



Miraculous conversion among Indian Pentecostals

by

Jibu Ninan

u22959085

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SUPERVISOR: Prof. Jaco Beyers

CO-SUPERVISOR: Dr Finny Philip

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DECLARATION

I, Jibu Ninan, student number 22959085, confirm that this dissertation entitled '*Miraculous conversion among Indian Pentecostals*' is my original work and meets the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Pretoria. The document has not been previously submitted to any other institution. The study paper includes a thorough list of references, acknowledging all sources consulted.



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Jibu Ninan

August 2024.

DEDICATED TO

Blessy Jibu, Christina Jibu and Chris Ninan Jibu
with love

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ABSTRACT

The research treats extraordinary conversion experiences inside Indian Pentecostalism. The study analyses the theological underpinnings of these encounters, their varied experiential character, and their profound importance in the lives of individual converts. These conversion experiences shed light on their impact on both the Indian Pentecostal movement and the broader religious landscape in India.

The research investigates biblical beliefs among Indian Pentecostal Christians by analysing their conversion experiences through divine healing deployments and deliverance phenomena, accompanied by instances of the Holy Spirit's activity, as well as the "born again" spiritual transition. This research sincerely acknowledges the spiritual boundary of India, which reflects Hindu religious concepts alongside religious paradigms of Indian religions. The study examines the interconnections and unique characteristics of Pentecostalism alongside other faiths, as well as an assessment of religious conflicts in India.

Through qualitative research that combines interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation, the dissertation investigates Indian Pentecostal converts who experience miraculous conversions from a phenomenological perspective. Research examines how Indian Pentecostal converts experience supernatural encounters, as these transformations significantly impact their spiritual interpretations of their lives and the changes they undergo. The study also analyses the dispute between the Pentecostal theological assertion on *MC* and the Reformed tradition.

Furthermore, the dissertation examines the theological and missiological implications of extraordinary conversions for Indian Pentecostalism. These events significantly shaped how the movement developed its theology while creating an authentic identity and executing outreach methods which fostered better relationships with Indian religious communities. The research findings gain significance through these observed implications.

The primary research goal is to build knowledge about conversion experiences within Indian Pentecostalism, taking into account its unique societal

and religious context. The research goal connects theological perspectives with conversion testimonials to uncover meaningful information regarding *MC* behaviour within Indian Pentecostalism. This study offers a unique perspective, illuminating the distinct theological understanding of *MC* within the context of Indian Pentecostalism.

This research enhances comprehension of the significance and function of miracles in church development and conversion by analysing them within the framework of India's religious culture. Through this dialogue, Pentecostals gain a deeper understanding of traditional practices, which helps expand their theological recognition and stimulates cross-cultural research on religious conversion in India and other regions. The research findings offer significant practical value to the study of religion, as well as to the understanding of conversion processes among religious scholars.

KEYWORDS

Deliverance

Healing

India

Miraculous Conversion

Pentecostalism

Social change

Spirituality

Testimony

ABBREVIATIONS

AoG	Assemblies of God
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CoG	Church of God
CSI	Church of South India
CMS	Church Missionary Society
GLS	Gospel Literature Service
IPC	Indian Pentecostal Church
KJV	King James Version
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau
NIDPCM	The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements
NIIT	National Institute of Information Technology
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
PMT	Pre-medical Test
RSS	Rastriya Swayamsevek Sangh
TPM	The Pentecostal Mission

Glossary of Hindi and Indian Terms

<i>adharma</i>	evil
<i>adivasis</i>	Tribal people
<i>advaita</i>	non-dualism (Hindu philosophy)
<i>anubhava</i>	direct experience
<i>astha</i>	faith
<i>bhajans</i>	rhythmic chanting
<i>Bharatanatyam</i>	devotional dance
<i>Brahman</i>	the ultimate (absolute) reality
<i>Brahmin</i>	Hindu high caste

<i>Dalit</i>	‘untouchable’
<i>dharma</i>	good
<i>dushtatma</i>	bad spirits
<i>guru</i>	religious teacher, advisor
<i>Hindu</i>	Dharma Hindu moral order
<i>Hindutva</i>	political Hinduism, Hinduness
<i>imam</i>	a prominent Muslim priest
<i>jadutona</i>	magic
<i>karma</i>	deeds
<i>Lok Sabha</i>	lower house of the Indian Parliament
<i>matiravadi, mantravadi</i>	Black magic, witchcraft
<i>maya</i>	illusion
<i>mukti, moksha, moksa</i>	salvation, liberation
<i>pooja, puja</i>	rituals, offerings, Hindu worship
<i>pujari</i>	Hindu priest
<i>pujaris</i>	traditional healers
<i>saitan</i>	Satan
<i>swami</i>	lord or master
<i>tantric, tantrik</i>	black magician
<i>Vaishnava</i> tradition	tradition related to god Vishnu
<i>Vedantic</i>	related to <i>Vedas</i>
<i>visvas</i>	faith

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Chapter - One

Essential components of the research

1.1. Introduction

Religious conversion is a political act in India that has numerous repercussions. Mahatma Gandhi wanted high-caste Hindus to take over from the British as the dominant force. However, Gandhi's dream of controlling most of the indigenous peoples in the name of religion after the British was dashed by the group conversion of the Dalits, an oppressed group in India, to Christianity and the announcement of B. R. Ambedkar, a messiah of the Dalits and those, who drafted the Indian Constitution, to convert to Buddhism (Iyadurai, 2015:1). The Dalits considered the gospel to be excellent news because it gave them a new identity and human dignity that the caste-based Hindus had denied them. Gandhi compared the Dalits to cows because he could not bear the upsurge and Ambekar's determination to liberate the Dalits from the high-caste Hindus by leaving Hinduism en masse (Iyadurai 2015:1, quoting Ambedkar's words in Das 1980:108). Gandhi even threatened to pass a law banning conversion once India gained independence. On October 14th, 1956, Ambedkar successfully led 500,000 Dalits through a conversion to Buddhism. During the same period, Indian political groups adopted right-wing Hindu ideals and initiated a proposed law mirrored by Gandhi's initial promises (Iyadurai, 2015:1).

In the current environment, academic research on conversion studies in India focuses primarily on the socio-political aspects of the complex phenomenon of conversion. The heated political discourse surrounding the issue has neglected the spiritual aspect. This research is distinct and challenges some of the prevailing understandings of religious conversion in light of India's unique cultural and religious heterogeneity. This study could reinforce converts' views on the current issue of religious conversion in India. Many of the accounts in this research reveal the cultural and familial resistance to conversion in India, as well as how converts respond to this resistance. The Indian Pentecostal churches emphasise conversion and the miracles of the Holy Spirit as core beliefs. Pentecostals view conversion as a miracle, whereas other Christian groups do not regard it in the same manner. Discussions about miraculous conversion (MC) among Indian Pentecostals demonstrate how pneumatically central their theological framework

and practical ministry become. In this context, 'pneumatic centrality' refers to the belief in the active and direct role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. People who believe in the Holy Spirit's power also acknowledge miraculous healings that often extend to exorcisms. The converts maintain their connection with the Holy Spirit, demonstrating the depth of their faith in Jesus Christ and enabling them to remain loyal to their new religious beliefs.

1.1.1. An appraisal of religious conversion

The complex matter of religious conversion generates multiple reactions, including debate, confusion, and misunderstanding, but also attracts intense interest and scepticism, and creates feelings of excitement. This phenomenon generates multiple perspectives regarding its procedures and motives, together with the expected modifications and accepted or rejected aspects. For some, conversion is a life-altering event. In contrast, for others, it means being ostracised by the family and religious groups that once embraced them (Rambo & Farhadian 2014:4). Conversion encompasses religious, political, psychological, social and cultural dimensions, necessitating a comprehensive and nuanced understanding. The topic's depth and complexity make defining religious conversion a formidable task for academic researchers. For too long, scholars have focused on the study of conversion, neglecting the miraculous encounters of Indian Pentecostals. This oversight is the driving force behind my studies.

This study employs the term 'miraculous conversion' to emphasise the inclusiveness of the miraculous experience of conversion, rather than religious conversion. It aims to enhance our understanding of religious conversion, particularly Pentecostal conversion, at both the ecclesiastical and academic levels. It considers the perspectives of both Pentecostals and traditional Christians.¹ Considering various viewpoints, all voices are guaranteed to be heard and respected. It examines 'conversion' in detail and explores why it is a contentious issue in India's political-legal landscape, fostering a sense of inclusivity and

¹ Traditional Christians are other Christians who follow cessationism. They are traditional Protestants, and today's conservative Reformed churches, e.g., Lutherans, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Brethren, Baptists, Reformed, and certain Evangelicals. They reject modern miracles and hold that the remarkable deeds performed by the apostles and prophets of the New Testament did not continue after the apostolic age. Yet some of them among these traditions believe in the miracles.

understanding in the study of religious dynamics.

Psychologists who focused on the convert's sense of crisis and cognitive development, sociologists who highlighted the social determinants of the process, and Christian theologians who—without disregarding the earlier perspectives—spoke of the role of God in transformation have all examined religious conversion from a variety of perspectives (Malony & Southard 1992, cited in Barua 2018:94). Martin Luther and John Calvin both had similar views on conversion. Calvin uses the term 'conversion' several times in his writings, especially in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), the *Commentary on Acts* (1552–54), and the *Lectures on Jeremiah* (1563). In the *Institutes*, Calvin reflects Luther's two basic understandings of the meaning of conversion. First, this 'conversion as the initial event is an act of God.' Because of human attachment to sin, 'even the beginning of conversion to God is ascribed entirely to God's grace' (Calvin & McKim 2001: 41). People cannot be converted unless God first transforms their stubborn and stony hearts into soft and malleable ones. Second, 'Conversion is a lifelong repentance process that manifests in moral and spiritual regeneration' (Calvin & McKim 2001:41). The author of the sudden and transformative change here is God's sovereign will. For Calvin, God changes the stubborn inclinations of our hearts, and the source of repentance is God, not man, through the hidden power of His Spirit. Calvin knew that faith is not the least element of conversion and that the entirety of conversion to God is summarised under repentance (Calvin & McKim 2001:41, Kling 2020:219-21).

Two of Harvard's most influential former scholars—William James and Arthur Darby Nock—defined religious conversion in psychological terms. William James (2002:150), in his work on *Varieties of Religious Experience*, examines the term conversion as '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.' His concept was derived from his study of Christian conversion experiences, which he found to be regenerating spiritual encounters. According to Nock, by conversion, we mean the conscious turning away of a person's soul from insignificance or towards a different kind of piety, a turn that indicates the awareness of a significant transformation, the realisation that the old was false and

the new is true (Nock 1998:7). This is best demonstrated in a person's enthusiastic response to the options presented to them by prophetic religions. The psychological processes of change influenced both James and Nock. They analysed the inner experiences of converts and saw these as essential to understanding the conversion process.

Conversion, according to Rambo (1993:5), is a process of religious change that occurs within a dynamic web of individuals, institutions, expectations, occasions, ideas, and attitudes. He defines it as the surrounding environment. In other investigations, he admits to the existence of the divine. Except for James' study, none of these studies have directly examined the presence of divine-human contact during the conversion process (Iyadurai 2015:3). From this research, we can understand from a phenomenological perspective that the *MC* experience is both a complicated process and a perceptible event—the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit's encounter with man—that brings about a personal transformation towards holistic well-being and change activates religious beliefs.

Pentecostal theology and practice have emphasised the experiential manifestation of the Holy Spirit through healing miracles as a path to conversion. This can take many forms, extending beyond the traditional idea of a sudden and supernatural encounter, such as a progressive transformation that various people undergo along different paths. In any case, the Pentecostal tradition firmly attributes the conversion process to the action of the Holy Spirit, inspiring a deep connection to the divine in the hearts of believers.

Many psychological and sociological studies of conversion take a reductionist approach and explain away the spiritual components. Other studies, while acknowledging the crucial role of the supernatural, dispute its prominence, although converts strongly emphasise it. Previous studies of religious conversion have employed a disciplinary approach to the phenomenon; however, it is essential to acknowledge that these studies have limitations. A disciplinary approach is one that, according to Steigenga (2014:411), 'increasingly measures variables and tests hypotheses using qualitative methods and survey research.' Theology may overlook the psychological, social, and cultural components of conversion. Psychology overlooks the religious element of conversion and considers it only through the principles of psychoanalysis. Ignoring other aspects, sociologists only examine the social dimensions of the conversion process

(Iyadurai 2015:4; Mendiratta 2024:44).

Iyadurai (2015: 4) quotes Rambo (1993) as saying that a multidisciplinary approach is necessary to understand the conversion process. Accordingly, Iyadurai consulted ecclesiastical and academic discourses, drawing on knowledge from psychology, sociology, anthropology and theology. This approach enables the present researcher to present a phenomenological viewpoint and critically evaluate the ordinary theology of *MC* experiences in Pentecostal churches. As Ekeke and Ekeopara (2010:266) argue, phenomenological inquiry is a powerful tool that helps us understand 'the meaning and manifestations of the religious phenomena of each religion.' Awang and Ramli (2011:184) note that 'religious phenomenology focuses on aspects of the religious experience and explains religious phenomena based on people's orientation.'

Therefore, this study's methodology examines the transformative testimonial accounts of individuals' *MC* experiences to gain insight into religious conversion from a phenomenological perspective. Astley (2020:4) argues that 'experience refers to an event, activity, or incident' that has a lasting impact, and the meaning of these experiences is examined through the lens of phenomenology.

1.1.2. Motivation of the study

First, I outline my theological background so you may understand where I stand. Being a part of a Pentecostal church in South India, I was raised in a Christian Pentecostal household. I came to understand Christianity rationally through my theological education at a prominent Evangelical seminary. This helped develop my basic religious ideas and expand my theological understanding. Having been exposed to many theological viewpoints, I appreciate their merits rather than simply dismissing them. I had doubts about the conventional Christian denial of miracles because I was aware of Pentecostals' claim that they had miraculous encounters that led to their conversion. However, my interactions during my mission with people from different Christian traditions and Indian states, as well as my reading on conversion, enabled me to recognise the various perspectives from which conversion can be viewed. Similarly, hearing from converts about their *MC* experiences and the price they paid for their conversion made me believe them and led me to focus my research on *MC* in

Indian Pentecostalism. This study aims to contribute to the existing theological discourse by examining conversion as a miraculous event and comparing it to the perspectives of some Reformed and Traditional Christians. The aim is to adopt an unbiased approach, as conversion can also be a cognitive process.

The Pentecostal theology of conversion is examined by giving reasonable weight to the significance of the conversion narratives of converts. It is called *MC* because it allows for the presence of religious experiences and practices during the conversion process while considering psychological and sociological considerations. While the beginning and end of such a process can only be vaguely identified, this helps to understand the complicated reality of the conversion process. Pentecostals define their mystical turning point as the spiritual encounter in which the divine presence becomes evident, connecting human beings with God. When the Holy Spirit displays a supernatural presence, converts gain certainty about experiencing truth and believe they possess divine knowing of God through this encounter. People who convert to this faith often say that their experience with the Holy Spirit is unlike anything else they have ever experienced. They describe it as a powerful and personal encounter that gives them a strong sense of knowing God tangibly. This belief does not represent a logical understanding of religious truths. It cannot be taught or translated into testable philosophical statements. It comes only through the direct, miraculous experiences of the mind.

When a convert regains normal waking consciousness, he suspends his will. He replaces his previously held religious beliefs with a keen sense of excitement and anticipation that the newly discovered knowledge of God is genuine (James 2002:150). The convert may need time to consider abandoning their previously held religious beliefs. However, they are thrilled that the Holy Spirit has performed a great miracle. Thus, some reject the old religious beliefs in favour of the new understanding of God that results from the active participation of the Holy Spirit (Abraham 2021:202; Sahoo 2018:96-99).

The Holy Spirit works miraculously on unbelievers, leading them to experience healing that results in conversion. The experience of encountering God through an extraordinary intervention requires converts to experience knowledge of sin before they can turn towards Christ through faith-based acceptance as Saviour and Lord. Fellowship with God leads people to immediately

confess their sins before receiving forgiveness from Him. During their miraculous experience, converts repent of their sins, but afterwards, they experience everlasting joy and peace, along with happiness, rather than remorse. The holistic well-being of an individual—consisting of several elements—is, therefore, the fruit of this *MC*, providing a sense of reassurance and confidence. The *MC* influences all aspects of the convert's life—spiritual, psychological, behavioural, physical, social and financial. As a result, converts achieve satisfaction in both the spiritual and broader areas of life. A phenomenological study of *MC* illustrates this. The latter phase of my research, in which Christ is discussed as the centre of the proclamation of salvation, will, however, deal theologically with the entirety of conversion as a moment of salvation. In keeping with India's rich religious background, Pentecostals firmly believe that salvation is attainable only in and through Christ. However, miracles are crucial for a person to recognise Christ as the faithful Saviour and Lord.

