deprivation has its origin in comparison. Relative deprivation is a sentiment that derives from the perception of inequalities. Sociologists think that the sense of inequality in society depends, to a large extent, on the choice of reference groups by members of different strata.[7] Thus the notion is based on the familiar fact that people's attitudes, and aspirations depend, to a great extent, on the frame of reference within which they are conceived. This reference group theory is useful in conceptualising and understanding caste mobility.

Merton says that reference group behaviour depends to a large extent on the social visibility of the norms prevailing in one's own and in other groups and on the extent to which the members of groups live up to their norms: "There must be patterned ways in which people become acquainted with the norms and activities in the groups which they select as evaluative and comparative frames of reference.[8]

M.S.A. Rao says that the leaders of a movement select

---

7.  Satyavart Pande, Relative deprivation among career Elites, Published by Sunita Prakashan, Lucknow, 1974, p.5.

8.  Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, Revised and Enlarged Edition, Glencoe III, 1957, p.351.

different elements of relative deprivation and combine them
in different ways to formulate an ideology. An important
part of the ideologies based on relative deprivation is
establishing identity in relation to other groups.[9]

In conversion movements also any group wanted to change
their identity through mass conversion had taken some kind
of reference group. In Dornakal Diocese of Andhra Pradesh
some lower castes converted to Christianity and established
a higher caste identity. This improved status of the group
served as a emulative model for the upper middle class Hindus
to follow the Christian faith. In South Travancore Sambavars
who are lower in status than the Nadars first converted to
Christianity and improved their position. Forrester says
this small scale Sembavar movement sparked off a massive
movement of Nadars into the Church.[10]

In the case of Meenakshipuram the landed upper class
Muslims served partly as a model of reference group for the
Harijan converts. The Muslim in that area are landlords
and engaged in business and acquired a recognised social
status. This status of Muslim may have attracted the poor
deprived Harijans. They might have had the feeling that
by changing identity as Muslim they would get employment

9.    M.S.A. Rao, op. cit., p.7.
10.   Duncan Forrester, Caste and Christianity: Attitudes &
      Policies on Caste of Anglo Saxon Protestant Missions
      in India, London, 1980, p.84.

opportunities in abroad, and equal status with the Muslims.

Thus Mass conversion essentially a search for new identity is based on relative deprivation. The greater the feeling of relative deprivation the sharper the sense of new social or religious identity. The groups or castes which seek mass conversion are relatively deprived in one form of another. The Nadars who were converted were completely dissatisfied with their earlier position. Before joining the new faith they had developed a sense of dissatisfaction with their old religious identity. So it has some reasons to believe that deprivation of one kind or another is a necessary condition for seeking new social identity. From this one can conclude that in a society where inequalities exist in a greater level will have more possibilities for the occurrence of mass conversion.

## Social Mobility

Mobility has been classified in terms of directions into three categories viz. upward, static and downward. Horizontal social mobility could be understood as a transition of an individual from one social group to another on the same level. By vertical social mobility is meant the relations involved in the transition of an individual from one social stratum to another.[11] In India individual was

---

11. Sachchidananda, The Harijan Elite: A Study of their Status, Networks, Mobility and Role in Social Transformation, Thompson Press (India) Ltd., 1977, p.95.

never as a unit of social mobility. Caste is often a unit
of social mobility. Even in the present social system an
individual can not do anything against the interests of his
caste members.

In Hindu society the upward mobility of the low caste
Hindus have been complicated because caste as a rigid form
of social stratification determined the social status of the
members of particular caste group. Yet attempts have been
made by many castes to move upward in the status scale.
These attempts ranged from fighting for position within the
caste cluster to imitation of higher caste and conversion
to another religion. So the struggle for upward mobility of
lower castes had given birth to many mass movements. M.S.A.
Rao says that an important mechanism of social mobility was
through the membership of new religious sects. Thus the
religious change of a group of people may also be viewed
as a new way of seeking enhanced status.

In few areas, we can also note, even after conversion,
the converts retained their old caste practices and they
are treated as the same as they were. M.N. Srinivas is of
the opinion that "conversion of the so called low castes to
Islam and Christianity in many parts of India was often
motivated by a desire to shed the odium attached to being
low. But the converts found that it was not at all easy to
shake off their caste and that in fact, they carried it with

them to their new faith".[12]

## Social Mobility of the Christian Converts

Scholars viz. Caldwell, Hardgrave, Pickett, Oddie, Richter and others have dealt with Christian conversion movements in India. The research evidences gathered by them have shown the upward mobility of the Christian converts. In brief they have summarised that there was a successful or remarkable growth in the social and moral stature of Christian converts. And the improvements has been most rapid and general in the case of depressed class Christian converts. Among them the Protestants in particular. The Christian Missions have been one of the most potent influences contributing to this result. Pickett's study shows that changes in social characteristics and standards and in the whole social pattern are taking place among groups that have embraced Christianity in mass conversion.[13] Forrester says Christianisation was only one of several alternative possibilities for a caste seeking to escape from a status and conditions deemed to be intolerable within the Hindu social structure.[14]

Converts to Christianity in Southern districts of Tamil Nadu are Sudras, formerly reckoned as low-caste, but now

12. M.N. Srinivas, "Mobility in the Caste Systems" in Milton Singer (ed.), Structure and Change in Indian Society, Addive Publishing Company, Chicago, 1968, p.194.

13. W. Pickett, Christian Mass Movements in India, The Abingdon Press, New York, 1933, p.127.

14. Forrester, op. cit., p.48.

regarded as one of the alert and progressive elements in those areas. Thurston holds the view that many Paraiyans in Tamil Nadu became converts to Christianity, and thereby rose in the social scale, and a freedom from the disabilities under which their lowly position in the social scale places them.[15]

It is interesting to note that social mobility provided by conversion led to upward filtration in some areas like the Anglican Dornakal diocese of Andhra Pradesh. The social mobility and the new identity acquired by the most oppressed groups worked as an incentive for the castes immediately above them to join the Christian Church.[16] Oddie also stated Christian mass movement in that region was primarily an agricultural and rural movement in many cases moving upward from the status of landless to that of tenants and landlords.[17] Pickett in his conclusion also remarked that in several areas where mass conversions of the depressed classes have taken places large number of higher classes are being converted.

In Kerala the situation is entirely different. There was little change in the outlook of Roman Catholic converts

---

15. Thurston, Caste and Tribes of South India, vol.VI, Government Press, Madras, p.130.

16. G.A. Oddie, "Christian conversion among non-Brahmins in Andhra Pradesh, with special reference to Anglican Missions and the Dornakal Diocese, 1900-1936" in G.A. Oddie (ed.), Region in South Asia, Curzon Press, London, 1977, p.80.

17. Ibid., p.80.

who came specially from the lower castes. In Kerala the
converts from higher castes were absorbed into the ranks of
Syrian Christians and the Mukkuvars (fishermen) from the
lower caste in coastal areas are referred to as Latin
Catholics. Many Pulayas, who were converted to Christians
were known as "Putu" Christians (Neo-Christians) and Pulaya
Christians.[18] The Syrian Christians were not prepared to
accept the Neo-Christians as equals. Separate Churches were
maintained for Syrian Christians and lower caste converts.
The Syrian Christians developed a psychological feeling
that they were far superior to those Christians converted
from the lower castes.

