

A Search for Identity: Conversion from Hinduism to Islam among Scheduled Castes in Sindh. A Case Study of Shahdadpur(District Sanghar) and Bait Ussalam Matli (District Badin)

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the factors that cause Scheduled Caste Hindu's conversion to Islam in Sindh. The study has been conducted in *Shahdadpur* city (District Sanghar) and *Bait Us salam* Matli District Badin. The reason to include two different places as a case study is to get inclusive results as *Bait Us salam* a center of training for new Muslim converts gets these converts through their special Dawah campaign that is run throughout Sindh. At the same time, *Shahdadpur* is a city that is not only dynamic in its population and rich in its culture but has a unique blend of different religions and different Muslim religious sects. History of Scheduled Caste Hindus conversion to other religions including Islam dates back many centuries in the Sub-Continent. The conversion of Scheduled Caste Hindus in the past was labelled under the different tags due to their specific motives for conversion. The conversion from Hinduism to Islam in different parts of Sindh raise questions due to the nature of conversion. Mainstream and international media present it as forced, enthusiastic Muslims call it a submission to the ultimate truth and some push and pull factors indicate that some ulterior motives like social, political, and financial status and their prompted and unprompted assimilation are also causing their conversion to Islam. Instead of bringing the conversion of Scheduled Caste Hindus into different parts of Sindh under any particular tag or preconceived label, the researcher has investigated the phenomenon through a qualitative method of research by conducting semi-structured interviews through snowball sampling from 32 converts in the *Shahdadpur* Sanghar and *Bait Us salam* Matli and has found three categories of converts although with different intentions and commitment towards religion but with same consequences.

Introduction

This article focuses on the issue of conversion of Scheduled Caste Hindus to Islam. The research study has been conducted in Shahdadpur, the city of Sanghar the district of Sindh province, Pakistan. The inclusion of another place Bait Ussalam Center for basic religious education for new converts in Matli district Badin aims to get comprehensive information and deeper knowledge as this center provides basic knowledge and shelter to mostly scheduled caste converts from Hinduism to Islam belonging to different parts of Sindh. A considerable number of converts most of them belong to Scheduled Castes get four month's training in this center. This study aims to comprehend the real motives behind the conversion of Scheduled Caste Hindus to Islam. Although

the issue of Scheduled Caste Hindu's conversion to other religions dates back in history it's sudden emergence at large scale in the media after 9/11 was the part of same campaign that was portraying stereotype picture of Islam and Muslims. As the projection of this issue on media by merely presenting these conversion to Islam as forced was oversimplified. Likewise oversimplified view of status of these converts by calling them converts of convenience or by calling into question their intentions and labelling their conversion to Islam under the tag of convenience or conviction is not the entire truth. The issue of religious conversion of Hindus and specially Scheduled Castes, is not new.

It finds its roots back in the history of sub-continent. Under British rule Christian

missionaries converted large number of Scheduled Caste Hindus. These mass conversions of oppressed and indentured Hindus raised many moral questions not only about the intension of converts but on the approach of Christian missionaries as well.

The mass conversion of low caste Hindus to Christianity according to many scholars was due to their poor financial condition, their inhumane status in society, their absence in political sphere and their illiteracy. There was nothing to do with religion the way these oppressed people were accepting Christianity without clear understanding. For example Christopher Harding (Cultural historian of Japan & India. Religion, Spirituality & Psychiatry. Writer & broadcaster. BBC/AHRC New Generation Thinker. University of Edinburgh) truly presents the picture of such conversions in his book *Religious Transformation in South Asia: The Meaning of Conversion in Colonial Punjab* in following words.

“How appropriate is it to describe the transformation sought by converts as ‘religious’? The epithet of ‘rice Christian’ was applied to poor rural converts at the time of the mass movements, by commentators who saw their conversion as a pathetic, cynical, and even ‘denationalized’ attempt to gain material advantage.” (Harding, 2008)

A significant number of Hindus in Sindh convert to Islam. Only a data of single center in Matli (Badin, District Sindh, Pakistan) named Baitussalam (a Center in Matli City (Badin District, Sindh Pakistan). In this center mostly Scheduled Caste Hindus get convert. They get four month’s education to learn practices of Islam) shows the nature of this phenomenon. At this center 3500 converts from Hinduism to Islam got their basic education from 2009 to 2023. This data received by single place. Other palaces and

shrines where Hindus particularly scheduled caste Hindus get convert in large number at different Shrines and seminaries are following. Umerkot , Ghotki ,Sanghar, Mirpurkhas, Badin (All these mentioned places are cities of Sindh Pakistan where Hindus specially from Scheduled Castes convert to Islam in large number) . Instead of stereotyping and generalizing this process of conversion, the researcher has conducted research by using qualitative research method that includes semi-structured interviews from 32 converts through snowball sampling method.