The present study of *MC* stems from my deep interest in the Pentecostal study of conversion stories and my concern about the ongoing problem of religious conversion in India, a persistent issue for the Indian Church. The topic first captivated me over a decade ago. This study delves into the individual, everyday conversion experiences of Pentecostal Christianity in India, a journey that is as diverse as it is fascinating. The converts, hailing from diverse origins, are members of various castes, including Dalits, Brahmins, and tribal communities. Members of this movement originated from people with both educational backgrounds and no formal schooling, as well as from the rich and the poor social classes. The conversion experiences of these participants become increasingly complex because they belong to Christian, tribal, Islamic and Hindu traditional faiths.

1.2. Research Problem

The study investigates how Indian Pentecostals describe their supernatural encounters with the Holy Spirit, which led to *MC* experiences. It employs a phenomenological approach to understand how these individuals perceive and interpret these encounters, and how they intersect with and challenge the philosophical perspectives of cessationist Changed Christianity and the Hindu understanding of marvels (both ordinary and extraordinary), potentially contributing to inter-religious tensions and accusations of control.

The research will examine Pentecostal theology to provide a solid theological foundation for understanding and expressing the nature and meaning of MC. Additionally, it is essential to address interreligious dialogue, examining the potential for misunderstandings and conflicts that may arise from Pentecostal conversion practices, particularly with Hindu communities. By addressing these issues, research can bridge gaps and enhance understanding of the complexities of interfaith relations in India, the personal dimensions of religious experience, and the significance of miracles in conversion.

Pentecostals emphasise the direct, tangible experience of the Holy Spirit, often demonstrated through signs and wonders, such as speaking in tongues, healing, miracles and prophecy (Poloma & Green 2020:3). In the Pentecostal understanding of conversion, these expressions of the experience of the Holy Spirit are essential as evidence in the person's life.

In contrast, cessationists believe that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, such as those listed above, ceased with the end of the apostolic age (Dev 2008:12; Warfield 1973). They argue that these gifts were temporary signs authenticating the early church and are not necessary for the church today (John 1996:148-49, 183). The research contrasts Indian Pentecostal beliefs with the Reformed theology approach, as the tradition prohibits the practice of spiritual gifts. Pentecostals and Cessationists base their understanding of Christianity on established religious texts, while the Pentecostals focus primarily on Spirit-led miracles that manifest during conversion. The various interpretations within Indian Christianity have sparked essential discussions among Christian circles in India.

Pentecostalism identifies conversion as a transformative experience of the supernatural encounter with the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals centre their lives on this mystical experience, providing evidence from the Bible. This encounter often involves a dramatic spiritual awakening accompanied by miraculous manifestations. Charismatic experience plays a vital role in defining who Pentecostals are and what Pentecostalism represents, shaping their conversion theology based on the experience of experiencing the scripture.

Convincing one's conscience of sin and forgiveness, convincing one's mind of the truth, and allowing Christ into one's heart are all part of the Pentecostal explanation of conversion (Kärkkäinen 2003:120). From a phenomenological point of view, a person receives the heavenly touch of the Holy Spirit, which helps him

to convert from sin to Christ by faith. Theologically, a person's conversion experience is greatly influenced by their faith. According to Pentecostals, the Holy Spirit is an agent of God who encourages disobedient and unwilling people to 'repent and turn to God' (Vondey 2014:26, 28; Towns 2008:241). Without the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, there would be no point in planting churches. Human tools cannot change evil ideas, stubborn wills, biased judgments and dead hearts. Furthermore, the active participation of the Holy Spirit in demonic deliverances, miracle healings, and other events justifies a person's belief in Christ and turning from sin (Macchia 2006:250, 51; Abraham 2011:205-06; Tennent 2010:310; Del Colle 2011:239).

Church denominations like Evangelicals, Baptists, and Brethren have all voiced their disapproval of Pentecostalism, saying that these healing miracles were often overstated. The ability of Christ's crucifixion to pardon human sins can be proven through the robust evidence of miraculous events. His death has a more profound significance, offering hope and faith in the face of criticism. Ultimately, this is a victory over evil, mortality and transgression. Miracles manifest God's rule over the natural world, as this victory demonstrates (Abraham 2021:216, 224-25). Christ's death and resurrection prepared the way for the Holy Spirit to come at Pentecost and bestow supernatural abilities, such as prophecy and healing. The Holy Spirit manifests himself through miracles made possible by the sacrifice of Christ. God's message and active presence in the world are demonstrated through these miraculous events (Dick and Dick 2011:131).

From a Pentecostal perspective, these remarkable signs continue to occur today because of Christ's sacrifice. Pentecostals argue Christ's sacrifice as the basis for miracles because it represents God's victory over evil, empowers believers with the Holy Spirit, and is consistent with biblical examples and the Pentecostal understanding of God's power and love (Abraham 2021:222-25). Miracles are always the product of God and the Holy Spirit and never happen because someone asks for them (Warrington 2008:281-82). In India, Pentecostals emphasise healing and miracles because they believe these can lead to conversion and change in beliefs and behaviour (Sahoo 2018:36, 37).

One of the main characteristics of Indian Pentecostals is their emphasis on miracles (Kuhlin 2022:43). A miracle is a symbol that points to something greater than itself. Religious phenomena arise when extraordinary events convey, reveal,

or symbolise a spiritual reality. Importantly, miraculous events typically trace their meaning to the fact they point to, rather than the actual event. Pentecostals describe 'miraculous' or 'supernatural' events, such as the healing miracles described in the Gospel, as evidence of divine intervention in human affairs (Kärkkäinen 2016).

Many Pentecostal theologians associate conversion experiences with a sudden and unexpected turn to repentance and faith (Kärkkäinen 2016:137; Abraham 2011:104; Towns 2008:336). Pentecostals base their faith on the dynamic experience of the Spirit, rather than on logical theories or constructions (Pinnock 2006:148-49), and they aim to understand the miracles of conversion exclusively in biblical terms. Pentecostals believe the Holy Spirit has an active part in the conversion process. Pentecostals provide testimony of the Spirit through transformative experiences, which express themselves as prophetic declarations, evidence of healing and deliverance, and speaking in tongues. However, within Indian Christianity, Reformed Cessationists focus on comprehending and believing the gospel message, criticise Pentecostalism's doctrine and practices in India, and emphasise the Bible as the primary source of conversion.

Other traditions view conversion as a cognitive decision or process that includes thinking, knowing, remembering, judging and decision-making. It might be accurate to claim that rational means can also lead to conversion. The Pentecostals are actively involved in proselytising and converting people, and have even been questioned by the Hindus. Why do Pentecostals emphasise so much the miraculous works of the Spirit in the conversion of Indians when all religions approach God in different ways? Although virtually all faiths believe in miraculous events, Pentecostals must reflect on their experiences and develop coherent theologies to explain these experiences to other Christian traditions and their differences from various religions, particularly Hinduism, which is the main religion in India. The study can bridge the gap between Pentecostals and Reformed traditions, while Pentecostals can engage in a meaningful dialogue with Hinduism in India.

Pentecostals believe that despite their best efforts, people cannot overcome the influence of darkness, overcome the past or enter the kingdom of God. Therefore, the Holy Spirit works miraculously in the lives of those who earnestly hear the gospel (Acts 2:37). Pentecostals carry out ministries of healing, exorcism,

casting out evil spirits, and other miraculous deeds, which are an integral part of their gospel witness in India (Sahoo 2018:36, 37). Kärkkäinen (2010:236-238) and Vondey (2020:264) consider the miracle to be part of the church's ministry. K.E. Abraham (2001:77), a well-known Indian Pentecostal figure, observes that following 'miraculous power displays and spirit-filled preaching, people would be freed from the grip of evil.' Divine healing and miracles can provide evangelistic opportunities and lead people to conversion (Anderson et al., 2010:248).

Pentecostal services are characterised by sharing testimonies, including *MC* experiences associated with healing, deliverance and prophecy. Pentecostals often employ evangelistic methods that emphasise the miraculous power of the Spirit to transform the lives of those suffering from various things. Prophetic ministries, divine healings and testimonies of miraculous encounters are used to attract and convert people. Indian Pentecostals view miraculous healings and exorcisms as a priority for evangelism, aiming to lead unbelievers to Christ (Sahoo 2018:37). Miraculous healing is a key attraction of Pentecostalism, which is why it has become one of the fastest-growing religions worldwide (Burgess 2006:xiii; Stolz 2011:456).

Miracles are crucial to Pentecostal evangelisation (Smith 2010b: 2-6), and when a miraculous element accompanies the gospel, it increases the probability of conversion (Vondey 2014:114; Sahoo 2018:37; Abraham 2001:187,199-200). This practice helped Pentecostals survive and grow into a significant denomination within Christianity (McGee 2010:xx), and this is examined in this study. Conversion is a miraculous procedure in which converts experience 'shalom-wholeness', 'power encounter', and 'connection with the supernatural'. Therefore, a believer may witness a miraculous element, whether healing, a miracle, or even the powerful transformation in a conversion experience (McGee 2010:222; Ma & Ma 2010:112,223; Iyadurai 2015:169-71). It is the focus of this study. How does the dimension of the Spirit as a miraculous element of conversion shape the Pentecostal life from beginning to end? How does this impact those who are part of the conversion process?

Bauman (2015:19) argues that 'Pentecostal faith healing as a primary factor in conversion to Christianity in India today alters contemporary debates about conversion in significant ways.' Not surprisingly, power encounters and miraculous deeds have been recognised as the cause of countless conversions over the years

in India. The Holy Spirit is a dynamic and creative force in bringing about miraculous events. Pentecostals view the miracles depicted in Luke-Acts as paradigmatic for their practice and theology (Moreau, Corwin, & McGee 2015:16; Menzies 2013:30). However, the Pentecostal view of the theological implications and frequency of these miracles varies widely.

In contrast to some traditional churches in India with their cessation-of-miracle theology views, Kimberly Ervin Alexander (2020:264) argues that 'where the work of the Holy Spirit takes place, signs and wonders trigger conversion. The cessationist premise, according to which notable charismatic manifestations or miracles ceased towards the end of the apostolic era (John 1996:148-49; Kärkkäinen 2016:436; McClymond 2023:98). The most pressing theological question concerns the extinction and miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Some Christian traditions in India, mainly traditional Protestantism and today's conservative Reformed churches, are deeply rooted in Cessationism (Dev 2008:12; John 1996:183; Luther 1959:953-57; Calvin 2006:16.17; Warfield 1976, 2010; Kärkkäinen 2016:373; Ruthven 1993:24-40; Hejzlar 2010:49-51). Reformed traditions hold that miracles are no longer necessary because they were given to confirm the gospel and have faded now that the gospel has been spread and preached throughout the world (see John 1996:183; Dev 2008:12; Warfield 2010; Wayne House 2016:42). Traditional Christian theologies, particularly the cessation style, frown on any miraculous significance attached to conversion.

Ward (2006, 2013:217) observes that 'religious faith depends upon experiential, not physical, evidence.' Experience is central to Pentecostal development of theology. Neumann (2012:12) examined Pentecostals in the 1990s and up to the present, and 'Pentecostals are making more conscious efforts to reflect on the role of the experience of God in the context of their theology and spirituality.' Therefore, how and why the Pentecostals emphasise the *MC* experience in their theology and practice in the Indian context should be examined.

The challenge is that Christians from other traditions insist that conversion is a cognitive (Robeck 2014:250) and developmental process, rather than primarily a miraculous experience. Pentecostals emphasise that all converts have a miraculous experience at the time of conversion and should experience more such incidents throughout their lives. The study examines the Indian Pentecostals' perspective on the conversion experience, how it shapes their religious and

cultural life from beginning to end, and how it differs from other Christian traditions. It also examines how they use the Luke-Acts account to support the idea that the Holy Spirit performs a miraculous deed at conversion. The study aims to clarify and understand a Pentecostal theology of conversion as a first step towards investigating Pentecostal conversion in India. The research conducted here aims to stimulate renewed reflection and response to the difficulties traditional theologians face in conversion.

Pentecostalism places great importance on the continuous presence of the Holy Spirit, resulting in key theological elements that emphasise divine power, spiritual abilities, and individual believer participation in church activities. Christian spirituality exhibits an energetic and personally experienced character, as it rejects static and historical interpretations of faith. A large number of believers experienced spiritual revival through their renewed focus on the Holy Spirit during this Christian development, which we now know as the Renaissance. The rapid expansion of Pentecostalism is expected to have a substantial impact on Indian religious believers. This evaluation examines the cultural and social environments that have fostered the rapid growth of Pentecostalism in India, offering comprehensive insights into both Pentecostal beliefs and their associated religious teachings. The present debate will benefit from a detailed analysis of Pentecostal and Cessationist religious beliefs.

The study also highlights the need to bridge the gap between Pentecostals' emphasis on supernatural encounters in transformation philosophy and other Christian traditions, such as the Brethren, Baptists, Reformers, and certain Evangelicals, who approach change from a cognitive perspective. Subsequently, the Pentecostals' remarkable involvement in change should be viewed from a broader religious perspective, as conventional Christians in India often perceive supernatural occurrences negatively and note that Pentecostals employ various mysterious or miraculous strategies. Some evangelicals argue that miracles cannot illuminate the dark minds of non-Christians or soften their stony hearts. Pentecostals, however, emphasise that the Holy Spirit is crucial in convincing them of sin and softening their hearts. Although this study has its limitations, it is hoped that it will support further academic research and aid the broader Christian community in seeking the meaning of Pentecostal theology of conversion. This

study employs a qualitative empirical approach to examine Pentecostal conversion theology.

1.3. Definitions

1.3.1. Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism originates from the biblical religious festival of Pentecost. The Greek translation *Pentekoste* is the essential element that defines this observance, as it means fiftieth. It signifies the fifty days after Easter or the tenth day after the Ascension, a period that marks the profound revelation of the Holy Spirit to the apostles and other early followers of Jesus Christ who had gathered for the feast (Marina 2013:15; Sahoo 2018:24).

Pentecostalism, however, defies simplistic definitions. It is a complex, global phenomenon that a single model cannot fully encapsulate. Hollenweger acknowledges the challenge of defining Pentecostals solely by their faith, given the diverse expressions of Pentecostalism worldwide (Hollenweger 1972:327). He elucidates their theological approach, which is deeply rooted in personal experience, open to oral forms, ecumenical, and expressed in categories of pneumatology (Hollenweger 1972:329). According to Anderson (2014:13) and Gooren (2004:206), Pentecostalism is a valid descriptor for all churches and movements worldwide that underline the work of the Spirit on both phenomenological and theological grounds.

Anderson proposes that the best way to categorise Pentecostals is to assess the significance they attribute to the [miraculous] experience of the Spirit and the spiritual gift in their practice (Frost 2019:23). Jacobsen (2003:12) defines being Pentecostal as a commitment to a 'Spirit-centred, miracle-affirming, worship-oriented version of the Christian faith.'

Anderson (2014:21) underscores André Drooger's sociological definition of Pentecostalism, emphasising the primary focus on spiritual encounters accompanied by ecstatic demonstrations. Thus, Pentecostalism can be understood as a profoundly personal experience of the Holy Spirit, connecting individuals to their faith in a unique way.

1.3.2. Miraculous Conversion (MC)

Defining the conversion phenomenon remains a problematic issue. The word 'conversion' is typically used to refer to ideas of extreme, rapid change due to the theological heritage of Christian teaching. As a result, the Pauline paradigm of abrupt, radical change, a dominant force in conversion discussions among Christian scholars, takes centre stage. The Pauline conversion paradigm includes notions of a surprising flash of revelation, a dramatic reversal of prior views and loyalties, and the assumption that converts are passive recipients of external influences. Theological scholars mainly consider the Pauline conversion model to be authentic. However, the definition of conversion is complicated. Evangelical Christianity has often called for a person's life to undergo a drastic, abrupt, and sweeping change in word and deed (Rambo 1993:213–14).

Although the Pentecostal understanding of conversion is from an evangelical perspective, it profoundly emphasises the conversion experience from a phenomenological perspective. It suggests that conversion occurs when a person repents of their sins and trusts in Jesus, accepting Him as their Lord and Saviour in the process (Peace 2004:9). For evangelicals, Bielo (2012:265) states, 'The self-consciously accepted belief is a central element of conversion narratives.' Evangelical conversion could only be intellectual, only a matter of faith. Typically, Pentecostal conversions are more intense than those of Protestants, imbued with the miraculous power of the Spirit that convinces converts that God is now actively involved and present in their lives (Peace 2004:9). This intensity underscores the profound impact and transformative nature of these experiences. However, it may be challenging to define and measure what constitutes a miracle precisely. While some believe that God has miraculously changed their lives, others may be less convinced, believing that what happened was merely a coincidence or a series of unusual circumstances (Elliott 2007:92).