In some areas the higher castes' conversion to Christia-
nity has led to downward mobility of the converts. In Tamil
Nadu the converts from the privileged class met some kind
of persecution and harassment. The caste Hindus illtreated
and persecuted them in order to prevent further conversions.
For example the Vellalas (higher status agricultural caste)
who converted to Christianity were refused entrance into the
homes of their relatives. Hargrave also says that while the
Vellalas lost status by conversion, the Nadars gained status

_____

18. For detail, see K.C. Alexander, "Neo-Christians of
    Kerala" in M.J. Michael Mahar (ed.), The Untouchables
    in Contemporary India, Tueson, 1978, pp.155-70.

rising above their former position.[19]

## Nadars' attempt at Mobility through Christianity

The Nadars before their conversion to Christianity were socially oppressed and economically exploited group. They were placed in somewhere between the position of Sudras and Pallars. Caldwell described them as the highest division of the lowest class.[20]

Hardgrave noted that before their acquaintance with Christianity the Nadars in general were depraved in their morals and filthy in their habits.[21] They were defiled by their rituality impure calling as Toddy tappers. By remaining in Hinduism the Nadars could not move up in the status scale because of their low ritual purity. A large number of civic rights were denied to them by social sanctions. Some Nadars tried themselves to move upward by Sanskritising their ways of life. However, by doing so they could not succeed in moving upward in the status scale.[22]

The Nadars' Conversion to Christianity has served as a mechanism of upward social mobility of the whole Nadar

---

29. Hardgrave, Nadars of Tamil Nadu: The Political Culture of a Community in Change, op. cit., p.90.

20. Ibid., p.21.

21. Ibid., p.61.

22. Ibid., pp.65-88.

community. Census report of Madras says, "Shanars (Nadars) were a downtrodden race, under Christian teaching and enlightment their social position is vastly improved, and many of them, by their Christian training, have become educated, and now hold positions of influence and respectability".[23] Hardgrave made a study on Nadar mass movement has said Christianity "promoted their education and enlightment..... .....their position has been greatly improved, and many spheres of useful, remunerative and honourable labour which were formerly closed against them are now almost as open to them as to any other class in the country".[24]

The low ritual status of the Nadars in Hindu Society added to the deprivation of Nadars. In the first place, the Christianity provided the Nadars some kind of spiritual protection. Christianity provided them the opportunity of becoming priests, pastors. Therefore, the Nadars moved up in the ritual aspect which increased their self-respect and dignity.

The immediate effect of Nadars' conversion to Christianity was that many Nadars gave up the degraded profession of Toddy tapping and thereby gained social respect. It is important to note here the departure from traditional degraded occupation is an important character of upward

---

23. Madras Census Report, vol.I, 1971, p.315.
24. Pickett, op. cit., p.185.

social mobility. Pickett notes the acceptance of Christianity made many of the Nadars look down upon tapping of toddy which they have given up.[25]

The educational opportunities provided by missionaries served as the spring board enabling a great many Christians to become upwardly mobile. Among the Nadars, the English education provided by the Protestant missions contributed much to the upward mobility of the community indirectly through occupation and income. This mission education gave them a new level of confidence which was absent in their earlier generation. This new education taught the younger generation to appear decent in public. Thanks to the Mission education, they entered into various administrative and professional jobs especially in the teaching body.

The several material inducements by the Christian missions have also helped them to enhance their social status. In 1830 the Christian Mission in Tirunelveli established "Dharma Sangam" or Philosophical Society for the purchase of lands and houses for Nadar Converts.[26] Hardgrave noted that the L.M.S. and C.M.S. Missionaries sent a great many Nadar converts to Ceylon and Malaysia for plantation work on a higher wages. Compared to the Hindu Nadars in South Travancore and Tirunelveli, the

---

25. Ibid., p.141.

26. Hardgrave, op. cit., p.43.

Christian Nadars enjoyed a substantially improved position.[27]

The Missionaries represented the grievances of the Nadars to the government. Due to their effort, certain civil rights which were not hitherto conceded to the Nadar converts were secured. In 1813 Col Munro granted permission to the Nadar women converted to Christianity to cover their bosoms. A proclamation was issued on 29th June, 1814, exempting the Christians from paying the poll-tax. Thus, for the Nadars the process of conversion was an adaptive process of caste mobility.

## Social Mobility of Muslim Converts

As noted earlier Islam had won numerous converts from the lower ranks of society. Earlier in India, the people of particular caste group who were converted to Islam either by force or at their own will no doubt gained easily the status of upward mobility in a generation or two. Discrimination based on ritual purity and pollution is absent in Islam. In the case of converts to Islam, the egalitarian ideology of Islam brought about significant changes in the outlook of the converts by undermining the traditional rules of purity and pollution.

"Conversion to Mohammadanism", Logan writes, "has had

----

27. Ibid., p.54.

a marked effect in freeing the slave caste in Malabar from their former burthens. By conversion a Cheruman obtains a distinct rise in the social scale, and if he is in consequence bullied or beaten the influence of the whole Muhammadan community comes to his aid".[28]

Muslim community in Tamil Nadu is not a classless society. It is also divided into three main groups (Lebbais, the Rauters, and the Afganis) largely based on economic status.[29] But the inequality is not much practiced among the Tamil Muslims. Mattision Mines in his study on stratification among Muslim Tamils says, "Despite the recognition of a number of differentiation features among the Muslim sub-division, they are not hierarchically ranked castes........ There is no recognition of untouchability among the Muslim Tamils. In ideological terms, of course, the Muslim is highly egalitarian........ Muslim Tamils stress the importance of the Muslim brotherhood".[30]

## Social Mobility of Meenakshipuram Converts

Of course it is too early to make an assessment of the

---

28. Quoted from Thurston, Ethnographic notes in Southern India, op. cit., p.447.

29. Report of Backward Classes Commission, vol.II, 1970, p.41.

30. Mattison Mines, "Social stratification among Muslim Tamils in Tamil Nadu" in Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.), Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India, Manohar Publications, Delhi, 1978, pp.162-83.

mobility of the Meenakshipuram Harijan converts to Islam. Yet some press reports after directly observing the living social condition of Harijan converts to Islam since the time of conversion, have made some interesting facts relevant for the present study.

In fact the Harijans in Meenakshipuram wanted to secure their rights and an honourable place in society. With their conversion to Islam a few of their major aspirations have been fulfilled. Now they say that they have found an atmosphere of greater equality and brotherhood in Islam. They have been transported from the status of seum to Human beings. Somehow the Harijans in the village by their conversion to Islam overcome many of disabilities and have entered a new stage in their social and economic life.

At first the converts way of life have been Islamised and they underwent a cultural change. This changes of the life styles of the Harijan converts have been accepted by all Muslims and non-Muslims.

The Harijans of Meenakshipuram had felt insecurity in Hindu society. They have alleged that when they were in Hindu society, if any Harijan was killed by a caste Hindu there were no responses from the side of any Hindu organisation. They say that Islam provided shelter to them. Now they have found that the caste Hindus (Thevars) and the police do not have dare to touch them.

The Converts of Meenakshipuram have been assured of free education to their children by the Muslim organisations. It is appeared in the newspapers that many children of the converts were withdrawn from the local school and they have been sent to various places in the state to obtain Muslim culture and education. Thus there is a general feeling in many minds that their (converted Harijans) future generation will lead a happy and prosperous life.

In the religious status the converts were freed from its old restrictions and new religious freedom is achieved, old village diety is replaced by Mosques. Now there is no discrimination in the place of worship. The rich and poor Muslims mingle together on equal terms. After their conversion to Islam the new converts had a feeling that they are no more untouchables. "We can now walk with our heads high. We will be equal to others in society", said a converted Harijan in Kurayoor village.

In Meenakshipuram many of the converts have given up drinking and other bad habits. In support of this view a newspaper report says,[31] "The fact that there were no takers for a toddy shop in the region at a recent auction cited as evidence of their pledge to abstain from liquor".

By joining hands with the Muslims the Harijan converts

---

31. The Hindu (Madras), 22 Sept., 1982, p.5.

broke occupational restrictions and inhibitions. A concret[blacked out]

evidence for this was the Harijans after their conversion

refused to do the work of drum-beating in a ceremony held

at the village. Since the time of conversion most of them

do not work regularly in the field of caste Hindus any more.[32]

Some converts migrated to towns in search of new employment.

Some local Muslims too have provided them few jobs.

In Meenakshipuram cases of marital alliances between

the born Muslims and new Muslims have also taken place. A

rich Muslim merchant is reported to have offered his daughter

in marriage to a neo-Muslim.[33] Now in the recent mass

conversion to Islam, the Pallars have proved that an untoucha-

ble caste can move upward by changing their religious faith.