This study aims to comprehend the real motives behind their conversion and to determine the nature of conversion by investigating that whether their social, financial and political status is working as a push factor toward Islam or these conversions are conversions of conviction or they have unconsciously assimilated in society. However we cannot determine that conversion of convenience and conversion due to assimilation cannot change later into true submission and conviction. Researcher has categorized the all interviewees according to their first response to Islam and their present commitment towards religion and demonstration of these factors in their daily lives. Before I proceed to the main body of my work and define religious conversion, explain the types of conversion and make analysis I would like to introduce briefly the fieldwork area and define Scheduled Castes.

Brief introduction to Shahdadpur

Shahdadpur is historical city of District Sanghar. It is one of the largest cities of Sanghar in population. It is the most developed city of the district as well. It is dynamic in this sense that people belonging

to different races religions and communities live in the city.

60% people are Sindhi an Urdu speaking while Punjabies are 30% other 5% speak different languages (Shahdadpur City, 2024). Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's tomb in Bhit Shah is also near to the city. The population according to the census 2017 is 4,57,55158.2% is urban whereas 41.8 is rural population (City Population, 2024).

Definition of Scheduled Caste

Some of the definitions that describe Scheduled Caste Hindus.

“The official name of low castes in India, called untouchables in ancient Hindu books and scriptures, socially disadvantaged (Untouchables in ancient India, 2024)

“The lowest castes in traditional Hinduism who are given special aid by the government (Macmillan Education, 2024)

“The official name given in India to the lowest caste, considered ‘untouchable’ in orthodox Hindu scriptures and practice, officially regarded as socially disadvantaged (definitions, 2024).

History of Scheduled castes

The cultural theory says that caste is an outcome of the interaction between the Indo-Aryans' varna system on the one hand and the tribal system of the Dravidian on the other. Thus, this theory holds that the caste system evolved because of integration and assimilation of different cultures like the Aryan's. 'Karma' based varna system and the tribal system of the Dravidian occupational division of society etc. As the number of ethnic groups increased the caste system began to grow more complex (Theories of Caste System in India, 2024).

According to Jagan Karde (Professor and Head, Department of Sociology, Shivaji University, Kolhapur (Maharashtra), India) 'Sudras' were classified as inferior and the last varna (Caste) to other three varnas, in ancient social system in India. Along with these several social, economic and political restrictions were imposed on them. This classified 'Sudras' includes various caste groups, which have suffered social and economic inequity since ages. They had to stay outside the village. The concept of pollution was attached to them, and they were treated as untouchable castes.

These untouchables or castes were officially defined as depressed castes in 1932, and they were systematically listed in the 1931-Census of India. The Simon Commission in 1935 first coined the term 'Scheduled Castes'. All the untouchable castes, which were listed in 1931-Census of India, came to be known as the 'Scheduled Castes' (SCs) through the Government of India Act of 1935. In the meantime, the Government published a list of Scheduled Castes under the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1936.

The Government of India in postindependence period carried the same idea (Karade, 2008).

Legislations were also made in Pakistan to ensure their rights, but these laws could not be implemented in letter and spirit so far as in both countries as Scheduled Caste Hindus are facing marginalization at all levels.

Hindus and Scheduled Caste Hindus population in Pakistan

In Pakistan, the population of Hindus increased from 3.5 million in 2017 to 3.8 million in 2023, making it the largest minority community in the Islamic nation,

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according to the official data of the 2023 census, reported in the Dawn newspaper (Bureau, July 19,2024).

On Thursday, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) released the results of the 7th Population and Housing Census 2023. In 2023, Pakistan's total population stood at 240,458,089.

Interestingly, the population of Hindus increased from 3.5 million (in 2017) to 3.8 million (in 2023), but, in the total population, their share went down from 1.73 to 1.61 percent (Statistics, 2023).