Philosophers who have attempted to define the miraculous often did so by making a connection to a supernatural being. Clarke (2007:277) quotes philosopher Paul Dietl (1968:131). He states that 'to call an event a miracle is to attribute it to the will of a supernatural agent and to claim that if the supernatural agent had not intervened.' If this were the case, the event would have never occurred. This means the natural world is insufficient, and only a supernatural being can intervene. For Geisler (2004:24), a miracle refers to a 'special act of God

in the world, a supernatural [intervention] in nature, a special divine intervention.' Clarke defines a miracle as the intended result of a supernatural being intervening in the natural world (Clarke 2007:277-78). According to Ward (2006:227), miraculous means 'extraordinary and astonishing acts [that go] beyond the ordinary powers of nature and reveal the spiritual nature and purpose of the entire cosmic process.'

Thus, '*MC*' can be defined as a profoundly personal and miraculous experience through the supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit. '*MC*' can be expressed as a sudden and dramatic change in a person's life, typically when the convert experiences a miraculous event through the Holy Spirit, or it can be a gradual process. Sahoo (2018:98) states,

once they convinced that the Holy Spirit is responsible for the miracles in their lives, they decide not to look back, no matter how hard the path may be. They persuade...to become believers, strongly defend their faith, and even being willing to leave the village [for the sake of faith in Christ] and sever ties with relatives who oppose their decision.

Pentecostals emphasise that most conversions involve a miraculous element through supernatural signs such as healing, deliverance, visions, dreams, power encounters and other miraculous events. Scientists do not precisely define this convincing phenomenon, known as *MC*. However, the term *MC*, as per Taylor's (2005:12) view, is adopted as a working definition throughout the study. Therefore, for this study, an *MC* is defined as a 'supernatural aspect of the Spirit's role in the miraculous, revelatory signs of God's presence and love through the power of healing and deliverance, which is so powerful to convince people of their sins and to touch them deeply through the experience of a sudden decision - faith and behaviour strengthen their faith in Jesus Christ and provide a life-changing experience.'

Someone whose life is miraculously changed is never the same again. They pledge allegiance to Christ and seek to serve God by keeping His commandments (Taylor 2005:12).

1.4. Research Questions

1.4.1. Key Research Questions

Given the research problem that ‘Pentecostals view conversion as both a miraculous and cognitive event, which poses challenges within and outside the Christian tradition in India,’ this study seeks to answer the research question: Why do Indian Pentecostals consider the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit essential to the conversion process?

1.4.2. Secondary questions

What is the role played by miraculous experiences, especially the activity of the Holy Spirit, in a person’s faith and repentance in Christ? In the Indian context, what are the observable outcomes of this emphasis on the miraculous in conversion? Why do Pentecostals believe the Holy Spirit’s miraculous intervention is necessary for conversion beyond a cognitive or psychological process? Is there biblical and historical evidence supporting *MC*, or is it a peculiarly Pentecostal innovation? How does the conviction of the Spirit’s miraculous action in conversion shape Pentecostal experience and doctrine? What problem, according to some traditional Christian theologians in India, exists with the Pentecostal emphasis on the *MC* experience? What contribution does experience make to Pentecostal theology of conversion, and how does this differ from its role in other Christian traditions? What are the issues related to Pentecostalist conversion, particularly in terms of miracle healings and exorcisms that are favourable or unfavourable to Hindus, and how can a perspective concerning the same be introduced for respectful interfaith dialogue between Hindus and Pentecostalist Christians and management or resolution of conflict through prevention of misunderstandings?

1.5. Research Background

The entire existence of Pentecostals is based on the belief that the extraordinary events of the Day of Pentecost continue to unfold in the life of the Church (Del Colle 2011:235; Twelftree 2011:235). Webster argues that a believer can demonstrate genuine faith in Christ working through love, often expressed in miraculous ways (Vondey 2014:148). In Pentecostalism, conversion is widely regarded as a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit (Sahoo 2018:37; Keener

2011:289; Ma & Ma 2010:53, 112). This ongoing act of God disrupts the normal cycle of cause and effect in the world. It is more than just the beginning of the Christian life. McKim (2014:133) defines conversion as 'turning to or responding to the call of God in Jesus Christ in faith and repentance.' The effect is profound, as it radically changes a person's heart, mind, and will, leading to a new life.

While Pentecostals underscore miraculous experiences in conversion, others underline biblical teachings. According to Calvin, conversion is a lifelong process, and he advocated saving faith (Calvin, edited by McNeill 2006: 597). For him, it is not just a first act but a way of characterising the entire life of faith. Reformed traditions view conversion as the gracious gift of new life, marking the beginning of genuine faith and repentance that continues throughout the Christian life (Kling 2020:294). True conversion is the result of God's sovereign grace working in the hearts of men. They understand the concept of conversion or renewal in covenant language. Jesus, the Saviour, serves as the beacon of hope for those whom the Father has chosen in him, and he will fulfil this role on behalf of all sinners selected from before the world's foundation (cf. Eph. 1:3-14). This proposition expects the divine act of redemption, God's redeeming grace, to be extended to those He wishes to spare, but not to all humankind. The Holy Spirit encourages applying Christ's work to people chosen by the Father, for whom the Son would give up Himself beneath the pledge of redemption. This guarantees that all individuals foreordained by God will eventually accept Jesus Christ when confronted with the gospel message. The covenant in question includes the assurance of eternal life. It is founded by a benevolent deity who desires to save his elect from the consequences of Adam's transgression, which is accomplished through the redemptive acts of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament serves as evidence that miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit occurred in the first century, which is fundamental to all Christian beliefs (Menzies 2013:38). But traditional Christians understand that God-given miracles ceased in the early second century (Del Colle 2011:235; McGee 2010:7). Some of the theologians who hold similar views of cessation include John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Theodore Frelinghuysen, Charles G. Finney, Edward Irving, and Abraham Kuyper. Therefore, they disagree with Pentecostalism regarding the experiences of *MCs*. Pentecostals have attempted to express their experiences theologically and doctrinally, although language cannot capture or convey the

meaning of spiritual encounters. However, the urgency and relevance of the topic are underscored by the need for a phenomenological study of the MC experience to understand the concept of conversion and its process.

1.6. Literature review

1.6.1. Conversion

Many scholars have conducted numerous studies on conversion from various perspectives, including religious, sociological, and ethical. Some works dealing with the topic of conversion are listed here.

Stephen D. Elliott's (2007) study, *'By the power of signs and wonders: The role of the miraculous in conversion in Canada among the Pentecostals'*, concludes that the likelihood of conversion increased when Canadian Pentecostal churches presented the gospel message through miracles. He presents a distinctly Pentecostal theological and practical model from a missionary perspective, focusing on empirical investigation based on the Alpha course offered in Canada. He noted that the most successful and fastest-growing churches and evangelism efforts worldwide are often characterised by the 'miraculous' work of the Holy Spirit, which can be understood as the manifestation of divine power through healing, prophecy, or other extraordinary events. He noted that Pentecostal churches are more open to the experiential aspects of the miraculous Spirit in conversion. In this study, the primary purpose of miracles is to break people's indifference to the Gospel and to objectively and emotionally substantiate to secularised people the validity of the Christian message, the existence of God and his messengers. The study showed that a non-Christian who experienced a miracle firsthand would have significantly better spiritual outcomes than someone who did not experience a miracle at the time of conversion. Compared with those who did not, those who had a miracle felt more assured about their relationship with God.

George Anderson Jr's (2014) study, *'The ethical implications of the use of miracles for conversion: A study of the Word Miracle Church International'*, explores the moral ramifications of using miracles to convert people. He discovered that miracles were highlighted as one of the main attractions for people in Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Ghana. It became an approach to membership in the Word Miracle Church International. However, he argued that

Pentecostal Charismatic Christian churches in Ghana should not use miracles to accumulate wealth, compete, manipulate, or gain members. Additionally, he pointed out that Word Miracle Church International's use of miracles does not violate the ethical standards for the use of miracles in conversion. Pentecostal-Charismatic churches began using miracles to attract new members and recruit more people to their institutions. The research highlighted three main hazards, including deceptive practices that result in trust loss and abandonment of authenticity, alongside the commercialisation process that diminishes the spiritual value of miracles. In contrast, the fear of using miracles for church enrolment generates coercive situations and emotional stress.

Joel T. Mathai's (2017) study *'Conversion in the pluralistic religious context of India: A missiological study'* presents various church organisations representing radically different ideas about contextualising and converting missions. In India, this has made effective evangelism a problematic task. Mathai's study highlights the importance of a biblically grounded, unified concept of mission, contextualisation, and conversion, which will significantly contribute to the dialogue of the gospel message within Indian society. A study investigates the shared biblical interpretation of conversion, which provided foundational material for discussions about the Indian Church, societal issues, and modern ecclesiastical renewal in India. The missiological problems confronting the Indian Church about conversion demand courteous and speedy responses. The study presents a theological understanding of conversion in the Indian context and recommends that different churches emerge in response to varying contexts, without compromising their faith in Christ.

Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke (2007) have authored a book titled *'Religious conversion in India: modes, motivations, and meanings'*, which focuses on conversions to Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism and compares the elements that affect these conversions. It was published at a time when the conversion debate was becoming politicised. The non-proselytising religion of Hinduism is losing followers to the two proselytising faiths of Islam and Christianity. Accordingly, the Hindu society is in a frenzied state, trying to reabsorb reconverted Hindus into these societies again. Allegations of forced conversion, which allege that most Hindus are persuaded to convert to other religions using money or other forms of monetary gain, are helping to fuel these efforts. This is

rarely the fundamental reason for conversion, as most of the essays in this book show.

Although a different topic, Sarbeswar Sahoo's (2018) *'Pentecostalism and politics of conversion in India'* is also worth considering. The author's academically rigorous work focuses on the historical and contemporary lives of Pentecostals in Rajasthan, the western part of North India. Although most of Rajasthan's population adheres to a strong Rajput-Hindu ideology, Christianity is flourishing among the tribal people of Hindu society. Conversion to Pentecostal Christianity occurs because it practices divine healings and miracles while evangelising the indigenous population. Pentecostals are very vigorous in conversion activities in various parts of the country. According to Hindu nationalists, conversion is violence that destroys the essence of the spirit of an individual convert. Therefore, Hindu nationalists often targeted Pentecostals. The main themes of the studies are conversion and religious violence, two essential realities of Pentecostalism in much of India today. The author presents an academically thorough, accessible, and intellectually engaging assessment of the political, theological, social, and economic life of Pentecostals in Rajasthan, who share many commonalities with Pentecostals worldwide.

Grace Milton's (2013) study, *'Understanding Pentecostal conversion: An empirical study'*, later published as *'Shalom: The Spirit and Pentecostal conversion'* (2015), presents a typically Pentecostal model of conversion based on practical theological methods. The Bible-based concept of Shalom serves as an interpretive lens, providing practical implications for the Pentecostal community. In this study, Milton brought the everyday experiences and beliefs of Pentecostal Christians into a discussion of conversion theories from the humanities and theology. A survey conducted by Milton with 20 participants examined situations in which people reported having encountered experiences that influenced their decision to convert to the Pentecostal faith. However, there is a lack of research into what people experience before or during the first conversion. This knowledge gap could indicate that people are more aware of God's presence at the moment of conversion.

The study by David J. Hall (2019) focused on *'The role of encounter within conversion in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches and its implications for the mission'*. Hall's careful examination of the study's information to survey the parallels and disparities between these experiences and those Milton found among

the Pentecostals in Birmingham establishes the legitimacy of the research's findings. This examines the impact of gatherings on transformation and how it may influence the work of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the UK. The literature associated with the ecumenical Fresh Expressions initiative served as the basis for his study, which focused on a current practice of conversion. In his view, conversion is more than just a crisis and a personal encounter with God; it is a route. To further illustrate this point, he interviewed 32 converts from ten churches, equally divided between the New Church and the Classical Pentecostal churches, who had little to no prior experience in church.

While scholars have conducted numerous studies on conversion, a notable gap remains in research on Pentecostal conversion in India. In his book *'Pentecostalism and the Politics of conversion,'* Sahoo mentions Pentecostals' emphasis on miracles in conversion and their practices. In *'Pentecostals, proselytisation and anti-Christian violence in contemporary India,'* Bauman examines Pentecostal Christians experiencing violence in contemporary India as a result of their aggressive proselytising. He attempts to explain this disproportionate focus on India's Christian history, India's current socio-cultural and political characteristics, and Pentecostal belief and practice. However, neither Sahoo nor Bauman engaged with the Pentecostal theology of MC in their studies. Therefore, the proposed research on Pentecostal MC in India is a unique and necessary addition to the existing body of research. The researcher will include scholars from other church traditions to facilitate a balanced theological discourse.

1.6.2. Miracles

Christian culture considers religious healing miracles to be essential components, possessing supernatural abilities that exceed natural laws. Most ancient Greek and Roman cultures recognised that natural occurrences could receive divine intervention, a belief that has continued throughout human history. The belief in miraculous healings remains active within traditional healing practices and Pentecostal Christian groups, especially in modern times (Ferngren 2014:9-10).

In the Book of Leviticus, chapter 26:20, the Old Testament describes sickness as a form of divine retribution for human transgressions. Christian and Jewish thinkers, too, believed in God's providence and his regular intervention to

correct sinners, bless the righteous, and administer justice (Rider 2017:59). Examples of this include the short-term skin illness of Moses' sister Miriam after criticism (Num. 12:9-15).

In the New Testament, Jesus is shown healing sick people, including those with leprosy, blindness, and paralysis, thereby demonstrating the significance of these events in Christian culture and challenging the belief that illness is a punishment from God (Rider 2017:63).

It was believed that sinful actions could cause illness, which was perceived as divine retribution, and that healing could signify divine forgiveness and benevolence (Wilhoit 2022). Therefore, miraculous healings are a critical aspect of Christian culture, as evidenced in the New Testament, particularly in Luke-Acts (Rider 2017:63). The biblical authors' condemnation of secular medicine is not apparent. On the contrary, limited evidence suggests that early Christians, like other religious and nonreligious groups in the Mediterranean, frequently used secular medicine (Ferngren 2014:7). Mediterranean residents throughout the first century believed that sin, illness, and healing were inextricably linked (Rider 2017:59).

Beliefs about the causes of illness have varied across cultures and periods. Some believed that illnesses were God's punishment for sins, while others attributed illnesses and other problems to evil spirits, and still others thought they were caused by a natural imbalance in the body (Bruchhausen 2022:57; Schmidt 2022:118). Witchcraft, sorcery and magic are standard practices in the Indian religious context (Raj 2008:142–45). From this perspective, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Catholics believed that the cause of illness was evil spirits (Bruchhausen 2022:57).

Koenig, McCullough, and Larson (2001:3) state, 'For thousands of years, it was believed that physical and mental disorders resulted from demon possession or other spiritual forces and therefore must be dealt with in spiritual terms.' This belief has deep historical roots and is present throughout Christian history. Supernatural occurrences have become a standard part of modern life, as individuals relate them to therapeutic medicines. American Protestantism experienced a growing notoriety of faith-healing homes in the mid-19th century, primarily due to the influence of Methodism. The 20th-century emergence of Pentecostalism developed its theological framework through the belief in

supernatural gifts and healings, which the church expected to be natural occurrences (Ferngren 2014:7).

Healing miracles, the most prevalent in Pentecostal history (Del Colle 2011:245), have been a significant part of Pentecostalism's belief system and practice. During the latter half of the twentieth century, there was considerable growth in belief, participation in healing and prophecies, speaking in tongues, and other phenomenal experiences. Menzies (2013:30) states these 'miraculous occurrences will continue to influence the church's work today.' Kärkkäinen (2003:281) noted that Pentecostal pragmatism always expects miracles from God (see Harvey Cox 2007).

A substantial number of those who identify as Pentecostals believe in miraculous healings, attributing such phenomena to the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is considered the ultimate source of healing and release, a belief often supported by first-hand accounts of individuals who have experienced healing through direct divine intervention (Dyrness et al., 2008:1952; Saju, 2007:133; Chacko, 2018:24; McGee, 2010:4-6). Williams (1996:1907) argues that 'the outreach of the church should accompany spiritual manifestations: miracles, signs, and wonders.' Several power encounters and miraculous events have been credited with conversions over the years (Kärkkäinen 2016:164).