## Social Adaptation of Converts

Adaptation is nothing but an adjustment. The adjust-

ment is the psychological equivalent of adaptation which

emphasises the individuals struggle to get along with their

social and physical environments. Thus basically adaptation

or adjustment is a matter of problem-solving.

We can see a lack of integration between the untouch-

ables and caste Hindus in Hindu society. The same untouchables

---

32. Indian Express (New Delhi), 16th June, 1981, p.8.

33. Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 18th July, 1981, p.8.

after their conversion to Christianity or Islam find a close
interaction with their previous masters. The convert' new
interaction pattern in many cases reflected the vertical
mobility of the converts.

## Christian Converts in Interaction
## with Non-Christians

Many caste Hindus came forward to have a close contact
with the lower caste Christian converts. Oddie's mass
movement study in Telugu region has shown the new interaction
between the upper caste Hindus and untouchable converts to
Christianity.[34] He observed that in Telungana areas the
higher caste welcomed the Christian converts of Malas and
Madigas into their homes. They allowed their children to
mingle freely with the children of lower caste converts.
And the higher castes did not feel any hesitation in serving
or accepting food from the hands of Christians of untouchable
origin. There existed a happy relation between the higher
caste Hindus and lower caste Christian converts.

In Nagercoil area Christian Nadars readapted themselves
to the changed situation. Pickett[35] who surveyed some mass
movement affected villages in Nagercoil area says that the
Nadar Christians of Nagercoil are among the cleanest people

---

34. Oddie, op. cit., pp.50-52.

35. Pickett, op. cit., p.128.

of their villages, and very decidedly cleaner than the masses
of non-Christian Nadars around them. So the new interaction
between these people may be explained as a result of the
distinct improvement found among the new converts.

## Muslims in Interaction with Non-Muslims

In some villages of Ramenathapuram, Madurai and Tirunel-
veli there is striking evidence of a remarkable degree of
adaptation to the changes in dress, food habits and worship
warranted by the conversion to the new faith. This cultural
change of the converts brought them into new interactional
situation with the outside world. Now the Harijan converts
have found that the attitude of caste Hindus towards them
tended to change to a large extent. By converting en-masse
into Islam the danger of persecution at the hands of caste
Hindus has been reduced to the minimum. The converts often
alleged that previously the caste Hindus treated them as
second class citizens. But after their conversion to Islam
they are being treated as human beings.[36] Now all civic
rights are opened to them. Earlier the Harijans were not
permitted to carry the dead along the main road. After the
conversion, when an old woman died in the village, the
Muslims of nearby villages came to Meenakshipuram, took the
body in procession to the mosque and buried her there.

---

36. The Hindu (Madras), 1st March 1982, p.6.

In the past in Meenakshipuram the caste Hindus had
no contact with the Harijans or their interaction with the
Harijans was limited to the occupational sphere and to some
social functions where the service of Harijans was required.
But now the situation has changed to a large extent.

# CHAPTER IV

## SOCIAL CONFLICT AND ITS MANIFESTATION: SOME EVENTS

One would not be able to understand the group conversion without refering to some events and conflicts which struck the village. By analysing social events and conflicts we can give a better picture about the influence of social factors on religious sentiments. Here it is assumed that conflicts and conversions are closely interrelated and the former is the cause of the latter. The conflict is further intensified by some events. Mass conversion is a reaction towards a series of events.

Every event that occurred in Meenakshipuram made awakened the consciousness of the Harijans of their position in society. As a result they made a conscious rejection of Hinduism. Karl Marx noted that it is not the consciousness of the individuals which determines their existence but, it is rather social existence which determines their consciousness.[1] Sociologists and psychologists cannot deny that certain people react according to their immediate social and physical environments. Meenakshipuram Harijan conversion is a glaring example to substantiate the above statements.

---

1. Quoted by Chaiman, *Caste, Status and Power*, Classical Publishers, New Delhi, 1980, p.134.

## The Concept of Conflict

Coser defines social conflict as "a struggle over values and clashes to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals.[2]

Conflicts are bound to occur where there is too much clash of interests. If there is a clash of interests then there is violence and consequently social change. In the individual level conflict disintegrates society. But group level it binds individuals together. Conflict may produce ties as well as divide people. Conflict is an important element of social interaction. It had been viewed as a fundamental and constructive part of social organisation.

Simmel[3] sees conflict as a part of the dynamic by which some men are drawn together into groups. Simmel's concern is mainly with the functions, rather than dysfunctions of social conflict. In a sense Simmel justifies his statement when a Harijan convert in Meenakshipuram says, "They (Harijans of Meenakshipuram) wanted to embrace Islam a long back. But they could not do it. There was lack of unity among themselves. The recent happenings (Harijan

---

2. Lewis Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict, Free Press, Glencoe, 1956, p.8.

3. George Simmel, Conflict and the Web of Group affiliations, Free Press, Glencoe, 1955.

caste Hindu conflicts) in the village helped them to unite as a body and take unanimous decision of embracing Islam".[4] Here the conflict served as a factor or unity for the Harijans of Meenakshipuram.

## Harijan Versus Caste - Hindus in Tamil Nadu

In the past the Harijans did not engage in open conflict with the caste-Hindus. The Harijans absolutely depended upon the caste-Hindus for their livelihood. Moreover Harijans accepted the Hindu social order as divinely ordained. Unlike the earlier generations now the Harijan youths are more sensitive of their rights.

The attitude of the caste Hindus towards the Harijans had become increasingly hostile. It is widely published by the press that atrocities on the Harijans have been increasing in Tamil Nadu. The reasons for the increase are well known. The Harijans get some concessions guaranteed under the Constitution. As a result the Harijans are made aware. They have begun to ascertain their rights. A slight improvement in the status of the Harijans has produced the sense of deprivation among the caste Hindus belonging to middle class. Mukherjee[5] undertook a study of inter-caste

---

4. The Hindu (Madras), 27 May, 1981, p.8.

5. Radha Kamal Mukherjee, Inter-caste Tension, University of Lucknow, 1951.

tension. He interprets caste tension in terms of changes in
the traditional pattern of social status within the Hindu
community.

In the past few years Tamil Nadu witnessed a wide
occurrence of social tensions and conflicts between the
Harijans and the caste Hindus. This made Harijans to think
of conversion. It may be viewed that the real causes of
conflicts are the real causes of conversion of Harijans.

Taking the state as a whole, conflicts and tensions
prevail between Thevars and Harijans in the Southern districts,
between Vanniyars and Harijans in northern districts and
between Gounders and Harijans in the western districts.
Unlike other states, in Tamil Nadu most of the conflicts
have occurred in the social sphere. Eve-teasing has been
often the cause of clashes involving Harijans and non-
Harijans in Tamil Nadu. These clashes have taken a toll of
40 lives since 1978, of them 34 Harijans.[6]

Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram districts need special
mention here. Many of the mass conversions have taken
place in these two districts. The incidence of offences
against the Harijans in these two districts have also been
high. These places have a notorious tradition of Harijan

--------

6.   Times of India (New Delhi), 23 June, 1982, p.5.

oppression. By the end of the 19th century, Tirunelveli
had the greatest number of Christians in Madras Presidency
and one of the reasons for the Nadars to embrace Christianity
was the urge to escape from social oppression. According
to the Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Castes and
Scheduled Tribes, 90 per cent of total number of artocities
on Harijans that occurred in Tamil Nadu in 1976 took place
in Tirunelveli and adjoining districts, in that year there
was a 200 per cent increase of such incidents.[7] Just
before the Harijan conversions, these two districts had
been the scene of clashes and violence.

In the end of July 1978 there was a serious violence
flared up in Villuppuram near Madras between the Harijans
and the caste Hindus. This led to the death of 12 Harijans,
arson, looting of Harijans' belongings. The reason was
said to be the teasing of a Harijan girl by a caste Hindu,
a merchant.[8] Following the Villuppuram incident attacks
on Harijan villages have been reported from various parts
of Tamil Nadu. A Newspaper report alleged the situation
in Villuppuram worsened due to Police inaction.

On 20th August 1978 at Palani in Madurai district one

---

7. George Mathew, "Politicisation of Religion: Conversions
   to Islam in Tamil Nadu", Economic and Political Weekly,
   14, 1982, p.102.