Number of scheduled Castes

Most of the scheduled castes hindus activists claim that in overall census scheduled castes are not counted separately and while two thirds of hindus in Sindh belongs to these scheduled castes or lower castes. However as per Bureau of Statistics, the 2023 Census recorded 1,349,487 Scheduled Caste Hindus in Pakistan (PBS, 2023).

Now before proceeding further to know the real motives behind Scheduled Caste conversion to Islam. I would like to briefly describe the definition of religious conversion and Islamic concept of religious conversion.

Religious Conversion

Religious conversion is the process in which an individual adopts a new religious identity, shifting from one religious belief system to another. This can involve a complete change of faith or a significant increase in devotion and practice within the same religion (M.Eliade, 2002)

According to Lewis R Rambo “It will mean simple change from the absence of a faith system to a faith commitment; from religious affiliation with one faith system to

another, or from one orientation to another within a single faith system (R, 1993).”

Islamic Concept of Religious Conversion

Maha Al-Qwidi in her book *UNDERSTANDING THE STAGES OF CONVERSION TO ISLAM THE VOICES OF BRITISH CONVERTS*, writes that There is no word in Arabic for 'conversion', but there is the idea of 'becoming a Muslim', for which the verb *aslama* (literally, 'to submit') is used. It is from this verb that the word 'Muslim' is derived. Grammatically it is the active participle meaning 'one who submits, a submitter' So 'Islam', which is the verbal noun—equivalent to the gerund in English, means 'submission (Al-Qawidi, 2002)

Three Basic Categories of Religious Conversion According to Response of Converts.

I have divided all the interviewees according to their first response and their commitment to religion. This categorization makes it easy to understand the phenomenon of conversion and helps to organize the work. Demonstration of every factor has been described by just presenting a single example.

- 1.Spiritual Conversion or Conversion with Conviction
2. Conversion of Convenience
3. Assimilation

Spiritual Conversion or Conversion with Conviction

Under this category I have included those 12 converts who accepted Islam whole heartedly and with sincerity of intention. They are regular in their prayers and in other acts of worship. Despite all hurdles and opposition from their friends and relatives they accepted Islam. Most of them had to leave their

families but they demonstrated unshakeable commitment towards Islam. All the interviewees had the same problem that they complained of, that society does not treat them as equal Muslims. They feel themselves a minority within majority. They are not welcome in the religion as they ought to be.

They do not get financial help neither from society nor from any government or non government organization to get settle in the society. The demonstration of this spiritual conversion factor is evident from the following story of Muhammad Ehsaan.

Demonstration of Conviction Factor by Converts

The first convert to Islam to whom I met was Muhammad Ehsan fifty years old. His previous name was Chooni Daal. He accepted Islam in 2008. His previous caste was Kohli. He relates the story of his acceptance of Islam as follows.

We are living in this area from the time of our forefathers. As we were scheduled castes so from my childhood to till acceptance of Islam I experienced worst kind of marginalization. Although we were Hindu by religion but we were not allowed to inter in any Hindu temple. We had no right to participate in religious activities. Practically we were practicing no religion. Due to caste limitation we had limited opportunities. Further he relates that I was involved even in crimes due to severe poverty.

I had no purpose of life and no peace of mind. One day I was sitting alone when all of sudden the sound of Azan struck my years. It had very soothing effects. It started casting spell on me. As I was already fed up with the previous religion and the treatment from upper caste Hindus, I decided to change my religion. He further told when I came to Masjid in my locality, and told the Imam of

the Masjid about it, he without second thought called the some members of Tableeghi Jammaatⁱ and they asked me to take bath and after that I declared the Kalmah Shahada. Another thing that strengthened my faith was that after embracing Islam one of brother who was metally abnormal got normal and healthy. He also accepted Islam. My wife and children also followed me and converted to Islam. I am practicing religion whole heartedly and have accepted it with all its entirety.

Conversion of Convenience

A "conversion of convenience" occurs when someone changes their religion, or appears to change their religion, for an ulterior motive. For example, someone might convert to Christianity so that they can go to a Christian school run by missionaries, giving them the opportunity to learn English and obtain a better education than that which is available elsewhere. Such Christians, during the days of the Raj, became known in India as "Rice Christians" because they changed their religion for material benefits (Gascoigne, 2024)

Demonstration of Convenience Factor in Converts

The converts in this category show different motives for conversion to Islam and their commitment to religion is nominal. For example, i met one of the converts who told that he with his family accepted Islam with the hope that at least his children will have better status in society. Another convert stated that he accepted Islam to get rid from the labour bonding in which his whole family was badly trapped. Many of them are seen mostly asking other people for financial help by showing them religious conversion certificate that they get at religious conversion ceremonies where they formally get convert to Islam. Some of the converts

initially started going to Mosques in hope to get financial help from people but later left when they did not get expected response.