According to Williams (1996: 295, 313, 1304), miraculous signs lead others to a living faith in Christ. Miracles serve as physical examples and proof that the Gospel message is valid. In Pentecostalism, faith healing is a longstanding Christian practice based on biblical authority (Del Colle 2011:249; McGee 2010:222). Moreover, Pentecostals believe that the miraculous healing described in the New Testament could still occur today (McLean 2014:30; Williams 1996:1306-11), a belief that inspires hope and faith. Williams (1996:1908) believes that Christians are called to proclaim the gospel through supernatural manifestations. Pentecostals view miracles as apparent signs. The language used to describe such signs within global Pentecostalism leads to supernatural interpretations.

For Smith (2010c: 46,47), the immanence of God grounds the possibility of miracles in the natural world. Others, such as McGee (2010:4-6), Moreau, Corwin, and McGee (2015:96), and Williams (1996:313), have described how the presence

of the Holy Spirit and the possible occurrence of miraculous events in today's world continue to affect non-Christians, encouraging faith in Christ and conversion.

Brian McLean (2014:4) noted that while Pentecostals share beliefs based on a literal interpretation of the Bible, Reformed theologians suggest that miraculous manifestations such as miracles, prophecies, and speaking in tongues ended after biblical times. Pentecostals believe that the God depicted in the New Testament continues to perform extraordinary acts due to the empowering influence of the Holy Spirit (Kärkkäinen 2021:111). According to Calvin, Johannes Wollebius, and Benjamin Warfield, miracles were given in the apostolic age to confirm the gospel and are rejected in modern times (Warfield 2010:10; Calvin 2006:16; McClymond 1998, 2023:98; Kärkkäinen 2016:485-86). Therefore, due to the Reformation and a more focused Christological orientation, Reformed theologians adopted a more critical stance and analytical approach to miracle reports, providing a rich historical context for our understanding of miracles (Woodward 2001:383-84; Weddle 2010:164, 167; Twelftree 2011:241-44; see Yong 2014c:217).

1.6.2.1. Defining the term miracles

The definition of 'miracles' requires an initial understanding of 'supernatural' abilities. Many dictionaries define 'supernatural' by studying its root parts, where 'supra' means 'above' and 'natural' means 'occurring in nature.' A pair of dictionaries provides exact definitions: 'Supra' functions as a prefix with three meanings, including 'above', 'beyond', and 'outside' ('Supra-Dictionary.com Definition'). At the same time, 'Natural' serves as an adjective that states 'it exists in nature' ('Natural-Dictionary.com Definition'). The adjective 'natural' specified in 'Natural-Dictionary.com' 'Definition from Natural-Dictionary.com' means something that 'exists in nature or derives from natural sources. Some dictionaries fail to acknowledge genuine supernatural powers because they reject the experience of miracles. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a miracle represents a phenomenon that seems to transcend natural law; thus, no authentic biblical miracle is considered to violate natural law principles. These biases challenge preexisting belief systems and lead to deep analytical thought. According to this definition, the adjective 'supernatural' means 'departing from the usual, especially

appearing to exceed the laws of nature.' ('Supernatural-Merriam-Webster.com definition').

Given that miracles are inherently supernatural events, it becomes a fascinating intellectual exercise to examine the possible biases and contemporary interpretations of the term 'miracle' by consulting a modern dictionary. The Collins English Dictionary, for instance, often uses ambiguous expressions, such as 'supernatural,' Which can potentially dilute the profound meaning and impact of the word 'miracle.' It defines miracles as events that 'apparently contradict known scientific laws' and are 'Causes, esp. an act of God' (Collins English Dictionary-Miracle). However, beyond bias and contemporary definitions, a supernatural event can be described as one that transcends natural law when we consider the individual meanings of the word. Some scholars may argue that a supernatural event is a miracle, but this is not a universally accepted truth. All supernatural events are indeed miracles, but it is important to note that not all miracles are necessarily supernatural events (Lennox 2011:167).

The terms used in the Bible to describe miracles typically refer to the idea that God's power is at work to surprise people. There are three types of terminology such as (1) 'sign' (Greek σημείον), which alludes to another thing, particularly (relating to miracles) God's activity and power; (2) 'miracle' (Greek τέρας), which refers to an event that astonishes or astonishes people; and (3) 'miracle' or 'mighty work' (Greek δύνάμις), which refers to an act that shows excellent power, mainly (Acts 4:30; 5:12; Rom. 15:19) and other passages The phrase 'signs and wonders' is often used to describe miracles. Other passages encompass all three concepts and refer to 'mighty works and signs and wonders' (Acts 2:22; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4). Although the Greek word for sign (σημείον) sometimes refers to miracles, *semeion* means 'something that signals or points to something else' (Grudem 1994:356-57; 363).

Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume (2007:83) defines a miracle as a 'violation of the laws of nature by divine intervention.' Philosophers often consider supernatural forces when defining the miraculous, a challenging intellectual endeavour. According to Paul Dietl (1968:131, cited in Clarke 2007:278), calling an event a miracle requires attributing it to 'the will of a supernatural agent and claiming that if the supernatural agent had not intervened, that event would not have occurred.' The basic premise underlying objections to

the occurrence of miracles is that they are supposed to violate the established rules of the natural world. Pentecostal theologians argue that a miracle does not occur in the natural order and, therefore, never contradicts the natural order. In this theory, God performs a miracle that contradicts the laws of nature.

According to Yong (2011:117), 'It is the existence and activity of God that sustains the laws of nature,' and not vice versa. This leads to the explicit theological defence of natural law and nature itself. A miracle is an event that involves divine activity, deviating from the regular processes of nature. An example of God's unparalleled providence is a miracle. When God performs a miracle, He controls everything, acts supernaturally, and interacts with His creation in a manner different from how nature normally functions (Williams 2011:141). According to this definition, a miracle is an act of the Holy Spirit, the divine entity that can contradict scientific and natural laws. A miracle is an expected result of the miraculous manifestation of Spirit in the physical world. The Holy Spirit, which is God, alone has the power to work miracles. A miracle is a less common type of God's action in which he excites people's awe and wonder, and bears witness to Himself (Grudem 1994:355). The Holy Spirit can only work miracles in people's lives.

In today's scientific understanding of the universe, miracles are impossible. Nevertheless, Pentecostals believe differently. They believe miracles are rare occurrences that happen to ordinary people, just as they did in the past with the apostles. This strong belief in everyday miracles showcases the depth of their faith. Pentecostals believe that miracles are the works of the Holy Spirit, with the divine intent of authenticating and testifying to the gospel. Therefore, miracles are conscious, planned activities that imply the existence of a mind behind them. However, scientists reject anything that would violate established scientific laws and question the use of scientific methods to prove miracles today. The work of the Holy Spirit goes beyond scientific theory. It is truly an experience for the popular people of Pentecostalism.

1.6.2.2. Theories of miracles

This study will focus on the main arguments of two theories of miracles: the theory of the possibility of miracles and the theory of the credibility of miracles, as presented in the accounts of Luke-Acts, which describe the days of the apostles.

This will help examine the theological inquiry of *MC* in Indian Pentecostalism and suggest a current theological paradigm in practical theology (PT) in the Indian context.

Although Pentecostalism's emphasis on witnessing miracles has remained, there have been changes in theological and philosophical perspectives over time (Del Colle 2011:235). Therefore, there is a difference between the theological orientation of a Presbyterian congregation that adheres to cessationist theology within certain branches of Calvinism and that of a Pentecostal congregation whose fundamental beliefs are rooted in the ongoing manifestation of the extraordinary events of Pentecost within the church's ongoing existence. In this analysis, although confirmations of supernatural events as documented in Scripture are accepted by both communities, there is disagreement as to whether miracles have ceased or are still ongoing. Examining two miracle theories can help evaluate the divine intervention hypothesis from the perspective of explaining *MC*.

a. Theory about the possibility of miracles

The possibility of contemporary miraculous healing did not arise in early Pentecostalism. Anderson (2005:560) states, 'The miraculous power of the New Testament has been restored in the present day to draw unbelievers to Christ.' For him, the plausibility of wonders emerged in the early 20th century, coinciding with the desire for an association between the Holy Spirit and the crucifixion and the redemptive works of Christ. The wonders of recuperation wrought by Christ's final triumph over various forms of suffering illustrated the comprehensive nature of His redemption, which pointed to addressing the entirety of human existence and its unique challenges. The Holy Spirit brings about healing miracles and deliverance (Anderson 2005:601). Witnessing, healing the sick, performing miracles, casting out demons, and more are ways the Spirit manifests itself. Regardless, traditional theology rejects God's supernatural work today, arguing that it does not occur to the same extent as in the New Testament, where eyewitnesses can claim to have seen healings (Keener 2011:260).

Despite the Pentecostals' belief in the possibility of miracles, traditional scholars argue that miracles are not a part of the modern world. On the other hand, Pentecostals urge traditional scholars to study and learn from the *MC* testimonies of ordinary people. They argue that the extraordinary manifestations of divine signs

and miracles provide believers and non-believers with a genuine encounter with miraculous healings. The display of God's power through the Holy Spirit often triggers conversion (Ma 2009:47). Anderson (2005:602-3) views physical healing as part of Christ's redemption, with God's desire for universal healing. Kärkkäinen (2002:42) asserts that 'Pentecostals comprehend the possibility of miracles and expect a supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit's work, both within and beyond the church ministry, through healing miracles and deliverance, which are integral to the conversion experience.' The belief in the potential for healing miracles has significantly risen among Indian Pentecostals in recent decades, sparking curiosity and intrigue.

b. Theory about the Credibility of Miracles

The Pentecostal faith possesses valid testimonies, which are supported by scientific evidence of miracles. The testimonies function as vital evidence to verify Pentecostal miraculous occurrences. The notion that churches were fabricated has gained support among modern theologians because they perceive biblical miracles as exclusive to ancient times (Keener 2011:742). The credibility of miraculous claims has long been the subject of disagreement based on philosophical, historical, and theological considerations (McGee 2010: 9). In the medieval 'Age of Faith,' Thomas Aquinas suggests that a miracle is 'something completely wonderful,' i.e. the cause of which is completely hidden from everyone. God is the root of it (Aquinas 1964:14:85-87 cited in McGee 2010:9). Medieval beliefs included the possibility of miracles. Hume (2007:83) argued that a 'miracle violates the laws of nature' and, therefore, cannot happen. Unlike Hume, his predecessor John Locke (1632–1704), 'the founder of eighteenth-century empiricism,' affirmed 'the possibility of miracles and invoked the credibility of miracles to authenticate Christianity' (quoted in Keener 2011:120).

Historical foundations support the rejection of miracles, which Hume and other scholars, such as Houston (1994:102), have explained. Biblical scholar Benjamin Warfield studied the historical period of the apostles, where he observed miracles. He believed that the apostles utilised the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit to confirm their message and serve as leaders of the church. However, as the church became firmly established and the former leaders disappeared, so did demonstrations of miraculous powers (Warfield 2010:23-24, Ruthven 1993:193).

Similarly, reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin were sceptical about the likelihood of miracles occurring after the New Testament period. For them, miracles were required to sow the seeds of new faith and persuade the first generation to accept the salvation claims of the gospel message (Calvin 2006:16; Ruthven 1993:33-35). This verifiable setting provides a wealth of insight into the evolution of philosophical perspectives on wonders, shedding light on the reasons behind conventional Christians' underestimation of the validity of wonders and the experiences of Pentecostals.

A particular highlight of Pentecostalism is its firm conviction in the Spirit's capacity to promote recovery in various dimensions, including physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being (Kärkkäinen 2014:36). Pentecostals believe that they have reestablished the whole gospel or missional confidence for the world. However, the lack of comparable sensory perceptions in other historical churches undermines the miraculous encounters of Pentecostals and reveals their departure from genuine apostolic faith (Neumann 2012:135). Pentecostals believe the Bible is true and historically accurate, containing accounts of miraculous healings. They fully accept the historical accuracy of the biblical accounts (Ma 2014:88; Nel 2018:29-30). Therefore, they believe that the credibility of miracles is not confined to the past but is a living reality in the present, always accompanied by the mission of the Church. Keener (2011:13) notes that 'the abundance of testimonies demonstrates a widespread belief that God performs miracles today.'

Understanding the distinctions between miracles in Pentecostalism and magic as perceived by traditional Christian denominations is of utmost importance. Some traditional Christian denominations often criticise Pentecostalism as a magical and alienating religion because of its emphasis on miraculous healings, deliverance, and sudden conversions (Sanzana 2014:137). Pentecostals reject such criticism because they believe that miracles are the work of the supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit, while they see that magic involves the summoning of demons. Although the line between a miracle and magic is theoretically straightforward, traditional churches often attempt to categorise miracles of God alongside magic. This is a whole different area and can lead to further complications in understanding the miracles of God. Undoubtedly, 'magic' refers to supernatural collaboration with demons. It is always against the miracles of God. At least in theory, miracles and magic are the two extremes in dealing with the

supernatural (Ward 1987:11-13). Nevertheless, it is not possible to compare and understand in the same way. Critics of miracles do not concern themselves much with the miracle theory.

Although Pentecostals face challenges from traditional Christian theologians on theological and practical issues, they believe that the primary goal of the Spirit's miraculous intervention is conversion, just as in Acts 3, the miracle of healing of the disabled sparked large-scale conversion. Williams (2011:168) notes that in 1 Corinthians 12:28, 'God has appointed miracle workers in the church' so that miracles will continue. This does not mean the Church was granted the right to perform miracles only during the apostolic era. Pentecostal groups testify that God continues to heal today, just as He did throughout His earthly ministry, with the same power and control over history (Sanzana 2014:137).

Pentecostals have strong faith and believe that, like Jesus and his apostles, the Holy Spirit still performs miracles today. They witness this power through healing, casting out evil spirits, and giving prophetic messages. Many Pentecostals have personal stories of experiencing amazing miracles after becoming believers. Pentecostals become even more confident that miracles result from these transformative experiences. They believe these miraculous occurrences strengthen their faith and draw them nearer to Jesus by confirming the gospel's veracity. Pentecostals view healing as a means for God to save both souls and bodies.

1.6.2.3. Miracle's relationship to conversion

The conversion experience involves miracles, which transform an extraordinary situation (Iyadurai 2015:84). Do miraculous healing experiences motivate recipients to repent, confess their sins, turn to Christ, and accept Him as their personal Saviour? How can Pentecostal conversion theology benefit from the miraculous healing of the Holy Spirit?

Indian Pentecostalism attracts most of its converts through miraculous experiences during critical life events. Such minor miracles produce significant changes by building Christian faith and encouraging church attendance among tribal people during their conversion to Christianity. When they face challenges or a hopeless scenario, a remarkable turnaround occurs due to the miraculous intervention of the Spirit. Such events are miracles that defy natural explanation,

yet they come with the certainty that they are works of the Holy Spirit. The feeling of certainty in interpreting an event in their life as an act of the Holy Spirit leads them to Jesus Christ. They view the miracle as confirmation or proof of the veracity of Pentecostal Christianity (Iyadurai 2015:85).

God's supernatural intervention is intended to bring about salvation. When healings occur, they often lead to large-scale conversions. When preaching, teaching, healing or casting out demons, the gospel messengers in Acts felt the accompanying presence of the Holy Spirit, a unifying force in the ministry. Therefore, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is the purpose of the people of God (Ma 2014:89), connecting them to a larger spiritual community. The key factor that draws people to the message of Pentecost is the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit, particularly in the form of healing. This is the primary reason, according to Ma (2014:104), that 'Pentecostals [rely primarily on] the activity of the Spirit to bring souls through prayer, evangelism and other miraculous manifestations,' instilling a sense of reassurance and confidence in their faith. Sahoo (2018:26) also says, 'Indian Pentecostals place great emphasis on miraculous healing to bring people to Christ.'

In his study on *'Pentecostalism and the Politics of conversion in India,'* Sahoo (2018) examined the conversion stories of believers, showing that miraculous healings increased their trust in Christ and influenced their decision to convert through faith and repentance. Once they realise that the manifestation of the Holy Spirit is behind their miracles, they never look back, no matter how difficult the path may be. The believers sustain their devotion through time, which gives audience members confidence in their religious dedication. People who experience the Holy Spirit's touch and spiritual miracles develop blessed life conditions characterised by love, compassion, trust and understanding. The Christian faith becomes more substantial when healing, deliverance, and the recovery of peace occur, as these miracles enable believers to attend church services and meetings. During gospel sharing, Pentecostals use divine Spirit manifestations to assert Biblical miracles, deliverance, and healing power. This is firmly anchored in the spirituality of Indian Pentecostals. Pentecostals attract not only those seeking physical healing but also those seeking the restoration of broken family relationships and a strong social community. Miracle healings are considered an effective way to achieve these goals. Indeed, the desire to heal

individuals to a state of restoration that enables a fulfilling quality of life for each person, their families, and their communities becomes part of the conversion experience (Sanzana 2014:132).