8. Patriot (New Delhi), 25 August, 1978, p.7.

couple from a minority community was taken into police
custody without assigning any reason. The husband was
beaten to death and his wife was molested and tortured in
the police lock-up. Thousands of Harijans gathered before
the Palani police station and staged a protest demonstration
demanding a judicial probe into the incident. The police
let loose repression and resorted to lathi charge and
teargassing to disperse the demonstration. People took
out a procession protesting the police atrocity and killing
in the lock-up. The police lathi charged this peaceful
demonstration also.[9]

Kovil Koodam Village in Thanjavur district was subjected
to an attack on July 12, 1979. Thirty three houses of the
Harijans were burnt down. Almost all the means of livelihood
of the Harijans were taken away by the caste Hindus. The
trouble started when the caste Hindus tried to prevent the
Harijans from using a village path way.[10]

Tholar, a Harijan village in South Arcot was attacked
on 6th August 1981 by a mob of about 3,000 caste Hindus from
nearby eleven villages. About 185 houses were burnt down.
Loss of property was officially estimated at Rs.6 lakhs.
Reason - a Harijan girl of the colony, was molested by a

9.  Patriot (New Delhi), 26 August, 1978, p.3.

10. New Age (New Delhi), 22 July, 1979, p.8.

Vanniya youth and the Harijans' protest against the incident
led to the tension.[11]

In Kachani village in Paramakudi Taluk of Ramanathapuram
district, 52 Harijan houses were attacked on the night of
April 12, 1981 and properties looted. The arson followed
refusal by a Harijan boy to remove his chappals while passing
through the/Hindu area.[12] Harijans of Ettuvayal village
near Chatrakudi in Ramanathapuram district embraced Islam
on 16th August 1981. This village was the scene of Harijan –
non-Harijan clashes in April which led to police firing.[13]

Seven Harijans lost their lives in clashes with the
Thevars and another few in police firing in Puliyankudi
village in Tirunelveli district on 12 June 1982.[14] The
reason is very simple. The Thevars tried to erect a welcome
arch in the Harijan sector to welcome a Gnana Ratham. Since
the Thevars had not allowed the Harijans to approach near
Hindu temples, the Harijans objected to erect the arch.
So tension was built up which led to the violence. Later
the victims (Harijans approached South Indian Islamic Society

11. Indian Express (New Delhi), 8 August, 1981, p.6.

12. Times of India (New Delhi), 4 July, 1981, p.3.

13. The Statesman (New Delhi), 17 August, 1981, p.9.

14. The Statesman (New Delhi), 13 June, 1982, p.6.

for their mass conversion.

There was a conversion threat came from about 2500
Harijans who were all employees of Reactor Research Centre
at Kalpakkam and the Madras Atomic Power Plant on August
1, 1981. Their decision was said to be the result of
attacks on a few Harijan employees by the caste Hindu
employers.[15]

## Events and Conflicts in Meenakshipuram

Meenakshipuram conversion is also an outcome of a
long standing caste-struggle. Prior to the Harijan conver-
sion, there had been caste rivalry and tension in Meenakshi-
puram. The Thevars had been troubling the Harijans of
Meenakshipuram since from a long time. A Newspaper
reporting from South says that Meenakshipuram has a 20 year
old history of acute caste Hindu-Harijan tension.[16] There
were sporadic incidents in the last two or three years.

Meenakshipuram conversion coincided with the clashes
going on in Ramanathapuram town and in surrounding areas.

The Parliamentary Committee in its study on Meenakshi-
puram conversion has said that "atrocities committed by
the police on the Harijans of Meenakshipuram hastened the

---

15. Indian Express (New Delhi), 2 August, 1981, p.3.
16. Hindu (Madras), 15 June, 1981, p.7.

process of conversion from Hinduism to Islam.[17] A convert says, "It is not poverty that made us to switch over to Islam. The continuous harassment of caste Hindus and the frequent police raid in the village have made us to change our faith".[18]

## Event I:

Thankaraj, a Harijan youth of Meenakshipuram, who eloped with a Thevar girl of Mekkarai, 7 kilometers away from Meenakshipuram. To escape the wrath of Thevars, he got himself converted to Islam in 1977 and took on the name of Mohammed Yusuf. The Thevars became angry. As a result violence between the Harijan and the caste Hindus broke up in the village.[19]

## Event II:

It seems that there had been a counterfeit currency racket in which a Harijan youth was allegedly involved. This was discovered by two Thevars. Later these two were found murdered. Since the Harijan youth was from Meenakshipuram the caste Hindus suspected that his accomplices hailed from Meenakshipuram. Thus police cases were implicated on Harijans of the village. Following the

17. Statesman (New Delhi), 20 September, 1981, p.5.

18. Hindu (Madras), 15 June, 1981, p.7.

19. Statesman, 22 June, 1981.

incident regular police raids began in Meenakshipuram. A
convert reports, "Ever since the murder, the police have
been raiding the village regularly, and taking away villagers
(Harijans). They have returned with broken bones and severe
beatings. There is nothing we can do because police are
in the hands of the Thevars".[20] According to some Harijan
youths following the death of Thevars the Harijan men and
women were stripped and beaten up by the Thevars. A Harijan
woman's nipple was cut off.

Event III:

Some educated Harijan youths of Meenakshipuram exposed
two Thevars of a nearby village who had been collecting
donations and fattening themselves in the name of the
Thiruvaduthurai Adheenam, which owned most of the land in
the village.[21] So the Harijans earned displeasure of the
Thevars. The Thevars retaliated against the Harijans which
led to severe tension.

Event IV:

Following the above incidents there occurred a chain
of events. A Harijan opened a tea stall. This was said
to be pulled down by the Thevars with the help of police

---

20. Sunday (Weekly), 16th August, 1981, p.22.

21. Dina Malar Tamil Daily, 13 March, 1981, p.3.

personnel. In another incident a Harijan's attempt to
open a shop was challenged by the Thevars. These minor
incidents added fuel to the fire.

With this background we are in a better position to
understand the upsurge of Harijan conversion to Islam.
The above incidents clearly indicate that the atrocities
committed by the caste Hindus on one side and the police
harassment on the other hand have forced the Harijans to
take up the decision of embrassing Islam.

The frequent violence against the Harijans by the
caste Hindus and the police created a tension and a sense
of insecurity in the minds of Harijans. Therefore they
searched for security. Muslim provided them security. It
is clear from a press statement that whenever the caste
Hindus committed atrocities on the Harijans in the village,
Muslims helped them. It is also obvious that the Harijans
realised that with their limited resources they could not
fight against the injustice. Therefore the Harijans
ultimately took religion as a means to achieve their ends.
So the present conversion to Islam represents the Harijans
revenge against the caste-Hindus.

## Conflict in Kanyakumari District

Kanyakumari district recorded a less number of conflicts
between the caste Hindus and the Harijans. But numerous

disputes arose and they were between the upper sudra castes
(such as Nairs, Vellalas etc.) and the lower sudra castes
(Nadars, Paravars).

The Pallars and the Paraiahs of Kanyakumari district
never protested against the oppression of the ruling class.
These two groups in the district absolutely depended upon
the caste Hindus. In this particular district even today
the Harijans live in utmost harmony with the caste Hindus.
That is why the paraiahs of Kanyakumari district were
seldom interested in mass movements.

There were disputes between the Nadars and few higher
castes in Kanyakumari district even before the arrival of
the Protestant Missionary.[22] The Nadars conflict with the
higher castes strained the history of social relations
in Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli district. The Nadar community
advanced in prosperity began to claim certain human rights
which they had been denied by the higher castes for centuries.

In Kanyakumari the foremost issue of the Nadars was
the "breast-cloth controversy". The so called upper castes
resented the claims of the Nadars. The Nairs and the
Vellalas in the district desired to maintain their inherited
social position. This attitude led to disputes which ended

---

22. R.N. Jesudas, A People's Revolt in Travancore, Manju
Publishing House, Trivandrum, 1975, p.3.

in violent clashes involving arson and killing.