Conversion of Assimilation

In the following researcher is presenting three different definitions to understand better this concept.

According to first definition

“Assimilation is cultural immersion of a minority into the main cultural body (PEDIAA, 2024)

Another definition says

In anthropology and sociology assimilation is absorption of culture of ethnic group into main culture of society. This process involves taking characteristics of culture to such a degree that assimilated group becomes indistinguishable. This type of assimilation is the most extreme form (Pauls, 2024)

If we make the detailed assesment of assimilation factor in converts from Hinduism to Islam, we will come to know that both unprompted and prompted factors both on work in their assimilation. Unprompted in this sense that they are cut off from their culture and religion from many decades and living among muslims so unconsciously they have assimilated and started practicing some acts of religion to become a part of society. The prompted assimilation happens since they are not allowed to enter in worship places by upper caste hindus, so they have no choice but to assimilate in muslim society. Moreover, they seem forced to be assimilated to become more acceptable in society.

Demonstration of Assimilation Factor in Converts

Under this catagory we see those converts who are not as wretched as converts of convenience. Although they are landless however they have their own homes and they are doing menial jobs and works to meet both ends. They say that they started practicing Islam, like offering prayers and sending their kids to mosques long before embracing Islam. Some of them never practiced Hinduism from their childhood. As they were living in Muslim society from generations and they had gotton cut off from their previous religion so they started practicing Islam having no other choice. But it is worth mentioning that converts in this category show better commitment to religion then converts in convenience category. Some of the converts to Islam in this category told that they were later asked by other muslim brothers to accept Islam formally and openly and they did accordingly.

Ghulam Shabir who accepted Islam formaly told that he even before accepting islam used to recite Quran and participate in Jumah and Eid prayer. Likewise all ten converts interviewed in this category had more or less same answers like ghulam Shabir.. This is also very interesting to mention that most of the converts had Mulims names like Nawab, nazar, nazeer, Nabi etc. Their islamic names even before conversion show the factor of assimilation in society.

Brief Introduction to Bait Ussalam Matli

Matli is a small city a part of Badin District Sindh Pakistan. Bait Ussalam, the center for conversion of Scheduled Caste Hindus to Islam is in this city. Although Christians, Hindus from upper classes and Qadiyanis convert to Islam in this center but their numbers are very small. The large number of people who convert to Islam belong to Scheduled Caste Hindus. Some time dozens

of people in group form accept Islam in this center. Some of them reach to center for conversion but most of them are accessed through the members of this center in their working areas, in fields and brick kilns.

This process of conversion seems the continuation of their conversion that happened in the past to other religions to upgrade their status and to get economic opportunities, to get political rights and recognition and equality. They convert to Islam by considering it a last hope and shelter to end their miseries.

This center first time attracted my attention when I was there in Karachi for my MA Islamic Studies from Karachi University. On 13 December 2011, I read the news in English newspaper regarding conversion of 37 Hindus in the mentioned center. The News paper reported "On Saturday thirty seven people belonging to different Hindu families converted to Islam in Matli. They claimed that more families will accept Islam in coming weeks (Mandhro, 2011) Once again on 21 January 2012, the same news paper published the news report about Bait uss Salam under the heading, "Mass conversion of Matlis poor Hindus (Mandhro, Mass Conversion for Matli,s Poor Hindus, Lakshami Lies in Another Religion., 2011)

This center started working in 2009 and till 2023, 700 Families containing 3500 persons including males, females and mostly children have accepted Islam and later got 4 month's training in the center. (The information was provided by management during the visit)

How Scheduled Castes are converted In Bait Ussalam

The survey team of this Center visits the sites where potential converts work and meet the

heads of the families alongwith inviting them to Islam they are also offered to pay all their debts in case they accept Islam. As reported in the same news article "One of the donor of Bait us Salam Haji Bashir Kamboh said that they had paid 3,11,000 for 7 families (Sameer, 2011)