Albrecht and Howard (2014:235) show that 'Pentecostals think about the theology of conversion based on their sense of the miraculous experience of God.' Their spirituality is rooted in the lived experience of the Holy Spirit and faith, which involves a deep personal relationship with God and a reliance on His guidance and power. As humanity is plagued by numerous illnesses for which modern science has no cure, Pentecostals today must consider what a healing restoration of life would mean. The Holy Spirit frequently performs miracles to give people hope in Christ during times of despair, when illness can crush dreams and hopes by affecting a person's health and well-being, and possibly impacting their loved ones. Pentecostalism places a high importance on the Holy Spirit's miraculous manifestations, viewing them as proof of the Spirit's existence and capacity to change people's lives. It goes beyond treatment and draws people to Christ (Sanzana 2014:132).

According to Bergunder (2008:169), Indian Pentecostals underscore the theoretical possibility that belief in 'Jesus can bring about healing for all diseases' and that such experiences lead to conversion. This is evident from the standard conversion stories of Indian Pentecostals. For Bergunder (2008:163, 65), 'faith healing and exorcism play a prominent role in the community practice of the Indian Pentecostal movement,' which contributes significantly to the Pentecostal movement's numerical conversion growth. Testimonies, with their power to reinforce faith, clarify that the conversion experience still contains a miraculous element today. Therefore, Pentecostals view miraculous healing and conversion as two sides of the same coin. When proven to work miracles, the proclamation of the Gospel can break through even the most stubborn forces, thereby bringing about conversion.

The Pentecostal environment attracted people from diverse spiritual backgrounds, enabling them to engage in spiritual exploration (Albrecht and Howard 2014:250). According to the Pentecostal belief system, the Holy Spirit functions as a supernatural being during conversion (Abraham 2021:202-03). During that period, believers can experience miraculous healing, which means the Holy Spirit works in conjunction with humans. The need for the Pentecostal

experience is paramount, as believers rapidly convert to salvation, receiving them in repentance and faith into Christ as both Saviour and Lord. A miraculous experience is a crucial factor in the rapid growth of the Pentecostal church.

1.7. An overview of practical theology and research methods

1.7.1. Practical Theology (PT)

Practical Theology (*PT*) is a comprehensive approach that considers its historical development and current perceptions. The goal of *PT* is to apply theological principles to everyday Christian life rather than examine them. *PT* has often addressed the perceived gap between theology as an academic field and the actual life of the church.

Richard Baxter's '*a Christian directory of practical theology*' (1673), a substantial four-volume work, holds a significant place in the history of practical theology. As the first to introduce *PT*, it covered various social and practical topics and was popular and influential among other religions. In 1830, Professor Friedrich Schleiermacher laid the foundation for *PT* as a study field, combining church leadership practice in his letter, "*Outline for the Study of Theology*." Schleiermacher established new research patterns for theological studies and the development of practical theory during his time. The author replaced the priestly and hierarchical framework of *PT*, emphasising the experiential dimension of human religious experiences (Louw 2011:4).

Cartledge (2022:206) states, 'Although *PT* has become a significant area of theology, it still has difficulty articulating its normative character. This [refers] to the focus of his attention, namely human action, while the Weakness lies in the articulation of divine action.' He says divine action is efficient and embedded in concrete, lived reality. *MC*'s Pentecost experience is realistic. The church emphasises the miraculous act of the Spirit in ministry, where unbelievers experience it at the time of conversion. Therefore, *PT* should urgently address the lived religious experience (of Pentecostal believers) regarding the *MC*. We can view *PT* as part of the existing life of the church and ordinary believers' understanding of Pentecostalism.

In his book *Practical Theology*, Osmer (2008:14) describes four main questions: 'What is going on?' (descriptive-empirical), 'Why is this happening?' (interpretative), 'What should be going on?' (Normative). Moreover, 'How might we respond?' (Pragmatic). Osmer's questions will help focus on the phenomenon of the study. *PT* examines a church ministry and believers' shared experience of *MC* as a lived spiritual experience. Here, the practices of the Pentecostal community and its pneumatically centred *MC* experience have motivated the investigation, including beliefs, practices, values, and attitudes. Klaasen (2014:4) articulates, 'These practices are [based on] practical reason and have validity as a phenomenon' that can influence both the experiencing subject and the experienced object. The argument regarding the *MC* experience here is: What constitutes an experience? Phenomenology examines the lived religious experience of ordinary believers in developing *PT*. Phenomenological methods use empirical social science to gain insights into the phenomenon. Next, we discuss how *PT* is connected to religious studies and empirical social science, aiming to provide an understanding of *MC* and its framework and interpretation.

1.7.1.1. Practical theology as an empirical theology

Empirical theology (*ET*) is a technique of *PT* that typically attempts to examine, describe, and evaluate religious concepts in a setting using rigorous scientific methods (Cartledge 1999: 100). However, *PT* bases its goals and views on theological principles. It differs from religious studies in sociology, anthropology or psychology. The pioneer of the empirical theological method, the Dutch theologian Johannes Van der Ven (1998), points out that *PT* should be viewed as 'an empirical discipline to explore, describe and test theological concepts contained in a particular context' and the practice of those affected is the direct object of *ET*. The social sciences drive this endeavour, and *PT* relies on these areas of study. Van der Ven argues that theology has the strategies and tactics to support this development. Religious principles serve as testable hypotheses and a broader framework for thought (Cartledge 2012:14).

Empirical Theology (*ET*) and Practical Theology (*PT*) have several meanings. *ET* argues that human reason alone should be used to determine what is true. Nevertheless, it also draws on experience and is willing to use both instrumental and experimental techniques to explore the range of human

experience (Cartledge 2016:14). *PT*, on the other hand, is a branch of theology that uses empirical methods to study religious phenomena. Empirical research allows theology to gain a comprehensive and unbiased understanding of *MC*. The empirical nature of *PT* makes it highly relevant for research due to its descriptive properties (Heimbrock 2004:60; Van der Ven 2002:7). Following the establishment of *PT* as an independent theological discipline, the integration of empirical methods as a social science approach is examined through a phenomenological lens. Typically, *PT* examines theology based on lived religious experiences to strengthen the connection between theory and practice (Milton 2015:13). The basis of phenomenological research lies in lived religious experiences, which serve as both a primary source and object of study. Therefore, like empirical disciplines, phenomenology begins with studying religious experiences.

The miraculous conversion of Indian Pentecostals also provides a fascinating interface between practical theology and religious studies. The focus of empirical studies on personal experiences and spiritual encounters is consistent with the emphasis of practical theology on lived religion. This study of *MCs* provides a rich data source for understanding religious experiences, particularly in the Indian context. By combining the perspectives of practical theology and religious studies, we can gain a profound understanding of *MC* as a Pentecostal experience. Moreover, through connection with other spiritual traditions, our research has the potential to inspire and offer hope by illuminating universal aspects of religious experience and belief.

1.7.1.2. Phenomenological model of empirical investigation

Lived (personal) spiritual experiences are the starting point of the phenomenological investigation. Van Manen (2014:53) notes that for a phenomenological study of experience, one must be 'strongly guided by the question of the meaning' of miracles and conversions. He says that we need an empirical search for lived (ordinary testimony) experiential material that, when examined reflectively, might reveal something about the fundamental nature of research (Van Manen 2014: 53-54). Therefore, Osmer (2011:2) proposes 'the descriptive empirical task' in this regard. It focuses on the human life experience (Osmer & Schweitzer 2003:2).

One can trace the origins of phenomenological approaches to William James' own phenomenological study of religious experience, as explained in his work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. His method of describing religious experiences through a phenomenological lens was groundbreaking. James' methodological focus is on collecting personal testimonies (lived experiences) to describe a spiritual experience, paying close attention to the richness of these experiences and understanding what makes religious experiences identifiable (Meierdiercks & Snarey 2019:2). Van Manen (2014:57-58) explores the possibility that one's own experience might be similar to the experiences of others and the importance of phenomenologists to be aware of specific experiential meanings. When the researcher is mindful of the structure of their own experience, this helps them to maintain an informed yet open mind while observing phenomena and conducting other phases of phenomenological inquiry.

Phenomenology consistently focuses on phenomena within the framework of possible human experiences. Therefore, engaging in phenomenological research involves interrogating a particular expertise to explore the nature of lived experience more generally. In this context, questions often arise about the characteristics of typical testimonies about *MC* and the lasting significance of this experience. This phenomenological study focuses on the events surrounding healing miracles, exorcisms, and how they lead to a conversion experience.

1.7.2. Methodology

This study examines conversion experiences and presents phenomenology as a potent tool for exploring these experiences. First, a summary of previous studies is provided, focusing on the conversion hypothesis and the methods used to investigate it. The research is expanded by defining the phenomenological idea of experience and how it might be understood in *MC* cases.

Phenomenology's methodological and theoretical framework creates a research agenda on *MC* experiences and brings together relevant research fields. The study design will be consistent with the theoretical foundations of phenomenology, including procedures for collecting and evaluating data, as well as relevant ethical and validity issues, which will highlight the promise of this approach and support its adoption. To encourage future research in this area,

some future research paths are suggested that utilise a phenomenological technique in the study of conversion.

An empirical study of *MCs* must use social science research methods. This research, therefore, employs the phenomenological method of qualitative empirical inquiry to explore how the complexity of *MCs* as a Pentecostal theological source can be understood through practical theological principles. Husserl, who developed a phenomenological theory in the 20th century, is examined by Heimbrock (2004:70). This scientific model describes the empirical connection between phenomena (Wu 2022:485). Many methods and processes conform to organisation, discipline, and methodological inquiry principles to generate scientific evidence through phenomenological studies.

A good starting point for conducting phenomenological research is personal experience. In a phenomenological study, the patterns of meaning in one's own experiences are also potential patterns of meaning for the experiences of others when creating personal accounts of *MC* experiences (Van Manen, 2014:313). It helps to understand the *MC* of the ordinary Pentecostal, as he experiences it. In his work, Astley (2020:19) explains that phenomenology primarily describes the subjective experience and perception of things by the individual who experiences them. It is a descriptive study of the *MC* experience (phenomenon) that expands on it by exploring its meaning. A phenomenal description highlights its existence and underlying meanings, allows the phenomenon to linger and retain its character, and allows readers to get as close to it as possible (Moustakas 2009:58).

The study aims to investigate how a miracle of conversion is perceived as 'real' and to examine it phenomenologically. What experiences have they had? The importance of experience is emphasised in phenomenological inquiry. The phenomenological study aims to understand the *MC* experiences of everyday Pentecostal believers and examine how they think about and interpret the meaning of these life-changing encounters. It can help draw a general picture of the *MC* and develop a conversion theology. What a miracle of conversion looks like can be understood through the phenomenological study of the experience of *MC* (Van Manen 2016:38-42).

Phenomenology is based on investigations that make sense and focus on the meaning of phenomena. It is also guided by themes that facilitate ongoing

inquiry, stimulate more significant curiosity and engagement, and explain our deep emotional connection to the objects of our experiences (Moustakas 2009: 59). Qualitative research will evoke people's ideas and feelings combined with the underlying principles of theology on *MC* experiences to develop a new practical paradigm.

Qualitative research is a methodological and empirical study that focuses on interpreting and understanding meaning. It involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data to gain a deeper understanding of ideas, attitudes, or experiences (Ritzlmayr & Erasmus 2024:146; Shank 2006:5). This helps the researcher gain deep insights from people's *MC* experiences and generate innovative ideas for studies.

The empirical study will be conducted after obtaining prior approval from the Ethics Research Committee of the University of Pretoria and submitting the consent forms and permissions from the churches. Church leaders are briefed on the research topic and are informed of it before permission is sought to conduct the research by surveying believers. The subject and aim of the study are also presented to the selected church members, who are asked to sign the consent form.

A critical component of the research is the collection and analysis of data. Two of the most common qualitative approaches for collecting data—interviews and focus groups—will be employed. These methodologies will facilitate a comprehensive understanding of individuals' conversion experiences within the Indian Pentecostal context. To collect data, a sample of 70 participants (male and female) is selected, comprising a diverse range of groups from those aged 19 to those aged under 60, for both qualitative interviews and focus group discussions. Participants will be selected with the assistance of pastors or elders who are familiar with individuals who have undergone significant conversions and are eligible to participate in focus group discussions. In unfamiliar situations, converts never share their experiences for fear of persecution and other threats due to the religious-political situation of India. For this reason, researchers seek the help of pastors or elders who know them well and introduce them to the researcher and the purpose of the work. It is helpful to understand whether these participants had a miraculous experience or had faith in Christ's redemptive act of salvation.

Among the Indian Pentecostal churches, six from South India and six from North India will be selected for interviews and focus group discussions. There are two reasons for selecting six churches from North and South India: (1) When I inquired about the growth of churches in terms of conversions, I learned that there were people who had stories of *MCs* that were relevant to my research topic and wanted to be interviewed about their experiences. (2) India has 2,000 ethnic groups, diverse religious and cultural customs, and more than 1,652 language groups. India is the most diverse nation on earth, living in unity and diversity (Bilinski & Leo 2023). The family of languages native to southern India is very different from the family to which the languages of northern India (and, interestingly, English) belong. The official languages in India are Hindi and English. These languages are official languages at the federal level (Bilinski & Leo, 2023).

Interviewing converts from diverse perspectives, including caste, region, language, and culture, enriches the data by providing a deeper understanding of their conversion experiences. This helps collect more accurate data for the study and offers new insights into the conversion experiences of ordinary people.

The phenomenological approach utilises subjective inquiry, primarily through semi-structured interviews, group discussions, and perceptions, to investigate participants' lived experiences, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Subjective interviews can moreover be considered a comprehensive or in-depth investigation (Morris 2015:3-5). This method enables an in-depth examination of the *MC* experience among Indian Pentecostals. It provides flexibility and depth, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the *MC* process. The methodology encompasses the selection of participants, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques (Tarwiyah 2023:64-65).

A purposive sampling technique is used to select participants who have experienced supernatural encounters during conversion. Selected participants are based on criteria such as age between nineteen and sixty, male and female converts, and geographical location to ensure diversity in the sample (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006:60-61; Tarwiyah, 2023:64-65). Participants who can offer rich, in-depth details about their *MC* experience are chosen through purposeful sampling. Choosing participants with pertinent experiences and viewpoints improves the breadth and depth of the data gathered (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006:60-61; Tarwiyah 2023:64-65). Semi-structured interviews facilitate open-

ended discussions with participants, allowing for the exploration of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences during their conversion (Tarwiyah 2023:64-65). An interview will be conducted in a calm and distraction-free atmosphere to ensure a smooth conversation. The conversation will be recorded using electronic devices with the participant's consent.

Before the discussion begins, welcome all participants and inform them of the purpose of the focus group discussion by explaining how their insights and thoughts will contribute to the research. Besides pastors and lay leaders, other elected members participate in the focus group discussion. They are encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings openly and honestly. Key questions are then asked and moved from one topic to the next as participants respond to the research objectives. It helps respondents express the affective, cognitive, and value meanings that certain situations have for them. Focus groups can be an excellent way to gather information about ordinary people's conversion experiences. Blackstone (2012) points out that 'conversation between respondents and asking questions for the researcher can be an excellent way for the researcher to learn more about a topic.' Like the interviews, a comfortable, private and quiet space is selected for the discussion, where participants can feel relaxed and open to the debate. All conversations are recorded by a recording device with the participants' consent, focusing on their reactions and interests in the topic. The analyst will observe their body language, emotions, and facial expressions, taking point-by-point notes, and focus on key points and emerging issues.

Subjective information investigation typically begins with the transcription of sound recordings. By listening to the audio again and inserting all the words spoken during the *MC* experience, the researcher creates a comprehensive written copy of the recording, noting who said which sentences. An inductive approach enables the identification of themes. We will use Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework to analyse qualitative data. The process includes multiple phases, beginning with familiarising oneself with the data before moving to initial code development, searching for themes, and validating the accuracy of these themes. This stage is most crucial because it ensures accuracy and reliability in theme identification. The process also includes defining and improving the themes, as well as organising and presenting the themes and related data.

Anonymous will be used to safeguard the identities of all participants and maintain confidentiality. Similarly, data collected from participants will be treated confidentially. Other people will have no access to the raw data provided. The original names of participants will not be associated with the research results. Instead, all participants receive pseudonyms. The analyst will transcribe all recordings as accurately as possible within the dialects used in the interviews and group discussions. Typically accomplished through near-tuning-in, exact writing, appropriate accentuation, capturing subtleties, noticing delays, and deciphering non-verbal signals, as well as understanding accents, dialects, and territorial varieties. It helps to respect participant confidentiality agreements. The researcher verifies the correct transcription of the participant's verbalisation by replaying the audio recording after transcription.