In the first place the Nadars of Kanyakumari considered the restrictions regarding dress as a sort of insult and humiliation.[23] Therefore the deprived Nadars led an agitation against the privileged class. The Nadar women started wearing upper garments. The trouble started. The first disturbances occurred in May 1922 in Kalkulam Taluk.[24] Nadar women who appeared in decent dress were mocked, stripped and abused by the upper castes.

In Tirunelveli also the Nadars' several attempts to improve their social position have brought them into open conflict with the Thevars. In this area the Maravars took objection to the Nadars even wearing foot wears.[25] Nadars they demanded equality with the Thevars, the privileged class. But this desire was thwarted from all sides by the privileged classes. So they became restless. The frustrated Nadars adopted Sanskritisation to improve their status. Hardgrave says that "some of the Nadars began to tie their dhoties in the fashion of Brahmin, to wear the tuft, and a few became vegetarian. The process of sanskritisation in Sivakasi was accelerated, antagonising

23. Ibid., p.27.

24. Ibid., p.54.

25. Robert L. Hardgrave, "The Nadars of Tamil Nadu,"op. cit., p.112.

the Maravars and Vellalas.[26]

As a result organised attacks were made on a number
of Nadar villages; the inhabitants were assailed, houses
were burnt, and property was looted.

The most serious occurrence was the attack on Sivakasi
in 1899 by a body of over 5,000 Maravars. Twenty-two
Murders, 102 dacoities, and many cases of arson were
registered, 552 were convicted, 7 being sentenced to death.
During this disturbance some of the Nadars are said to have
gone in Mohammedan fold.[27] There were many clashes among
them in other areas which had led to mass conversion to
Christianity. The important one was the riot in Kazhuguma-
lai in the last decade of 19th century. At this time many
Nadars turned to Christianity.

Recently in Kanyakumari district, outrage and violence
took place between the Hindus and Christians. The recent
outbreak at Mandaikkadu, 20 km. away from Nagercoil, was
quite serious in the history of Kanyakumari district. The
'Masi Festival' of Baghawathi Amman temple at Mandaikkadu
is celebrated every year. In March 1982 during the
festival six fishermen were killed in police firing.

---

26. Ibid., p.112.

27. E. Thurston, Caste and Tribes of Southern India,
    Government Press, Madras, 1909, p.364.

There were several reasons for this tragic event. The
R.S.S. (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) on its side claims
that while some pilgrims were taking bath in the Sea, some
fishermen molested and assaulted six women devotees.[28]
However, the fishermen say that they did not prevent the
pilgrims from the ritualistic bath and never did they
molest any women as alleged.

A close examination of these two reports reveals the
fact that the cause of Mandaikkadu incident was not locally
rooted. The incident at Mandaikkadu was just the reflec-
tion of the restlessness of past experience. However, this
incident became a matter of greater importance when it
influenced the rest of the population in the district.
Following the incident at Mandaikkadu, for nearly six
months, the entire district was in the grip of mounting
tension. This tension brought in its wake a series of
conflicts all over the district. The Hindus took out a
large religious procession in Nagercoil. In protest against
the incident the Christians also held a procession. On the
whole, the incident at Mandaikkadu paved a way for communal
violence in the district.

This communal violence in the district has affected

---

28. Thughlak (Tamil Fortnightly), 15 March, 1982, p.25.

not only the law and order problem but also affected the
social life of the members of the two religious communities.
Even meritorious students of Hindu Community were refused
admission in the Christian Colleges and so was the case
with the Christian who sought admission in the Hindu Colleges.

This frequent communal conflict makes the individuals
to become more fanatical. As a consequence more proselyti-
sing spirit arose in the minds of the followers of a
particular faith.

Hindu Missionary Activities

The various Hindu religious leaders now concentrate
their attention on the two Southernmost districts viz.,
Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli. It has been observed that this
is due to a sudden rise in the non-Hindu population, especia-
lly Christians and Muslims in the district. The Hindu
missionaries have felt that the increasing influence of
these two religions in these districts is a threat to
Hinduism. To forestall further conversions the Hindu leaders
are carrying out all possible means.

As a reaction to Christian expansion in Kanyakumari
district, the R.S.S. became well established. Today they
have 110 Shakas, the highest for such a small area with a

relatively small Hindu population.[29] Some are functioning
in the name of Hindu Ilaignar Munnani (Youth Wing of R.S.S.).
The main organisational activity of this youth section is
to halt the spread of these religions (Christianity and
Islam) by confrontation. The leaders of this progressive
wing organise youth and children who are given militant
training. The propagation of Hindu faith is also being
carried out by this militant section. In Tirunelveli
district, this youth organisation is trying its level best
to pull back the converted Harijans.

Newspapers have reported that soon after the conversions
in Tamil Nadu the leaders of various Mutts, representatives
of Arya Samaj and Vishwa Hindu Parishad and R.S.S. members
hurried to the places to stem the tide of mass conversion.
The Hindu leaders have called upon caste Hindus to take a
pledge to preserve harmony and treat Harijans as equals.
Padayatras (journeys on foot), conferences, bohjanam (feast)
were held in which Hindu leaders invited all the caste Hindus
and Harijans to take part.

Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam visited the
villagers and he made provocative speeches in Meenakshipuram.

_____

29. For detail of R.S.S. activities in Kanyakumari district,
    see George Mathew, "Communal Conflict in Kanyakumari",
    Social Action, A Quarterly Review of Social trends,
    Indian Social Institute, Oct.-Dec., 1983, vol.33, No.4,
    pp.27-40.

He stated in a meeting that mass conversion could endanger the security and integrity of the country. He also advised the Harijans that religious conversion was no remedy to their problems.[30] He expressed his view that conversion to Islam is more dangerous than conversion to Christianity.[31] He also called for forming a new "Hindu Sahodhara Abivrudhi Sangam" to provide a common platform to all sections of Hindus to discuss their problems.

On July 27, 1981, the Viswa Hindu Parishad arranged a two day Hindu Solidarity Conference in Ramanathepuram and Tirunelveli. The leaders of this organisation expressed their concern over the issue of conversion and hoped that such conversions would not take place in future dates.

---

30. Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 11 August, 1981.

31. Times of India (New Delhi), 31 July, 1981.

# CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

The depressed castes are taking to conversion as a last resort, since all other attempts to social equality have failed. Several efforts made in the past to change or even end the caste system have had little success. Despite efforts made by people of goodwill right from Mahatma Buddha down to Mahatma Gandhi, the situation remains unchanged. We have seen that the depressed castes' attempt at mobility through Sanskritisation also did not register any notable success. Consequently a movement which could have given the 'depressed castes' some hope of liberation within the Hindu fold died out. It can be said that their battle against untouchability did not give them fruitful result.

They have realised that there was no emancipation for them so long as they remained a part of the Hindu society. If they wanted liberation, they had to look for it outside the Hindu fold. Hence the depressed castes have started a new form of social protest. The social protest has assumed the form of conversion. The novel form of protest is indeed very infectious. Even at present, conversions are being reported from Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli districts of Tamil Nadu.

Viewed against this background, conversion in Tamil Nadu

can not be called real conversions. In the introductory chapter the concept of conversion has been defined. We have seen that genuine conversion is always an individual act, arrived at after much soul-searching.

To sum up in the case of present conversion of Harijans in Tamil Nadu there are two levels of explanations.

1. Conversion is for social equality,

2. Conversion is for temporal advantages.

Those who argued for the first are try to find out the root cause within the Hindu society itself. They have pointed out the continued illtreatment of Harijans by the caste Hindus coupled with the police atrocities.

The supporters of second explanation trace the origin of the conversion to material benefits. They have pointed out the inflow of foreign money from oil rich Arab countries.

In order to clarify the above doubts, in the second chapter we have dealt with how does Hindu society deal with the Harijans, particularly in conversion-affected districts. We have seen that the Hindu society is responsible for the alienation of the depressed castes.