Mostly the families get ready to get rid from the debts,clutches of landlords and their prosecution. Then businessmen and other people from society are asked for donations to make possible their conversion by paying their debts to their landlords. The new Muslims converts are also sent alongwith team members on Dawah campaigns to tell their experiences . Sometime landlords and brick kiln owners resist their conversion to Islam and try to stop them as they think in case they accepted Islam they will lose them as their worker. First these families are threatened with severe consequences in case they accept Islam and when these families resist by having only chance of getting rid of this worst kind of slavery then it is demanded from land owners to pay debts. That is why management of Bait Ussalam had to arrange money to pay their debts to take out these people from clutches of their owners.

"One of the convert told that landlords refused to let them go without paying debts. He agreed that some of the families converted due to their debts (Sameer, 37 Hindus Converted to Islam in Matli, 2011)

In the past same efforts have been made by Hindu organisations and property owners to stop Scheduled Castes from conversion to Christianity. As R.E Frykenberg (a Swedish American Historian Scholar and author He is a professor at Winscon Madison University) writes in his

book, *Studies in the History of Christian Missions*.

Apart from the political implications, there have been both practical and theoretical reasons from some Hindus to oppose conversion of other Hindus to Christianity. Under British rule out castes that became Christians were sometime able to escape lifelong serfdom and other dignities. Especially if they became literate or moved to other occupations or cities. Higher caste Hindus especially wealthy landlords resisted such a change and challenged the idea that any Hindu could not opt out of social position in which they were born (Frykenberg, 2011)

The record about families is kept in a register in written form that consists of the caste of the converts, their previous name, names after conversion, age, city and how much of their loan has been paid off. The amount of loan can reach up from few thousand to few lacs. The system of registration can be figured out through following image of the pages of this register.

The image shows a handwritten register with Urdu text. It is divided into sections for different families, with columns for names, ages, and financial details. The entries are organized into numbered sections (49, 50, 51).

ردیف	تعداد افراد	برادری	اسلامی نام	ولادت	رشتہ	عمر	قوم	گروہ/پہر	شہر
1	416	1	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد	30 سال	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد
2	411	2	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد	28 سال	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد
3	412	3	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد	25 سال	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد
4	413	4	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد	25 سال	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد
32000/- قرضہ ادائیگی									
چوتھا خاندان									
5	414	5	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد	30 سال	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد
6	415	6	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد	35 سال	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد
7	416	7	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد	1 سال	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد
8	417	8	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد	5 سال	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد
9	418	9	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد	4 سال	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد
31000/- قرضہ ادائیگی									
پانچواں خاندان									
12	419	12	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد	8 سال	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد
13	420	13	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد	25 سال	سید محمد	سید محمد	سید محمد
16500 قرضہ ادائیگی									

ex.t January 21, 2012

Moreover, the management informed that they are kept in the Center for four to five

months where they are provided with food, accomodation, Islamic education some money each month and some money when they leave. As reported in the same newspaper “He told that they are provided with food, medicine, Islamic education and some money when they leave the center.”

Although apparently Bait Uss Salam management has no other choice but to pay the debts of new converts to Islam otherwise they are not allowed by landlords and brick klin owners to accept Islam and go to the center for basic Islamic education. But coincidentally these effort match to the efforts of Christian missionaries who in the past have been converting scheduled castes to Christianity by paying them money and offering them other benefits. Intentions in both cases vary but actions coincide

It is also evident from the record that Center has to pay for each convert and this type of conversion, conversion on payment has been part of history of Scheduled Caste Hindus. As Gandhi G (A prominent Hindu leader who played a pivotal role in struggle for independence from British rulers) in one of his books writes

“Socio-economic factors often compelled people to convert to Christianity. Conversion was often used as a bait, especially for the poor and downtrodden. Gandhiji remarked that religion is not a barter which one can exchange for a materialistic gain. He warned the missionaries to stick to the humanitarian work they were doing in the field of education and health of the downtrodden without asking them to convert (Mehta, 2002)

Bait Ussalam Services and Positive Aspects

Bait Ussalam is the only center that is working for betterment and welfare of new

converts to Islam. This organization is trying its best to teach converts to Islam all the basic teachings in minimum period to regardless of age. They are reaching out to the people who are the most neglected part of society. They are neither recognized as Hindu by upper class hindus and are barred from entering to temples, nor they get attention from muslim society to get invitation for acceptance of Islam. Bait Ussalam as an institution doing all possible efforts to reache to these scheduled caste hindus. The main hurdle in their embracing of Islam is their status as being indebted to landlords from generation to generation. So funds are raised to pay off their debts to make possible their freedom from landlords.