The researcher employs qualitative data analysis methods, as Tarwiyah (2023: 65) states, 'thematic analysis' to interpret the data and develop new insights based on the analysis, ultimately drawing the correct conclusions. Tarwiyah (2023: 65) emphasises, 'Data analysis involves thematic analysis to identify patterns and underlying meanings, themes and categories within the data and to generate new theoretical insights (Tarwiyah 2023:64-65). The analysis process includes coding the data, categorising the codes into themes, and interpreting the results to develop a comprehensive understanding of *MC*. The themes can be linked to existing theories or used to create new theoretical insights.

A detailed analysis of the current topic, utilising qualitative data analysis, can offer practical insights to enhance the study's contribution to existing knowledge. The thematic analysis outlines conversions and miracles by examining qualitative data and documents. The document collection and analysis coincide with the interviews. Background information is helpful in the analysis process, as it clarifies a developing problem. Comparative analysis is directly related to this method. Comparative and thematic analysis enables the researcher to move back and forth between various sources, including qualitative data (such as interviews and transcripts), books, articles, journals, and research literature. Current literature addressing the issues and themes is also examined to gain an understanding by comparing the sources of Pentecostal and other traditions that are critical to assessing the topic. It will facilitate critical reflection on the current issue and lend credibility and theological depth to understanding conversion. By understanding

the theology of conversion, these approaches will help shape current research and present a practical theological paradigm for Indian churches in a multi-religious context.

1.8. Aims and Objectives

This research aims to deepen the scholarly understanding of the unique aspects of Indian Pentecostalism, particularly its doctrine, practices, and beliefs regarding *MCs*. It seeks to stimulate academic debate on the miraculous role in religious conversion. This research examines how religion integrates societal and cultural elements to shape the doctrine and methodology of *MC* within Indian Pentecostalism. The study cultivates theological discussions between distinct faith traditions by clarifying Pentecostal teachings and highlighting the foundational role of the Holy Spirit in contemporary Christian developments, especially within the context of Pentecostalism. The study provides insights into the significant encounters of Indian Pentecostals, enabling researchers to engage in dynamic philosophical discussions.

This paper analyses how *MC* recognises itself philosophically and experientially in relation to other Christian convictions in India, while being part of the Pentecostal movement. This is fundamental for clarifying how Pentecostal change approaches influence Indian Christianity socially, as they drive changes in devout and social designs. The central convictions of Pentecostal philosophy regarding conversion are examined, with a primary focus on the Holy Spirit and supernatural acts. The study is pertinent in analysing how Pentecostals emphasise marvels through scriptural and historical viewpoints. Lastly, the paper examines how the focus on miracles influences the practical theology of Pentecostal beliefs, spiritual practices, and relationships with other faiths.

1.9. Scope and Limitations

The research aims to provide a much-needed understanding of conversion and offer a unique perspective that is not often explored. This research does not underestimate the value of each discipline's contribution to the knowledge of conversion. These writings will monitor and evaluate the various complex human aspects of conversion, including personal, social, and cultural, as well as their associated variables, according to the standards of interpretation of each

discipline. However, this does not exclude the possibility that theology analyses and appreciates phenomena arising from the miraculous encounter of the Holy Spirit in the conversion experience. This study makes a significant contribution to the discussion of Pentecostal Christian conversion from a theological perspective, which is central to the study. The main contribution of the research will be in the area of *PT*. The research will not examine all religious views on conversion, but rather focus on the Pentecostal conversion model, with other Christian traditions also considered for critical analysis. The significance of this research in understanding conversion cannot be overstated.

This consideration, which is limited to the Pentecostal understanding of transformation within the Indian context, is significant due to the scarcity of written sources on this topic. The targets are predominantly people from villages and towns who are either undereducated, semi-educated, or uneducated, across India's southern and northern states. This examination sheds light on a far-reaching phenomenon among Pentecostal *MCs*, many of whom may struggle with their conversion thoughts. This affects the type of data. Pentecostals are scattered over vast geographical areas and speak a variety of dialects. Local languages can hinder communication and data collection. Since no written sources exist on Indian Pentecostal conversion theology, most of the data were collected from respondents' statements, highlighting the need for this study. Popular magazines, such as those published weekly or monthly, may be included in the survey to tell the story of ordinary people's conversion, which could affect the results. The conversion narratives of believers are systematised to understand the fundamental aspects of Indian Pentecostal conversion theology fully. An attempt is made to gain a deeper understanding of *MC* among Indian Pentecostals through conversations with ordinary individuals.

1.10. Significance of the Study

The research examines the significance of the miraculous element in Indian Pentecostal theology of conversion by comparing it with other everyday theologies of conversion. Theologically speaking, the experience of Pentecostal conversion cannot be limited to moments of crisis. Instead, it is about integrating supernatural encounters with the Holy Spirit into a God-centred experiential theology. The experiences of the miraculous reflect the experiences of an individual encountering

a deeply personal God. Therefore, in this explanation of an *MC* based on the experience of ordinary Pentecostals, individuals can shed light on the approaches and models of *PT* that can be applied in this situation, which will help believers become mature Christians and strengthen their faith. This study could also help believers feel more connected and understood in their conversion experience.

The study of *MC* can serve as a theological unit, providing a theological identity to the Indian Pentecostal theology of conversion. It could incentivise Pentecostals to express their theological convictions and share their experiences and teachings. Moreover, it advances Pentecostal studies, worldwide Pentecostal scholarship, Indian and Asian information of transformation philosophy, and Indian theological instruction. In this manner, this investigation highlights the need for a critical and unique commitment to the broader field of Pentecostalism and religious philosophy, particularly within the context of Indian Pentecostalism. The potential for collaboration is significant, as this exploration can offer assistance to Pentecostals in overcoming authentic segregation and cultivating future associations with other Christian religious practices. Inquiries about discoveries can potentially enhance devout theological programs, illuminate peaceful care homes, and provide a framework for supporting individuals in their spiritual endeavours. Furthermore, this examination contributes to the scholarly discourse on conversion and offers valuable insights for future research in the areas of religion and the most profound sense of being.

1.11. The organisation of chapters

Chapter 1: Essential elements of the research

This chapter provides an introduction and the research background for the study. It includes key conventional components, such as the research problem, research question, definitions and theories of the miracles, and their relationship to the phenomenon of conversion, an overview of practical theology and research methods, as well as aims and objectives. Other elements included in this chapter are the scope and limitations, the study's importance and the chapter's organisation.

The research focuses on the Indian Pentecostal theology of conversion in biblical-theological settings. Pentecostal theology is experiential, so a

phenomenological empirical study can be valuable. This chapter also deals with the research methodology proposed for this study. It includes the method of data collection and its analysis to compare with traditional Christian theological views on conversion.

Chapter 2: The centrality of miraculous conversions in Indian Pentecostalism: A biblical and historical investigation

India has a long history and is the cradle of many world religions. In such a historical context, Indian Pentecostalism is recognised as a movement with the fastest expansion pace in India. This chapter addresses the secondary questions that arise from the research. Despite facing numerous challenges since its inception, Pentecostalism has grown impressively across all social classes, ethnic groups, and languages. The following chapter delivers a historical and biblical examination of *MCs* to readers. When Pentecostalism began its history, people encountered spiritual manifestations that transformed their existence. The Holy Spirit performs miracles as an integral part of the Pentecostal spiritual character, as well as its beliefs and practices. The movement has profoundly affected thousands of individuals, leading many to adopt Pentecostal beliefs.

Most Indian religions recognise the value of using miracle healing. Pentecostals, in particular, think that supernatural occurrences of healing lead individuals to Christ and help them see Him as the genuine God and Saviour. The phenomenon of *MC* has played a significant role in the development of Indian Pentecostal Christianity in relation to other devout movements. Moreover, the interaction between the Pentecostal Church and India's other religions is not recent. The church is still attempting to clarify its stance on *MC* about other faiths, mainly traditional Christian denominations. Pentecostals have a different understanding of the claims to truth and the conversion process that leads to salvation through Jesus Christ. Pentecostals insist that redemption is only possible through faith in Jesus Christ and hold that those who hear the gospel experience a supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism's fundamental characteristic is its emphasis on the miraculous deeds of the Holy Spirit. Among India's other religions, it aids the Pentecostal churches in their fast expansion. This provides readers with a glimpse into Indian Pentecostalism.

Chapter 3: Contemporary theological understanding of miraculous conversions in Indian Pentecostalism

This chapter will explore a fresh viewpoint on *MCs* by examining the current theological interpretation within the Indian Pentecostal community. This study examines how Indian Pentecostal believers perceive *MC* as an independent divine force that transforms individuals. According to Pentecostals, the Holy Spirit makes its presence known through distinctive and unusual encounters which include healing, deliverance and dreams. These occurrences are viewed as substantiation of a true conversion.

By incorporating testimonies from ordinary believers and academic literature, the research seeks to understand *MCs* within the Indian Pentecostal context. This chapter will focus on the critical role of miracle healing and deliverance in Pentecostal conversion stories. The research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of *MCs* and their significance by examining key themes in the data through a phenomenological perspective. The Indian Pentecostal viewpoint makes a valuable contribution to the broader field of conversion studies. By highlighting the Indian Pentecostal perspective on *MCs*, this chapter offers a fresh perspective that adds depth to the existing understanding of conversion.

Chapter 4: Significance of miraculous conversions in Indian Pentecostalism.

The introduction of essential Pentecostal beliefs focuses on the central role of the Holy Spirit in conversion experiences through miracles. The discussion focuses on Indian Pentecostal communities by examining specific situations that make miraculous works appealing to converts and influence their conversion experiences.

Here, we focus on an empirical study to answer the research question: Why do Pentecostals in India consider miraculous experiences essential to the conversion process? I argue that extending God's grace to humanity, achieved through the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ, provides a convincing rationale for belief. This is a compelling reason to persuade someone to make a conversion. Nevertheless, this alone cannot validate Jesus as the world's saviour. In the diverse religious setting of India, people seek not only a saviour but a deity who can fulfil their specific needs to alleviate their suffering, for example, by supernatural healing and deliverance. To comprehend the subject matter, we will

analyse themes from the conversion narratives of Indian Pentecostals, incorporating real-life examples or testimonies about their experiences with miraculous works. This will help define extraordinary works within the Indian Pentecostal context, including healing, deliverance, prophecy, and other similar manifestations.

Additionally, this section examines how the Divine Spirit is perceived as working marvellously in transformation, enveloping the conviction of sin and drawing people to Christ. The study gives insight into how Pentecostal conversion functions as a life-changing process. Miracles that heal people can serve as indicators of spiritual deliverance, prompting spiritual and physical recovery, which can lead to conversion among believers. Miracles can also serve as a personal confirmation of God's work in conversion, attracting people to Pentecostalism by making conversion seem more tangible.

By addressing these points, this research chapter offers valuable insights into the miraculous works' unique role in conversion from an Indian Pentecostal perspective. This chapter also explores the issues and challenges of practising *MC* among Pentecostals in the Indian context.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the concluding section, we will highlight how the research findings shed light on the practical implications of *MC* for Indian Christianity, particularly in the context of mission work and church life. This emphasises the significance of integrating the study of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology) into the church's missional and theological practices, especially regarding extraordinary elements of conversion.

It will also give a concise overview of the main conclusions from the research on *MCs* in Indian Pentecostalism. Based on the findings, it is evident that *MCs* play a vital role in Indian Pentecostalism. Recommendations for further research will be provided to religious institutions and scholars. Indian Pentecostal churches can further use this model for theological reflection and practical application. By examining these factors, the chapter highlights the practical implications of this research for *MCs* within Indian Pentecostalism and the broader Christian community. This will also establish the foundation for further investigation into this subject.

Chapter - Two

The centrality of miraculous conversions in Indian Pentecostalism:

A biblical and historical investigation

2.1. Introduction

Pentecostalism had a humble beginning and witnessed the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit, providing a transformative experience to a small group and later in the lives of thousands. It soon became a global movement, and people experienced MC in the following decades. It has a long-lasting transformative effect on converts (Iyadurai 2011:511). Since the well-known revivals that symbolise the historical beginnings of Pentecostalism, the movement has undergone enormous changes in its global representation (Vondy 2013:1). Alexander (2006:64) states, 'The movement's history has been well documented, first by eyewitnesses and later in scholarly histories.' Miraculous healing experiences in the name of Christ and the divine manifestation of the Spirit were significant factors in the development of Pentecostal Christianity. This healing, as a religious practice and experience, served as a driving force for the growth of Pentecostal Christianity (Porterfield 2005:4). The events on the Day of Pentecost, described in the New Testament, are the source of the name and identity of Pentecostalism. In reality, modern Pentecostalism bears numerous similarities to scriptural events (Vondy 2013:11).

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, several communities in India, particularly those in Kerala, underwent significant socio-religious reform movements. At the start of the 20th century, Indian Pentecostalism had a critical presence in both local and global discussions (Abraham & Oommen 2023:312). Pentecostalism began as a modest movement that evolved substantially to become a significant and active Christian group in contemporary times. Approximately 700 million people from all around the world practice the Pentecostal faith through its three interrelated sections that include Pentecostals along with Charismatics and Neo-Pentecostals (Johannes 2018:7). According to the 2006 Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life survey, Pentecostal membership in India was reported as one in every 100 survey participants. Pentecostal movements are reportedly the fastest growing in all of Christianity (Ruby 2006:82).

The strong, affirming beliefs and practices of Pentecostals, such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, divine healing, and other miraculous signs of the Spirit, are a powerful reason for the growth of the church (Ruby 2006:1).

Pentecostals believe that the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit brings healing knowledge to individuals, in addition to preaching the gospel, where challenges are most prevalent. Reformed traditions argue that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit have ceased (Warfield 1976:6, 21; Löfstedt 2013:127). Pentecostals' exclusivist teaching on Christ's salvation, miraculous healing and conversion has led to hostility and violence against Christianity by Hindu fundamentalists, a testament to the challenges and sacrifices of their faith. Pentecostals do not recognise redemptive elements in non-Christian religions because they see this as contradicting the teachings of the Bible (Kärkkäinen 2002:189). The Bible is the foundation of Pentecostal spiritual practices and beliefs. This study aims to determine whether presenting the gospel message with miracles increases the likelihood of conversion compared to presenting it without miracles. In other words, experiential components of the miraculous act of the Holy Spirit increase the chance of conversion. In this setting, this chapter analyses the *MCs* in Indian Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism emphasises the supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit's endowments, including healing and the casting out of demons, which are bestowed by the Holy Spirit and are prevalent in modern church life and services. Due to broad conversion, Pentecostal development in India faces resistance from Hindu fundamentalists and other groups.

2.2. Biblical understanding of miraculous conversion

The previous chapter defined the term 'miracle' and examined the views of sin, illness, and healing among people living in the Mediterranean in the first century. The previous section also discussed the connection between malevolent entities and illness. In their belief in the divine manifestation of the Spirit, Pentecostals assert that God continues to work miracles today. They point to the evidence of miracles in both the Old and New Testament writings and to the fact that Jesus himself performed many healing miracles to strengthen the faith of his followers (Wilson 2019:88; Taylor 2005:13). These excellent signs and wonders

underscore God's great work of continually renewing the health of his creation (Schimmel 2008:181). The Old and New Testaments recognise God as the healer and redeemer (Gaiser 2010:122). The following sections provide a concise review of the miracles, along with the signs that appear in the Old and New Testaments. The sections provide summaries of biblical indicators to facilitate further research into the ongoing use of miracles within Pentecostalism.

2.2.1. Miracles in the Old Testament

The Old Testament records begin with God's dealings with man. Therefore, the Old Testament is connected with understanding the New Testament teachings about healing. According to the scholarly insights of Gaiser (2010:103), in the Old Testament, 'God's saving and healing are always closely related and sometimes indistinguishable.' This relationship is evident in the Old Testament. Gaiser (2010:103) notes a 'manifold use of the word for healing *rp*.' Pierce (2008:60–61) also provides further details on miracles in the Old Testament:

In Isaiah 53:4, the Hebrew word for 'sorrow' is *choliy*, meaning 'misfortune: sickness, infirmity' and comes from the word *chalah*, meaning 'to be weak, sick or afflicted' in God's Word about Healing: Deuteronomy 7:15: 'And the Lord will take away from you all sickness' (NKJV). Isaiah 53:4 adds, 'And our sorrows He carried.' The word 'sorrow' is translated from the Hebrew word *mak'ob*, which means 'pain,' and includes mental anguish and emotional pain (see Ecc. 1:18; Prov. 14:13). It is the same word found in Job 33:19: 'Man is also chastened with pain on his bed.' *Mak'ob* is also used in Jeremiah 51:8: 'Take balm for their pain' (KJV). So, a re-reading of Isaiah 53:4 renders the verse: 'He has borne our sicknesses and borne our pains.'