In this study we have observed that in Meenakshipuram the caste Hindus had a strained relationship with the Harijans. By contrast the relationship between the Muslims and the

Harijans was cordial. This is further reinforced by the admission of the converted youths that the Muslims treated them as their brothers, gave them equal rights, and never did any harm to any Harijan in the village. Ultimately the Harijans had developed a negative attitude towards the caste Hindus (Thevars) and a positive attitude on the Muslims. This feeling of the Harijans had played a significant role in their conversions.

The present 'conversion issue has been discussed in the Parliament and in the State Legislative Assembly. Some politicians who were really interested in the problem did go to the field and enquired into the problems of the Harijans there. Subramaniya Swami visited the conversion-affected areas and interviewed personally some of the converts and the non-converts. He comments the reported mass conversion in Tamil Nadu is a vote of no confidence of Harijans towards Hindu society.[1]

The outcome of Parliamentary debate on this issue was that a twenty-one member Parliamentary Study Team was constituted to probe into the issue of conversion.

The Committee members toured the conversion-affected areas and tabled its report in both the Houses of Parliament

---

1. Subramaniya Swamy, Tamil Nadu Conversion, 16 August (Sunday), 1981.

on 15th September 1981.

The Study Group stated that whereever the Members had gone they informed the following were the main reasons that promoted Harijans to embrace Islam: 1. Atrocities committed by the Caste Hindus; 2. Atrocities committed by the Police; and 3. Economic backwardness and social disabilities.

The Committee also observed that -

Meenakshipuram, which was the recent scene of mass conversion, is situated among three Muslim Villages and was therefore having considerable impact of Muslim culture. The study team also confirmed that mass conversion was followed by a feast and the present of Muslim League M.P. and Muslim M.L.A. Having observed all these things the Parliamentary Committee in its report summed up that conversion of Scheduled Castes in Meenakshipuram was done in an organised way.[2]

In the State Legislative Assembly meeting the opposition political leaders in Tamil Nadu took this as a great opportunity to find fault with the ruling political party. The D.M.K. members in the Assembly voiced concern over the maladministration of M.G.R. government. They stated that the various concessions granted to the Harijans were not

--------

2. Statesman (new Delhi), 20 September, 1981, p.6.

being properly implemented. It seems that they clouded the fact that a D.M.K. party Muslim M.L.A. took keen interest in converting the Harijans of Meenakshipuram.

Not surprisingly the various Hindu religious leaders reacted against the conversion. They all felt that the mass conversion in the state was mainly due to the influx of foreign money particularly from Muslim countries. They appealed to the government to enact strict laws prohibiting the influx of foreign money for religious propagation in India. They also wanted the government to punish the anti-social elements (according to their terms) who are involved in doing proselytising activities by means of fraud and force.

However, with the effort of the various Hindu religious leaders the state government introduced a new scheme of "Sama Bandhi Bohjanam" (dinner based on equality). This feast was conducted in all the major Hindu temples all over Tamil Nadu in which the caste Hindus invited Harijans into the temples and took food with them.

There has been some debate in the press and some other quarters in India about the nature of this phenomenon, about the factors underlying it and about the way it should be tackled. But, quite understandably, the major emphasis in this debate has been on the immediate causes which include:

Monetary and other inducement, political motivation, police
high-handedness or inaction, ill-treatment of Harijans,
perpetuation of the caste system and failure to end social
inequality.

Above all there is every indication that the conversions
are primarily and principally a form of protest from Harijans
against the various social disabilities and injustices which
high caste Hindus continue to inflict on them. In almost
all personal interviews (done by the social enthusiasts)
the converts referred to this aspect. In the fourth chapter
also we have seen that in many cases the caste Hindus
purposefully committed atrocities on the Harijans and in
some cases for Trivial issues the Harijans were beaten up
by them; the police officials connived at this. According
to some journalists the mass conversion in Tamil Nadu grew
up as a social revolt. Some other writers, in the Newspaper
editorials, viewed it as a real struggle against the vested
interests.

Ambedkar rejected the principle that the people should
enmasse change faith solely for 'spiritual' reasons. He
made an impassioned and persistent plea for mass conversions
for 'secular' reasons also. It may be noted that conversion
programme was one concrete component of his two-fold secular
approach to achieve a very secular objective, viz., promotion

of the welfare of the Harijans, the other component being
to obtain for the Harijans certain preferential, political
and economic concession.[3]

In this manner we can see a considerable similarity
exists between Harijan conversions to Islam in 1981 and
Mahars conversion to Buddhism in 1956 in Maharashtra. To
some extent the conversion in Tamil Nadu is for secular
reasons. The Harijans from Hindu society would like to
form an egalitarian society. They have asserted their
freedom of choice in the area of religion.

It is also necessary to emphasise here that the
present constitution did not bar any one from embracing
or preaching any religion. The Constitution guarantees
the citizens the right freely to follow the religion of
their choice. Our Constitution says:

> "Article 25(1) Subject to Public Order, morality and
> health and to the other provisions of this part, all
> persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience
> and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate
> religion.
>
> (2) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation
> of any existing law or prevent the state from making

---

3.    Dev Dutt, "Conversions: A View Point", Manthan, A
      Quarterly Journal of Deendayal Research Institute,
      May 1982, New Delhi, p.42.

any law,

(a) Regulating or restricting any economic, financial, or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice;

(b) Providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.

Article 26. Subject to public order, morality and health, every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have the right -

(a) to establish and maintain institution for religious and charitable purposes;

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

(c) to own and acquire movable and immovable property;

and (d) to administer such property in accordance with law.

Article 27. No person shall be compelled to pay any taxes, the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination .*[4]

In India certain religious organisations are actively

---

4. Quoted from P.D. Deevanadhan, "Dravida Kashagam: A Protest against Brahminism," C.I.S.R.S., 1959, p.24.

involved in non-religious activities. We can see the various
Hindu, Christian and Muslim organisations becoming more
active not only in religious but also in political affairs.
The Ishat-ul-Islam Sabha, set up some 20 years ago in
Tirunelveli is known to be under the control of pro-Muslim
League section. Like that the R.S.S. is led by the Bharatiya
Janata Party.

It can also be said that various non-religious organi-
sation are much influenced and do religious activities. In
India many educational institutions are controlled by the
religious groups. The consequence is that education which
is supposed to preserve the ideas of secularism rather
induces religious feelings and aspirations among the people.

(1) The government should stop registering the name of
caste, religion of candidates seeking admission and appoint-
ments in public institutions.

(2) The various reservations and concessions concerning
admission and appointments in government institutions that
are now being granted on the basis of caste, religion etc.
should be changed to the income level.

(3) The government should take steps to place a ban on
opening of any public institution in the name of a particular
religion or caste. For example, Hindu College, Christian
College, Nadar College etc.

(4) The government may also enact laws against the incoming of foreign money directly to the religious organisations for various purposes. Provisions should be made that the money should come through proper channel.

Apart from all the above mentioned solutions in course of the present study the author feels that so long as caste domination and caste feelings exist in the minds of the individuals, mass conversions will be a recurrent phenomenon in our society. Thus the only permanent solution to the problem is that Hindu society must reform itself down to its very roots. And it needs full co-operation and changes in the minds of caste Hindus towards the untouchables.

Many people did not bother about the number of converts and the reference to religion. They are interested only in knowing whether conversion has brought any revolutionary change in the position of Harijans. Our study shows conversions definitely brought some changes in the status of the converts. As far as Nadars are concerned Christianity helped them to change their status. After the Nadars' conversion the social stigma attached to them has disappeared. Their status rose to such an extent that it created jealousy and antagonism among the caste Hindus. In general, in Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli districts the converted Nadars became economically sound and cultural progressive.

In the third chapter we also analysed changes in the
life style of the converted Harijans of Meenakshipuram. We
have found that Harijans after becoming Muslims they are
no longer subjected to humiliation or illtreatment. Now
they are giving maximum attention to education and neatness.
It instills in them a new sense of confidence, and raises
high their level of aspiration.

On the basis of the present study the author finds that
mass conversion is the outcome of several circumstances
and not due to the religious factor alone. We have seen
that motives of mass conversion are strongly mixed. On the
basis of the present study the rise of any conversion move-
ment is predicted.