With limited sources they provide all the families food, clothes and financial assistance. Kids from many families are slected to memorize Quran in Mosques of this center. Where they also get education upto elementary level. During this period of memorization they get free food, accommodation and some money as scholarship. This center also organize the gathering of all converts on annual basis. They are also provided the Ramadan packages.

This center provides the environment to all converts to Islam where they can get Islamic teachings with the peace of mind without getting worry about their basic needs. The center in its capacity tries to settle converts to Islam after completion of four months in different menial works. The manangement of this center told that sometimes marriages are arranged for girls and boys in Muslim society in case of suitable match.

The center is making its constant and unbridled efforts from inception to this day to reach the different section of society to

extend there hand for support in this noble cause. So far center has tried its best in its own capacity to resettle these converts to Islam from all aspects, financially, socially and religiously.

Along with all these efforts they are facing the accusations of converting people to Islam by illuring them through money and offering them a good future and better social status in society. They are dealing with all the legal and social hurdles that convert face after conversion to Islam from his previous family.

Bait Ussalam some unfavorable aspects

Despite the unbridled services provided by Bait Ussalam for converts to Islam. The strategy they adopt in the process of Scheduled Caste Hindus conversion and later their training causes some unwanted and long lasting unfavorable impacts that are being mentioned here.

First they are rooted out from their work places and are cut off from the jobs and works although very manial like bonded labour. This connection with the landlords and brick klin owners although a servent master relations keep them alive and provide them two time meal. When they are brought to center for training most of the families lose this only source of income and after four months of training most of the families start wandring in search of works to earn a money enough to keep them alive and meet both ends. But hardly they find because no one gets ready to give them any work in society due to their status of being low Caste converts.

Researcher was fortunate enough to meet one of the new converted family in fieldwork area who got training in the same Center. Later this family introduced two other families that remained in center for four

months. researcher got information from them. The following information about the conversion experience and training in Bait ussalam were provided by the head of each family. As the converts have same background, the problems and difficulties they face. They relate the same stories regarding their conversion experience , expectations and consequences. All three converted related same stories with minor difference, that is why it seems useless to describe experience of each one separately.

Their experience regarding conversion follows as:

We were working as tenants on farms, although under the worst circumstances yet we were getting two-time bread for our family members. When we were contacted by the center for conversion, we saw it was a good deal. We accepted Islam in hope to get better status in society, to get better economic opportunities, we accepted Islam in hope to provide our children better life.

We were brought in the center for learning basic teachings of Islam. Until we remained there, we got assistance but after four months were left to our fate. Now we have disconnected from landlord and no other job to do. We send our kids to mosques to learn Quran, but no one takes interest in them. We are still facing marginality. We were expecting that conversion to Islam will end our miseries and we will be considered equal to other Muslims, but nothing has changed. No one invites us to their marriages and other social gatherings. People in society doubt our sincerity to Islam.

These were the experiences related by three head of families trained in Bait Us salalm.

Here I am not raising questions on the sincerity and intentions of management of

Bait Ussalam. Their motivations may be sincere and they may be doing their best in their perception. But this temporary solution of the problem, just providing new converts facilities for four months and then leaving them on their fate is creating permanent and unbearable problems for them. These Scheduled Castes should be provided Islamic teaching at their work places so they can remain intact with their environment and work. Moreover the landlords and owners of brick klin should be educated first at this issue that their workers conversion to Islam will have positive impact on their overall behaviour and they will be more productive in their work.

Problems for Scheduled Castes converts to Islam

Here some of the issues are being mentioned regarding Scheduled Castes converts to Islam. All the issues mentioned below comprised the data that was formally gotten from management of the Bait Ussalam Matli.