As the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea were the preludes and accompanying events of the Exodus, so too did God's miraculous acts always accompany the nation of Israel as part of the history of salvation (Maddocks 1995:31). Signs and wonders, healings and miracles, therefore, appeared very frequently in both testaments. Lawrence (2006:20) notes that 'the exodus from Egypt was a special time when miracles helped the Jews believe in God, to become a nation, and to enter into a covenant relationship with God as His chosen people.' The Old Testament is understood as punishment for sin and is associated with the Old Covenant relationship between God and his people, Israel (Lawrence 2006:147). God often punished Israel for their sins. For instance, when Miriam sinned against God, He gave her leprosy (Num.12:1-15). The Israelites muttered against Moses and Aaron, and the Lord responded by sending them another

plague (Num. 16:48-49). He attacked the people of Israel with poisonous snakes when they 'spoke against God' (Num. 21:4-9).

In contrast, the plagues ended after David admitted his mistake, prayed and offered sacrifices (2 Sam. 24:25). When the king urged the prophet to appeal to God on his behalf, God restored Jeroboam's withered hand (1 Ki. 13:6); Naaman's leprosy was removed when he obeyed God (2 Ki. 5). The punishment's goal was to encourage him to uphold God's laws and continue to be His people. Heap (2002:41) states that 'healing under the terms of the Old Covenant necessitated obedience to God.' The Old Covenant, a pivotal concept in this discussion, refers to the agreement that God established with the Israelites, whereby He would protect and bless them if they adhered to His laws. Thus, if people confess their sins and do not repeat them, specific healings can be regarded as a covenant (Lawrence 2006:146). The Hebrew Bible makes it very clear that God could and wanted to heal during the Old Covenant (Heap 2002:41). On the other hand, the Old Covenant was ineffective because people disobeyed the laws. Lawrence (2006:151), citing Isaiah 24:5, states, 'The earth is defiled by its people; They have disobeyed the laws, disobeyed the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant.'

The consequences of the Israelites' breaking of the eternal covenant are crucial to understanding healing in the Bible, mainly as we apply it to our own lives today. It shows that God's plan of punishment with the Old Covenant is no longer in effect. Sickness is no longer a result of sin. There is no legal basis for the Old Covenant to mandate healing (Lawrence 2006:153). Because there would not have been a need for a second covenant if there had been nothing wrong with the first, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews states that the Old Covenant was over. However, God rebuked the people... By making this covenant, By calling it new, he made the first superfluous' (Heb. 8:7-8, 13). Therefore, it teaches that the New Covenant should be central when considering God's supernatural healing in the present (Lawrence 2006: 155). Now, the Holy Spirit, the Healer, is available to all under the New Covenant, sealed by the blood of Christ. This emphasises the inclusivity and value of every individual in the healing process. Therefore, the significance of the healing miracles in the New Testament is examined to understand how the New Covenant enabled people to follow it.

2.2.2. Miracles in the New Testament

The Hebrew term '*Shalom*,' which he translates as 'peace,' comes closest to modern ideas about health, for which there was 'no word' in the Bible. The Greek word *therapeuo*, 'to heal'. Alternatively, 'heal' and *sozo*, 'save' or 'get well,' are at least two concepts that refer to health in the New Testament (Swinton 2013:233). The term '*sozo*' is utilised in Mark 10: 52 when a blind individual inquires of Jesus to heal him. The term reappears in Luke 8:36, when Jesus casts evil spirits out of a man who lived in the Gerasene locale, causing them to enter an adjacent herd of pigs. This passage describes the crowd's reaction to the occasion. The '*sozo*' healing that Christ offered in each of these cases was complete (Pierce 2008:59). In Hale and Thorson's (2007:71) study, 'miracles have always been an important part of God's plan to bring salvation to men and women.' For them, 'every miracle is a sign of God's work' (Hale & Thorson 2007:71).

When we consider the healing miracles of Jesus, we are drawn to the verbs used here, 'to make whole'. These miraculous deeds of Jesus, each a powerful testament to his divine nature, serve as a living narrative of the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies. The promised salvation, foretold by Isaiah, has come to pass through Jesus, a prophet mighty in deed and word, who brings the longed-for shalom (Maddocks 1995:32). This understanding, that the two words '*therapeuo*' and '*sozo*' are not just words but the very essence of Pentecostal teachings, enlightens and informs us.

Maddocks (1995:33) argues that 'the last of the Servant Songs (Isa. 53) saw that this saving work could only be accomplished through suffering. The New Testament records God's mighty saving work through Christ, who came to die to seek and save the lost (Lk. 19:10).' He is the good news of God's saving power (Rom. 1:16). God reveals His great love for humanity. He has ensured that everyone is forgiven and receives complete healing. The New Testament not only shows that healing through Jesus is possible, but it also empowers and encourages us to seek it. Next, we examine how Jesus performed healings in the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

2.2.2.1. Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God through healing miracles

His healing acts are the main factor that draws people to Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus attracts large audiences as he promotes the kingdom of God through healings and miracles (Matt. 4:23-25) (Thelen 2017:14). Although Jesus claimed that he could do nothing on his own, he never lacked spiritual strength during his earthly life (John 5:19, 30). He understood that the Father was the source of all His power to work miracles. Through his close bond with the Father, he could carry out His perfect will, leading people between their need for salvation and the supernatural source that could save them (Heap 2002:7).

Jesus used his actions during healing and exorcism to announce the kingdom alongside the proclamation carried by his words. Jesus demonstrates a deep respect for people as an expression of his personality. Luke 11:20 (NIV) states, 'If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you' (cf. Matthew 12:28). His works interpret his words while both elements play essential roles in spreading the message. This inclusivity reaches its climax when God's message and work unite to open the kingdom to all believers and usher in the new creation. This is evident in the mighty works of the New Testament, the Cross and Resurrection (Maddocks 1995:30). As Jesus travels through Galilee and teaches in the synagogues, he shares the good news of the kingdom through his healing work. He cured every illness and disease the populace had (Mt 4:23). Thus, Jesus' ministry in the New Testament includes preaching, teaching, and healing. Jesus is portrayed in the New Testament as the world's Lord, Saviour, and healer. The primary quality distinguishing Jesus' persona and mission is healing (cf. Mk 1:38–39, Lk 9:11; 10:23–24; 13:32) (Gaiser 2010:132; Verbrugge 2004:524).

Current critical methods of the Gospels have verified that Jesus performed healings and exorcisms. Therefore, sceptics can no longer discount all of Jesus' healing activities based on a single piece of evidence. Throughout his ministry, Jesus prioritised healing individuals and casting out demons (Maddocks 1995:33).

In Matthew 4:24-25, Jesus established his reputation as a healer when people across Syria brought him patients with different diseases, together with those who suffered chronic pain, the demon-possessed and the paralysed, whom he fully cured. A large number of people gathered from Galilee, the Decapolis,

Jerusalem, Judea, and the region around the Jordan River, following him. The Bible documents two prominent healing incidents involving Jesus, which show him restoring sight to a blind beggar in Mark 10:46-52 and healing a man with leprosy in Matthew 8:1-4. Such miracle accounts demonstrate how Jesus' life was significantly transformed during His ministry as a healer and how the lives of people in those times could be changed. Matthew's most important exposition of Jesus' teachings and preaching—the Sermon on the Mount—draws crowds due to its widespread acclaim for miraculous healing (5:1-2) (Gaiser 2010:132). Williams (2007:7) states, 'In all these stories and many, many more, what we have in Jesus' healings seems to be a restoration of relation, inclusion in the community' (see Morris 2014:137).

As noted in the previous chapter, from a New Testament perspective, Satan and the power of the demon were often revealed during illness. For example, in the account of the disabled woman (Luke 13:10-17), the diagnosis is that a spirit had crippled her for eighteen years (v. 10), a demon whom Jesus later referred to as Satan. Although the healing is not explicitly presented as an exorcism (v.16), in the New Testament, when a mental, emotional, or spiritual illness is diagnosed as being due to demonic possession, exorcism is the only pattern used to treat the patient. Jesus used touch or the application of various treatments to heal or cure physical problems and perceived illnesses. However, mental disorders are much more commonly the purview of the gods or spirits. In the Gospel of Luke, there is an explicit statement about Jesus' ministry: 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform healing...' (Luke 13:32). This statement highlights the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy (Luke 4:21) and Jesus's deeds, conveying a sense of historical continuity that is sure to strike a chord with academic theologians and religious studies students. It demonstrates that the reign of God, which brings redemption and healing, is now present in the world.

Jesus also trained his disciples by giving them authority and power over all demons and the ability to heal diseases. He sends out the seventy to preach the kingdom of God and to heal (Lk. 9:1f; 10:8f). As Luke wants his readers to understand, the healing ministry was not only a part of Jesus' ministry but will remain a vital component of the church's ministry. Luke emphasises how the early Christians followed Jesus' teachings to preach and heal, demonstrating that healing is not merely a physical act but rather a manifestation of God's kingdom,

and as such, essential to the church's mission and external direction (Maddocks 1995:45–46). Similar miraculous practices and beliefs were observed in apostolic ministries, and many believed in the gospel message. The churches arose in different parts of Asia Minor.

2.2.2.2. Apostles' proclamation of the Kingdom of God through healing ministry

All followers of early Christianity immediately followed every command Jesus provided before and after his resurrection. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit bestowed spiritual strength upon the disciples who followed Jesus. We can observe the Holy Spirit's extraordinary ability by reading the Acts of the Apostles. This divine influence guided them into the truth (Heap 2002:7). The apostles faithfully followed in his footsteps, guided by the Holy Spirit and the teachings of the risen Christ. The apostle Paul's call for repentance and a turn to God for Jews and Gentiles in Damascus, Jerusalem, and Judea is an example of this (Acts 26:19f) (Maddocks 1995:76).

In obedience to Jesus, the early Christians examined their calling to proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom through preaching and healing, a message that had the power to transform lives. They urged their listeners to repent and accept God's rule in their hearts and lives (Dearing 1998:18). At Pentecost, they began their ministry as a complete gospel mission for the whole person and received a supernatural gift (Dearing 1998:20). The apostles recognised that they had been given new power to proclaim the risen Jesus and inspire faith in him. Acts often deal with the connection between the apostolic proclamation and the apostolic performance of miracles (4:29-30; cf. 3:1-10; 4:16, 22; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6 – 8; 9:32-43; 15:12; The miracles are connected with the preaching; they serve as supplementary signs through which Christ confirms the testimony of the witnesses (14:3) (Verbrugge 2004:524).

The mighty deeds of Jesus opened the kingdom, and they must now use the same methods. He taught them the combination of preaching and healing, word and deed, always working together. Healing work was not a secondary task but a means of proclaiming the new age and the rule of God (Eckhardt 2011:6). Thus, with the healing charism that the risen Christ gave to His Church, the new age and reign of God began (Hayford 2014:1214; Lewis 2005:595; Maddocks

1995:77). According to Verbrugge (2004:524), in addition to the gifts of proclamation, the charisma of healing and the power to work miracles are among the living gifts of the Holy Spirit to the church (1 Cor 12:8–11:28). The disciples were entrusted with the power to use for their purpose, underscoring our responsibility and engagement in the ministry.

With its commitment to proclaim the reign of God, the early church was willing to preach and heal. The apostles, as Acts 4:10, 22 records, were instrumental in the miraculous healing of the lame man, following Jesus' instruction to heal the sick and preach the Gospel, thereby proclaiming God's rule (Maddocks 1995:31). Maddocks (1995:78) argues, 'The healing affords a heaven-sent opportunity for proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. The cross/resurrection has now opened the kingdom, and Jesus and his works rather than his words become the keystone of the apostolic proclamation.' With their significant role in the early church, the apostles followed Jesus' method of proclaiming the kingdom of God, in which healing and preaching were inextricably linked.

The signs and wonders of Stephen in Acts 2 and the healing of the lame man in Acts 3 caused the early church to disperse beyond Jerusalem and the Galilee region. Saul's blindness ultimately led to the early church dispersing throughout the Roman Empire. These healing narratives, which either precede or punctuate events in Acts, highlight the importance of expanding missionary work (Maddocks 1995:87) and emphasise the universal nature of these healing miracle stories. Morris (2014:135) states, 'Healing provides a way of speaking soteriologically that is rooted in the New Testament's so-called healing narratives.' Healing is a term used in stories in which Jesus, or the apostles perform miracles to the sick People transformed, crippled or controlled by demons. These healing miracle stories are found in all four Gospels and the Book of Acts, connecting us through the shared need for a transformed existence. They reveal the need for a changed existence for various people, including lepers, the blind, the deaf and those suffering from haemorrhage (Mt 4:24; 8:2-4; 9:20-22, 27-34; 20:29-34; Mk 7, 31-37) (Morris 2014:136).

From the passage above, these various problems can be grouped into three basic categories: illness, incapacity, and demonic possession. The healing narratives demonstrate that redemption is crucial to addressing these conditions. As Heap (2002:39) states: 'Salvation involves healing (1 Pet. 2:24; Matthew 8:17)'

and (2002:13) 'Healing is an act of God's amazing grace in the world.' The Acts highlights the use of miracles in various places. In Paphos, a miracle led to the conversion of an important man (Acts 13:6–12), while in Iconium, Lystra, and Ephesus, miracles not only demonstrated the truthfulness of the Gospel (Acts 14:2–3, 8–16; 19:11) but also reassured and instilled confidence in the faith of believers. As described by the Physician Luke (Allen 2017), the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit helped the apostles spread the Gospel.

Luke does not recount all of Paul's miracles, but some are typical of others. 2 Corinthians 12:12 records Paul's spiritual manifestations, including signs, wonders, and power, that were displayed in Corinth. During the Council of Jerusalem, apostles referenced miracles, which proved instrumental for Gentiles to gain membership in the church (Acts 15:7–9:12). The miracles were used as evidence to establish authority before Barnabas and Paul obtained their opportunity to speak to the crowd (Acts 15:12). The miraculous deeds of the apostles, along with the message of the resurrected Jesus, helped convert Gentiles to accept the Gospel and endure tribulation, leading them to become devoted disciples of Jesus Christ (Allen 2017). The Gospel accounts of Jesus' words and deeds, as well as the lessons that Acts teaches the Church today, demonstrate that the Church and the world will be renewed because the Holy Spirit will enable His followers to perform miracles in the present day.

Studying the remarkable deeds of the apostles in Luke-Acts, Pentecostals are driven to follow in their footsteps by adapting the apostles' methods and unveiling the miraculous power of the Spirit to guide ordinary people in India to Christ (Dev 2008:96). As Verbrugge (2004:524) states, 'Signs and wonders accompany the proclamation, [which occurs as a] demonstration of the power of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:4; cf. 1 Thess. 1:5).' Other traditions may hold differing views. For instance, according to the Brethren's Christian traditions, Paul's tactics do not apply to our work today (Dev 2008:96–97). In response, Pentecostals rigorously evaluate the nature and scope of these miracles and the apostle's use. Reformed traditions argue that the use of miracles has ceased.

Pentecostals place great emphasis on the miraculous accounts found in Luke-Acts. They believe it sheds valuable light on the conduct of many contemporary types of missionary work. Luke the Physician, the most prolific author of the New Testament, outlines miraculous depictions of the Holy Spirit in

Luke-Acts. His frequent mention of the accounts of the miraculous deeds of the Holy Spirit (Yong 2011:1–4) underscores the significance of Luke-Acts. Even today, the Holy Spirit's supernatural acts, as described in Luke-Acts, continue to motivate the Pentecost service. Pentecostals adhere to the apostles' commission to carry out missions, as in Luke-Acts.

2.3. Miraculous conversions and the beginning of Pentecostalism in India

Many people joined the movement at its inception, drawn by remarkable healing and other supernatural occurrences. These conversions contributed significantly to the rapid growth of Indian Pentecostalism within various Christian denominations and religions. The early theological scholars, however, overlooked the significant and rapid growth of Pentecostalism. This oversight presents a compelling case for the academic community to focus on this phenomenon, which warrants greater recognition. It draws individuals from all walks of life and cuts across caste and race. As Suico (2005:196) notes, the 'Pentecostals' strong emphasis on miraculous and divine healing is a significant factor in why people are drawn to their faith and practice.' Similarly, Abraham (2019: 84) emphasises the role of 'miraculous healings and deliverances in the appeal of Pentecostalism.' There is ample evidence that Pentecostalism is gaining popularity among both urban and rural populations in India, particularly in the context of religious pluralism. Shah & Shah (2013:196) and Shah & Samuel (2019:280) comment, 'Throughout most of the 20th century, Pentecostalism remained a powerful but complex part of India's religious landscape.'

The Pentecostal movement emerged in southern India before the twentieth century, generating significant historical interest. Since then, Indian Pentecostalism has given rise to four dominant denominations: the Church of God (1936), the Indian Pentecostal Church (1933), the Pentecostal Mission (1923), and the Assemblies of God (1918), which have proliferated significantly over the years (Bergunder 2008:46).