(a) Social awareness: A movement requires an increasing
awareness of the individuals who participate in the movement.
The awareness is the major cause of commitment to a particular
action. It stimulates the individuals a desire to improve
their social position. The awareness the individuals get
through various means. The awareness is further reinforced
by the modernisation process. The ideology of modernization
generates tension in society and it facilitates changes in
the value system in society. Hence the individuals are
forced to fight against the established tradition and customs.
The consequence is crisis in society at lower levels.

Conversion movement is an outcome of a direct competition between the forces of tradition and modernisation.

(b) Perception of deprivation: Conversion movement may be explained in terms of reaction to deprivation and help-lessness. The deprivation produces the feeling of alienation which is a necessary pre-requisite for a conversion movement. We have seen in the third chapter that deprivation is common to all social class viz. upper, middle and lower classes. As have pointed out in the third chapter some upper middle class people in Andhra Pradesh and in Tamil Nadu chose conversion only after noticing distinct improvement or progress in the life of the lower caste converts to Christianity. In general the lower middle class people are more deprived than the others. That is why mass conversions have been confined mostly to the castes which occupy marginal position in the status scale. How do the depressed castes perceive deprivation needs further research. Such study will/helpful in understanding some important aspects of conversion movements. We have seen that the mission education was an important area which enabled to overcome their deprivation. It can be said that the present consti-tutional privileges have helped the Harijans to become educationally and economically advanced. Despite this advancement the Harijans are not able to achieve the social equality with the caste Hindus in Hindu society. As a result

they feel more dissatisfied with their position. Ultimately
the religion has become a social leveller for the Harijans.
Conversion movement can therefore be seen as one possible
response to relative deprivation.

(c) Emergence of leadership: Leadership is a must for
a movement. Since mass conversion emerges as a protest
movement it also requires appropriate leadership. Collective
mobilisation is possible through leadership. The role of
the leadership is significant not only in the national and
state levels but also in the village level.

The Ezhavas in Kerala could not have been mobilised
unless Narayana Guru Swami gave the leadership. It may be
remembered that the Dravida Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu gained
strength under the leadership of E.V. Rama Swami Naicker.
The A.I.A.D.M.K. (Political Party) in Tamil Nadu continues
to hold the political power because of the able political
leadership of M.G. Ramachandran. We have seen that thousands
of Harijan from Mahar community embraced Buddhism in
Maharashtra. Ambedkar was their trusted leader. The
Mahars had implicit belief in his understanding and wisdom.
It was an act of faith, not in the Buddha, but in Ambedkar.

As far as the Nadars are concerned, in Kanyakumari
as well as in Tirunelveli District, the Christian Missiona-
ries provided the leadership. In the second chapter we

have seen that how the missionaries brought the Nadars into their fold. In the case of Meenakshipuram conversion the lead was given by the educationally and economically advanced section of the Harijans in that area.

(e) Positive activities of a religious group: Another pre-condition for a mass conversion is propagation or proselytising activities of a religious group. Mass conversion can not be brought about without the active effort of some external agency.

In the history of Christian mass movements one can note wherever the missionaries did their proselytising activities there arose a mass movement of the natives. It is also equally important the missionaries choose people for their proselytising activities. In Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli districts the target of Protestant missionaries was the Nadars. The Catholic Missionaries in the beginning concen-trated their work on Paravars. As a result a massive movement among the Nadars and Paravars arose in these two districts. The recent conversions in Tamil Nadu also partly due to the influence of Muslim organisations that had been working in that area.

The inflow of converts into Hinduism is very little. First of all Hindu society has the inherent weakness of caste system and apart from these the propagation of Hindu

religion is weak. Moreover since from the beginning the leaders of Hindu organisations take effort to prevent conversion and very little effort is made to purify the Hinduism and propagation of the faith.

Material Incentives: The interests of material gain also presence in the minds of the converts. The main aim of the converts is better prospect in their life. The affluent religions offer some kind of material help to the converts. This is also act as an inducement for others to follow the faith. But it is wrong to assume that mass conversion is always an outcome of tangible benefits. However, it may be considered as one of the motives which drive people to change their religious faith.

From this one can say that the Harijans' idea of changing faith is rooted in Hinduism. The acceptance of a particular religion depends upon the material power and the practical activities of that religious group.

The fact that conversion has attracted exceptional attention of the government, political parties, bureaucrats, intellectuals, parliamentarians, and journalists besides religious leaders shows that religion is not just a matter of spirituality or ultimate concern of man, but is linked with his social, economic, cultural and political conditions.

We may investigate in to the following areas of research in future.

i. Roles and activities of regional and National political parties in the conversion movements.

ii. Exploration of underlying economic and social causes in the conversion of Harijans despite the governmental privileges granted to them.

iii. A comparative study of conversion movements taking place in different parts of the country.

## Socio-Demographic Data of Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu is situated at the eastern side of the southern extremity of the Indian Peninsula. Bounded on the north by Mysore and Andhra Pradesh, on the east by the Bay of Bengal, on the south by the Indian Ocean and on the west by Kerala State. The State has a coast-line of 990 kilometers and a land boundary of of 1,200 kilometers. With a total area of 130,069 square kilometers and a population of 41,199,168 persons, it accounts for 3.96 per cent of the total area of the country and 7.52 per cent of its population. The State ranks eleventh in land area and seventh in population size among the states of India.

According to 1971 Census, 39.46 per cent is the literate population in Tamil Nadu and it ranks second among the States of the country in literacy.

The following statement indicates the break-up of the population of four districts by literacy status.

| District | Population | Literate&Educated | | Illiterate | |
|----------|-----------|-------------------|------|------------|------|
| | | Persons | Percen-tage | Persons | Perce-ntage |
| Madurai | 3,938,197 | 1,634,860 | 41.51 | 2,303,337 | 58.49 |
| Ramanathapuram | 2,860,207 | 1,136,629 | 39.74 | 1,723,578 | 60.26 |
| Tirunelveli | 3,200,515 | 1,434,809 | 44.83 | 1,765,706 | 55.17 |
| Kanyakumari | 1,222,549 | 711,676 | 58.21 | 510,873 | 41.79 |

## Religion

The population in Tamil Nadu is predominantly Hindu in its religious composition. 89.02 per cent of the population are Hindus while 5.75 per cent are Christians. Muslims form the third largest group with 5.11 per cent, while the percentages of Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists and others are very small.

### Population of the State according the the six principal religions

| SL. No. | Religion | No. of Persons | Percentage to total State population |
|---------|----------|----------------|--------------------------------------|
|  | Total | 41,199,168 | 100.00 |
| 1. | Hindus | 36,674,150 | 89.02 |
| 2. | Christians | 2,367,749 | 5.75 |
| 3. | Muslims | 2,103,899 | 5.11 |
| 4. | Jains | 41,097 | 0.10 |
| 5. | Sikhs | 4,355 | 0.01 |
| 6. | Buddhists | 1,148 | N.* |
| 7. | All others | 6,770 | 0.01 |

* N - Negligible.