Government Negligance toward these converts to Islam

Although Pakistan government has some laws about the protection of minorities rights and our law mentions somehow Scheduled Castes and their rights but no concrete step has been taken so far to solve the issues that new converts to Islam and specially Scheduled Castes after conversion to Islam face. Some of the issues that I observed during this research work are as follows

ID cards and Passport

The main problem that converts to islam encounter after accepting Islam is their identity as Muslim. Society by large does not recognize them as equal Muslim and does not pay them due respect. Side by Side government institutions like NADRA(National Data Base Registration

Authority (Pakistan)) that is responsible to provide them identity through identification cards does not cooperate with them. They are required to bring their parents that becomes almost impossible if parents did not accept Islam and are not willing to cooperate. The same problems and procedure they had to face in passport issuance when someone has to go for Umrah or Hajj.

Certificates

The young converts to Islam who complete their elementary education at Bait Ussalam or by any other mean they have to face legal restriction to get their certificates and change their previous names to Muslim names. Sometimes court's procedure makes it impossible to get their Matric certificates. As they don't have enough money to spend on this complicated legal process that court requires.

Other government facilities

Due their status they can not avail any facility provided by the government like health facilities and other support programs like Benazir Incom Support program etc.

Marriages

Scheduled Castes after conversion to Islam very rarely get any marriage proposal. By birth Muslims usually hesitate to make any kind of relationship with them. In case they find any suitable pair they have to face again legal restrictions and they are required to bring their parents to register their marriage. Moreover when they don't have ID cards, then it become more difficult to register their marriage.

Age factor and conversion

Due to external pressure and constant negative media propoganda and portrayal of Hindu girls marriages and forced conversion

both federal and Sindh government have passed the law that religious conversion will not be recognized and accepted until the age of 18. This legal restriction makes it difficult for converts under 18 to get marry, to get any certificate.

Government Jobs

All these legal issues, restrictions and status make it almost impossible for them to get government Jobs.

Social behaviours regarding converts to Islam

Scheduled Caste Hindus have been oppressed and marginalized section of society through centuries. They are not recognized even as a Hindus by upper classes of their own religion. That is why they are barred to enter to temples. Mostly they work in farms and brick kilns with minimum pay and poor hygienic conditions. They live at their work places in groups and families. They remain under debts generation to generation.

The only way they find to get rid from all this humiliation to get convert to Islam. They accept Islam in hope that they will get better status in society. Their kids will have better future. But after conversion they have to face some bitter truths and realities regarding social behavior towards them. Even after conversion these Scheduled Castes remain neglected part of society. Converts complain that no one cares about them. They are not invited in any gathering of other Muslims. They face immense difficulties in marriages.

Different shrines institutions and seminaries facilitate their conversion to Islam and show the numbers of converts as their achievement. No one bothers to train them properly although Bait Ussalam has exception in this regard. There are no arrangement for their settlement in society.

People doubt their sincerity to Islam. They are not considered an equal Muslim. Thus they remain a minority in majority even after conversion.

Conclusion

Scheduled Caste Hindus' history of conversion to different religions dates back to many centuries in Sub-Continent. Unfortunately throughout the history they have been facing discriminatory treatment from society and governments. After independence the Scheduled Caste Hindus who remained in Pakistan in hope that here they will have equal opportunities and better status by the Quaid's vision could not get what they expected. Islam as a religion is their last hope and shelter through they can get their rights. But our social behaviour and negligence of government have changed their dreams into nightmare. Had they been experiencing a cordial social behaviour they would have been accepting Islam for the good reason. But now their marginalization and segregation at all levels compelling them to change their religion in most cases in hope to get better treatment from Muslim society.

Hindus whether they belong to category of conviction, convenience or assimilation they are facing almost same marginalization and segregation in society.

Scheduled Caste Hindus who are converted by Bait Ussalam and trained there for four months although they get enough basic knowledge to act upon religion and get temporary financial help only enough to meet their daily expenses. But as soon as they leave center they again find themselves nowhere. They get cut off from their previous farming works. They also do not get expected response from society in terms of financial help and religious identity. They remain minority among majority despite accepting Islam.

Although the centers like Bait Ussalam are working are helpful for them to learn basic teachings of but it's not enough unless they have a sustainable system in which they can learn and act accordingly. It is high time for government and society to give these scheduled caste converts to Islam their due status and rights. They should not be discriminated from other Muslims and upper class Hindus converts to Islam. Religious organizations, seminaries and specially Tablighi Jama'at should teach the general public to recognize their status as an equal Muslim. Scheduled Castes segregation despite conversion to Islam is against the true spirit of Islam. The religion that claims equality regardless of creed, colour and race.

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