The following statement shows the numerically important Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu in descending order in the year 1961.

| Rank of Numerical Importance | Names of Scheduled Caste | Population | Percentage to total Scheduled Castes |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Adi Dravida | 1,763,000 | 29.06 |
| 2 | Paraiyan, Parayan (Sambavár) | 1,513,627 | 24.95 |
| 3 | Pallan | 950,266 | 15.66 |
| 4 | Chakkiliyan | 778,076 | 12.82 |
| 5 | Kudumban | 247,822 | 4.08 |
| 6 | Samban | 136,818 | 2.25 |
| 7 | Arunthathiyar | 99,947 | 1.65 |
| 8 | Kuravan, Sidhanar | 78,470 | 1.29 |
| 9 | Valluvan | 62,450 | 1.03 |
| 10 | Madari | 60,015 | 0.99 |
| 11 | Thoti | 41,129 | 0.68 |
| 12 | Pagadai | 19,299 | 0.32 |
| 13 | Adi Andhra | 18,269 | 0.30 |
| 14 | Devendrakulathan | 15,968 | 0.26 |
| 15 | Adi Karnataka | 12,448 | 0.21 |
| 16 | Pannadi | 10,745 | 0.18 |
| 17 | Tiruvalluvar | 10,077 | 0.17 |
| 18 | Puthirai Vannan | 9,696 | 0.16 |
| 19 | Koliyan | 5,680 | 0.09 |
| 20 | Vettiyan | 3,541 | 0.06 |
| 21 | Vannan | 3,383 | 0.06 |
| 22 | Madiga | 3,198 | 0.05 |
| 23 | Mala | 2,060 | 0.03 |
| 24 | Dom, Dombara, Paidi | 1,977 | 0.03 |
| 25 | Charuman | 1,884 | 0.03 |
| 26 | Holeya | 1,826 | 0.03 |
| 27 | Kadaiyan | 1,750 | 0.03 |
| 28 | Paravan | 1,550 | 0.03 |
| 29 | Thandan | 1,105 | 0.02 |
| 30 | Pulayan or Cheramar | 907 | 0.01 |
| 31 | Panniandi | 642 | 0.01 |
| 32 | Ayyanavar | 632 | 0.01 |
| 33 | Vetan | 630 | 0.01 |
| 34 | Bharathar | 513 | 0.01 |
| 35 | Uraly | 385 | 0.01 |
|  | Individual Caste Unclassifiable | 205,430 | 3.39 |
|  | All Other Castes reporting negligible proportions | 2,117 | 0.03 |
|  | All Scheduled Castes | 6067,327 | 100.00 |

## Scheduled Caste Population in Tamil Nadu

In 1971 Census, 17.76 per cent of the States population consists of members of the Scheduled Castes. The percentage of the Scheduled Caste population is highest in Chingleput District (26.28 per cent to total district population). The percentage of Scheduled Caste population is lowest (3.89 per cent in Kanyakumari district.

| Sl. No. | District | Total population | Scheduled Caste population | Percentage of Scheduled Caste population to total District's population |
|---------|----------|------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Madurai | 3,938,197 | 587,874 | 14.93 |
| 2. | Ramanathapuram | 2,860,207 | 459,616 | 16.07 |
| 3. | Tirunelveli | 3,200,515 | 504,956 | 15.78 |
| 4. | Kanyakumari | 1,222,549 | 47,536 | 3.89 |

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry
    Committee, Madhya Pradesh, 1956, vol.I, Indore
    Government Regional Press, 1957.

Report of the Backward Classes Commission, Tamil Nadu,
    vol.II, 1970, Govt. of Tamil Nadu, Madras.


Secondary Sources:

Alexander, K.C., "Neo-Christians of Kerala" in J. Michael
    (ed.), The Untouchables in Contemporary India
    (Arizonn: University of Arizonn Press, 1972).

Berger, P., "Identity as a Problem in the Sociology of
    knowledge" in R.N. Bellah (ed.), Religion and
    Progress in Modern Asia (New York: Free Press,
    1973).

Beteille, Andre, Caste, Class and Power (Berkeley: Univer-
    sity of California Press, 1965).

Bryan R. Wilson, Sects and Society (Berkeley: University
    of California Press, 1961).

Caldwell, Robert, The Tinnevelly Shanars (Madras, 1849).

_____, A Political and General History of the District
    of the Tinnevelly in the Presidency of Madras
    (Madras, 1881).

Clark, W.H., The Psychology of Religion: An introduction
    to Religious Experience and Behaviour (New York:
    Mcmillan, 1958).

Dale, S.F., The Mappilas of Malabar (New York: Oxford
    University Press, 1980).

Dubois, J.A. Abbe, The State of Christianity in India
    During the Early Nineteenth Century (New Delhi:
    Associated Publishing House).

Dumont, Louis, Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications (London: Paladin, 1970).

Durkheim, E., The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, translated by Joseph W. Swain (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1954).

Farquhar, Modern Religious Movements in India (Delhi: M. Manoharlal, 1967).

Fernandes, Walter, Caste and Conversion Movements in India (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1981).

Firth, C.B., An Introduction to Indian Church History Madras: C.L.S., 1961).

Forrester, D.B., Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India (London: Centre of South Asian Studies, University of London, 1980).

Ghurye, G.S., Caste and Race in India (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1961).

Hardgrave, Robert L., The Nadars of Tamil Nadu: The Political Culture of a Community in Change (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

Hough, J., The History of Christianity in India, vol.2 (London: Seely, 1839).

Hutton, J.H., Caste in India: Its Nature, Function and Origin (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

Irschick, E., Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

Knock, A.D., Conversion (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

Krishna Iyer, L.A., Social History of Kerala (Madras: Book Centre Publications).

Mattison Mines, "Social Stratification among Muslim Tamils in Tamil Nadu, South India" in Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.), Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1978).

Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion, translated by Ephraim Fischoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

Merton, Robert K., Social Theory and Social Structure (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958).

Mol, Hans, Identity and Religion: International, Cross-Cultural Approaches (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1976).

Murray, Titus, Islam in India and Pakistan (Calcutta: Y.M.C.A., Publishing House, 1959).

Oddie, G.A., Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times (ed.) (New Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1977).

O'Dea, F. Thomas, Sociology of Religion (New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India Private Ltd., 1969).

O'Malley, India's Social Heritage (Bombay: Longman, Bombay, 1977).

Parvathamma, "Conversion Movements among the Untouchables" in Jose Kananaikil (ed.), Scheduled Castes and Struggle against Inequality (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1983).

Pickett, J. Waskom, Christian Mass Movements in India (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933).

Pillay, K.K., The Caste System in Tamil Nadu (Madras: University of Madras, 1977).

Rao, M.S.A., Social Movements in India, vol.I (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1978).

Sachchidananda, The Harijan Elite: A Study of their Status, Networks, Mobility and Role in Social Transformation (Thompson Press, 1976).

Sahay, K.N., "Christianity as a Factor of Tension and Conflict among the Tribals of Chota Nagpur" in L.P. Vidyarthi (ed.), Conflict Tension and Cultural Trend in India (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1969).

Saraswathi, S., Minorities in Madras State (Delhi: Impex India, 1974).

Satyavart Pande, Relative Deprivation among Career Elites (Lucknow: Sunita Prakashan, 1979).

Sherring, M.A., The Tribes and Castes of Madras Presidency (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975).

Sorokin, Pitrim, A., Social and Cultural Mobility (New York: The Free Press, 1954).

Srinivas, M.N., "Mobility in the Caste Systems" in Milton Singer (ed.), Structure and Change in Indian Society (Chicago: Addive Publishing Company, 1968).

_____, Social Change in Modern India (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1977).

_____, Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

Thurston, E., Ethnographic notes in Southern India (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975).

Wilkinson, T.S. and M.M. Thomas, Ambedkar and the Neo-Buddhist Movement (Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, 1972).

Yesudas, R.N., A People's Revolt in Travancore: A Backward Class Movement for Social Freedom (Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1975).

Articles in Periodicals:

Agustine, P.A., "Conversion as Social Protest", Religion and Society, Bulletin of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (Bangalore, December 1981).

D'Souza, Victor S., "The Religious factor and the Scheduled Castes", Social Action (New Delhi), vol.32, July-Sept. 1982.

Lionel, Caplan, "Social Mobility in Metropolitan Centres: Christians in Madras City", Contributions to Indian Sociology, vol.II, No.1 (1977).

Mathew, George, "Politicisation of Religion: Conversions
to Islam in Tamil Nadu", Economic and Political
Weekly (Bombay), vol.XVII, No.25, June 1982.

Sharma, S.L. "Conversions", Seminar (New Delhi).

_____, "Conversions: Many Dimensions", Mainstream,
vol.XX, No.7, October 17, 1981.

Subramaniam Swamy, "Tamil Nadu Conversions: A Vote against
Hindu Society", Sunday (Calcutta), 16 August,
1981.


Newspapers:

Dina Malar (Madras), Tamil Daily.

Hindustan Times (New Delhi).

Indian Express (New Delhi).

Patriot (New Delhi).

The Hindu (Madras).

The Statesman (New Delhi).

Times of India (New Delhi).