Anderson established multiple early-twentieth-century religious movements that he discovered had distinctive characteristics of Pentecostalism. These revivals, which featured healings, speaking in tongues, prophecies, and other extraordinary events, occurred in different parts of the world, all within a few years

(Anderson 2006:37). The manifestation of the Holy Spirit, a defining feature of these Pentecostal revivals, has been a source of inspiration for people in India since the late 19th century (Lukose 2013:37–40; Rapaka 2013:23–27). Anderson (2006:37) points out that 'these awakenings,' often facilitated by popular periodicals, played a crucial role in 'spreading the evidence of the outpouring of the Spirit,' thereby highlighting the significant influence of the media on these revival movements.

Although American missionaries helped unify the various revivals and groups into a single movement, the foundation of the movement had already been laid by the time they arrived in India (Jones 2009:505–06). It is often claimed that Indian Pentecostalism was a precursor to modern Pentecostalism, emerging from the Azusa Street movement. However, Bartleman (2006:22) and Anderson (2013) claim that 'revival was born in Wales, developed in India and later established in Los Angeles.' Abraham (2014: ix) also takes a similar view of the roots of the 19th-century Wesleyan Holiness movement. Indian Pentecostalism, with its unique historical roots and development, presents an intriguing area of study. It can be argued that missions from other parts of the world influenced Pentecostalism in India. Nevertheless, various historical sources indicate that Pentecostalism existed in India before the Azusa Street revivals (Hedlund 2005:68; Burgess 2001:87) and before Western Pentecostalism reached the shores of India.

2.3.1. Earliest Pentecostal revival at Tirunelveli and Travancore: South India 1860-80

For the first time, a Pentecostal revival movement in India was established in Tirunelveli, located within the Madras (presently Chennai) area of Tamil Nadu. Students of history view the restoration as an early precursor to the Azusa Street Revival, as it illustrated all the fundamental components that characterise Pentecostalism. The revival occurred around 1860, when a lower-caste group, the Shanars, played a significant role in advancing and promoting the movement's success (McGee 1996: 113). A catechist, Carl T.E. Rhenius, instructed John Aroolappen, a Prussian evangelist sent by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1814, who played a pivotal role in the revival of Christianity in India. He remained active in Tamil Nadu until he died in 1838, serving as a leader of the movement (McGee 2010:118). John Christian Aroolappen, better known by his stage name,

Aroolappen, pioneered the revival movement. Prophecy, glossolalia, interpretation of languages, strong convictions of sin among nominal Christians, dreams, visions, and people collapsing or trembling under spiritual power were among the revival phenomena (Burgess 2001:87–88; George 2001:222).

Additional essential characteristics developed during this revival included the restoration of apostolic and prophetic ministry, evangelistic outreach, healing prayer for the sick, conversion and care for the poor. The Christians were expecting the fulfilment of an Old Testament prophecy through the Holy Spirit outpouring, as foretold by Joel (Joel 2:28-29; cf. Acts 21:9). For the end times, the appearance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of Aroolappen is straightforward to recognise demonstrated miraculous works of the Spirit in conversion (McGee 1996:113). This way, Pentecostal experiences were already prevalent 30 years before the Azusa revival. British soldiers stationed nearby also took part in the resuscitation. The number of conversions after the revival shocked the missionaries, who had initially supported them but then grew tired of their indigenous nature. The tension and conflict among the missionaries due to the revival is palpable (Kent 2004: 15–19).

Twelve years later, after the Tirunelveli revival in 1873, Anglican (CMS) and Syriac Orthodox churches met in Travancore - the present state of Kerala - for another South Indian Pentecostal revival, followed by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in 1874–75 (Burgess 2001: 87). This was another notable achievement in Aroolappen's ministry. According to Burgess (2001: 87), Aroolappen began evangelistic work in other regions of South India with little or no missionary influence and no financial support, resulting in conversions. Two prophets, Kudarapallil Thommen and the Brahmin convert Justus Joseph, served as the prominent leaders of these revivals. John (2021:11) claims, 'Justus Joseph played an important role in the great revival that broke out in the Syrian churches of Kerala, where there were Pentecostal experiences.' Mar Athanasius supported this movement. This revival helped the Syrian churches be part of this manifestation's experience.

These revivals were characterised by phenomena such as throwing arms in the air, shaking all limbs, violent contortions, falling to the ground, and rolling

around, sparking a 'six-year party'² whose followers also spoke in tongues (Jones 2009: 504; Blumhofer 2008: 220–221). The revival, like Tirunelveli, was indigenous and had a significant impact. The revival church continued into the 20th century under the leadership of Justus Joseph, a Brahmin convert of Aroolappen (McGee 2010: 118).

According to McGee (2010:118), these two great revivals, characterised by the restoration of charismatic gifts, other paranormal or Pentecostal phenomena, Indigenous leadership, and evangelism, were reported in Tirunelveli in 1860–61 and in neighbouring Travancore in 1874–75. For McGee, the seeds of these movements can be traced to the pietistic influences of missionaries such as Wilhelm T. Ringeltaube, Carl T. E. Rhenius, and Anthony Norris Groves, among many others. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) sent Rhenius, a Prussian missionary, in 1814; Anthony Norris Groves, an independent missionary from England, arrived in 1833.

Jones (2009:505) posits three things about these 19th-century Pentecostal movements, highlighting the significant role of Indigenous leadership:

- Firstly, these may not be India's earliest Pentecostal-like movements. Christianity in South India dates to at least the third century, if not earlier. South Indian Christians have lived in harmony with their Hindu neighbours and have borrowed and baptised Hindu rites, rituals, customs, religious activities and ideas. Since bhakti, an ecstatic type of Hinduism, originated in South India in the seventh century, it would not be strange if bhakti-like movements emerged in South Indian Christianity before Europeans came. No records exist; thus, it cannot be known.
- Secondly, Early Pentecostal groups in India appeared in regions with established Christian populations. Francis Xavier brought Christianity to Tamil Nadu in the 16th century, and Kerala possesses the oldest Indian churches. Centuries of Christian practice, belief and community life prepared these communities for regeneration and revival.
- Finally, Pentecostalism is indigenous and missionary-inspired in India (as elsewhere). The leaders of these 19th-century movements were Indians who transformed missionary teaching into a message that inspired Indian Christians.

India witnessed several of the most remarkable revivals of the 19th century, characterised by the charismatic blessings of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism has inborn roots in South India. The South Indian Pentecostal movement, a testament to its local relevance and authenticity, can be traced back to its grassroots level. However, Western revival movements had a significant impact on this indigenous

² Revival Church is also known as the Six Year Party

uprising much later (Hedlund 2005:73; George 2001:220). These revivals laid the foundation for Pentecostalism in India in the 20th century.

2.3.2. Revival in North-West and North-East India

As the 20th century dawned on the Indian subcontinent, different Pentecostal movements emerged across Indian regions between 1905 and 1906. In 1905, the spiritual movement in Sialkot (Punjab) enriched the evangelical labour of North India. American missionary John Hyde led this revival. Spirit baptisms for sanctification and prayer were celebrated at the Sialkot Annual Convention (Cherian 2005:96; Miller 2000:75). Abraham (2011:116) reports that 'in the last days of August 1905, a revival broke out at the second annual meeting of Sialkot in Punjab (now in Pakistan). Around 300 people gathered, mostly Indian workers, including men and women, as well as members of the Punjabi Dalit community. However, some Western missionaries from Scottish and American Presbyterian missions were also present.' Later, it spread to various parts of Punjab and the state of Uttar Pradesh (Lukose 2009:81). Abraham (2011:117) mentions a 'Punjabi Dalit Christian named Ditt who played a crucial role in the revival and conversion movement.' Abraham's *Studies in Ordinary Pentecostal Christology* (2011:117) show that in 1915, 'almost all Dalits known as *Churas* of Sialkot became Christians.' Although most historians agree that Hyde's seven-year prayer campaign was the catalyst for Sialkot's revival, it is clear that Ditt's contribution was significant. He was indeed the unsung hero of the movement.

On April 5, 1905, Dholka, Gujarat, experienced a similar awakening. During this outpouring, the boys at the orphanage were overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit (Joseph 2005:4). This revival, which began a few months prior to the Mukti Revival, originated in the prayer group at Bethel Alliance Church. Following their baptism in the Holy Spirit at Dholka in April 1905, some Christians took the initiative to visit the Mukti Mission Ashram of Pandita Ramabai. Their visit was a precursor to the revival fire they would help kindle at the Mukti Mission in June 1905 (Abraham 2011: 115).

In March 1905, there was a notable revival of Welsh Presbyterian missions in India, particularly among the tribal communities living in the Khasi Hills in the north-east of the country (Sharma 2003:273; Snaitang 2002:6). In Northeast India

(NEI), Pentecostalism has its roots in the evangelical Christianity of the Welsh missionaries. Several waves of the Welsh Revival (1904) affected the evolving leadership of the NEI churches. The 1905 revival in the Presbyterian Church there, with its 'many features of Pentecostal expression,' such as loud praying, singing, dancing, trembling and being slain in the Spirit, had a profound and transformative impact. This revival movement originated in Wales in 1904 (Hedlund 2005:73). According to Pentecostal theologian Vondey (2013:13), the influential Welsh Revival emerged from a series of small revivals in a Welsh-speaking mining community, reflecting the distinctive cultural forms of the Welsh population.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, sparked during a gathering in Pariong (Western Khasi Hills) in 1905, spread to other regions of northeastern India, including Mizoram and Manipur, and to other nations including Korea (Cherian 2005: 100; Snaitang 2002: 6). This spiritual wave, influenced by the Welsh revival and the renewed European mission (from 1897), led to several revivals across India in 1905–1906. Anglicans, Baptists, Danish Lutherans, the London Missionary Society, the Church of Scotland, Methodists, Brethren, and Presbyterians were all part of these revivals. These awakenings were spiritual and marked by miraculous events such as prophecies, healings, dreams, and visions (Satyavrata 2019:288; Burgess 2001:87–88), leaving the participants and observers in awe and wonder.

A few months later, in June 1905, these earlier revivals sparked a Pentecostal revival in the Mukti Mission in Maharashtra (Jones 2009:505). Similar revivals are documented in India at least 45 years before the Mukti mission (Satyavrata 2017:11). Others have also appeared in unrecorded history in various regions of India. Nevertheless, historical evidence shows that from 1904 to 1906, a wave of revivals swept across India.

2.3.3. Mukti Mission Revival and Indian Pentecostalism: 1905-1907

Among all *MCs* in Indian Christian history, the conversion of Pandita Ramabai stands as one of the most renowned. Ramabai's Western schooling background enabled her to learn multiple languages, despite being born into a wealthy Brahmin family of Hindu ancestry and becoming a widow. Medicine became the focus of her studies when she set out for England in 1878, until she experienced a remarkable healing experience. During her time in England, she

adopted Christianity and became a passionate advocate for women's rights and societal reform. The conversion of Pandita Ramabai marked a defining moment in Indian Christian history, demonstrating that charismatic revival held value for the Indian population beyond being a Western phenomenon. Through her labour, women gained entrance into Indian ministries while she redirected the direction of Indian Christianity (Frykenberg 2010:408–9).

Pandita Sarasvati Ramabai (1858-1922) was a guiding light for Indian girls and women, especially those most vulnerable to neglect and abuse in society. Her baptism in 1883 marked a turning point, strengthening her Christian commitment (Jones 2009:505; Cherian 2005:100–2). She became the most celebrated Indian Christian woman, reformer, Bible translator, and social activist. The revival movement within her mission, in particular, played a crucial role in the global spread of Pentecostalism, a testament to the profound impact of her work on Indian women (Anderson 2006:37; Hedlund 2005:72).

Jones (2009:505) states, 'In 1898, she attended a convention in Keswick where she asked those gathered to pray for 200,000 Indian women and men to preach the gospel to their non-Christian neighbours.' Shah and Shah (2013: 196) stated that 'during the Keswick Convention in Keswick, Great Britain, Ramabai was a convert to Christianity, a Marathi Brahmin proposed a prayer for a missionary awakening among Indians.' The focus of the Keswick movement was, according to Frestadius (2019:78), 'to experience the fullness of God's empowering presence, one was encouraged to surrender to God completely and to place one's faith entirely in him.' Burgess (2001:88) explains, 'In January 1905, Ramabai called for prayer' and led prayer services among the mission's residents. In 1905, she asked for the Holy Spirit to be poured out at the Mukti Mission in Kedgaon, Maharashtra. In June 1905, the spiritual outpouring of the Holy Spirit touched 500 female congregants from her prayer group during their early morning devotions. The 18-month revival, a significant chapter in the history of Indian Christianity, resulted in conversions among ordinary people (Studebaker 2021:110; Sahoo 2018:29). Ramabai's ministry, credited with miracles and revival, lasted two years (Burgess 2001:89).

Anderson (2011:155, 2014a:209, 2021:164) reports that the revival, which began with young women [Ramabai] being baptised by the Spirit, having visions, falling into trances and speaking in tongues, had a global influence. Tears of

repentance and confession marked the revival meeting, and prayer meetings featured healing miracles, speaking in tongues, prophecies and interpretations. The Holy Spirit empowered hundreds of young women to evangelise in surrounding villages, and the revival transformed the Mukti Mission into a global Pentecostal centre (Anderson 2006:38; Cherian 2005:102–03). Blumhofer (2008:223) notes three widespread aspects of this Indian revival: 'Fire (felt and seen), enormous joy, and public confession of guilt.'

Burgess (2001:88) states that 'the revival continued until 1906 when participants also experienced glossolalia.' Several missionaries at Mukti, including Minnie Abrams (Methodist Episcopal) and Albert Norton (Methodist, later Independent), also received the baptism of the Spirit. Anderson (2021:164) claims that 'the Mukti revival had other far-reaching consequences that penetrated parts of the world untouched by Azusa Street ... Ramabai understood this revival herself to be how the Holy Spirit was creating Indian Christianity.' This made Pandita Ramabai a significant figure in understanding the history of Pentecostalism, and her understanding of the revival was accepted by some members of the broader Christian community, further solidifying its influence. Anderson (2007:4) argues that historically, 'Pentecostalism was in the process of emergence that was not considered a distinct form of Christianity at least a decade after the revival and missionary movements' with which it was intertwined, such as the Mukti or the Azusa Street Revival.

There is the problem of strictly linking the emergence of Indian Pentecostalism with the beginning of global Pentecostalism. Unlike other authors studying the Indian Awakening (such as Stanley Burgess or Gary McGee), rather than emphasising Azusa Street as the birthplace of Pentecostalism, Studebaker and Anderson argue that the revival in Mukti is significant because of the argument for global ascension supports the Pentecostal movement (Studebaker 2021:110; Anderson, 2011:136). This became a turning point in the history of Indian Pentecostalism. Shah and Shah (2013:196) posit that 'the Mukti mission became an important link between the burgeoning Pentecostal movements in the West and India.' With its global connections, the Mukti revival has not only influenced the history of Indian Pentecostalism but also contributed to the larger narrative of Pentecostalism worldwide. Nevertheless, many Christian leaders in India disagree with classifying the Mukti revival as Pentecostal, as none of the participants in this

revival founded a movement or subsequently identified with Pentecostalism (Pulikottil 2002:48). Despite this disagreement, Anderson (2006:39, 2014a:30-31) takes it a step further. He asserts that the revival, widely reported in Western evangelical and Pentecostal publications, attracted the attention of missionary individuals and was viewed as an initial stage of a Pentecostal movement in India.

In July 1906, another significant revival spread at the Anglican (CMS) boarding school in Bombay. Some girls who attended a CMS conference in April and heard Mukti missionary Minnie Abrams speak were encouraged to pray and confess. Sarah prayed for the conversion of Libya and spoke in tongues (Jones 2009:505; Cherian 2005:102–03; McGee 1999:655). Meanwhile, Abrams sent a copy of a detailed report on the Mukti revival to Willie C. Hoover in Chile, a historical moment that influenced Pentecostalism in Chile (Samuel 2018:7). Anderson (2014a:38) examines how the Mukti mission became the catalyst for the beginning of Pentecostalism in Chile, marking a significant chapter in religious history.

Ramabai's narrative of the Mukti Mission women's baptism in the Holy Spirit is a powerful testament to the Mission's active role in promoting Pentecostalism. Mukti missionaries Albert Norton and Minnie Abrams, who were instrumental in India, underscore the Mission's influence on the beginnings of Pentecostalism in India (Samuel 2018:7–8). The Mukti Mission's active involvement in expanding Pentecostalism in India, as well as its role as a key link in the growing global Pentecostal network, is evident. The arrival of the first active members of Azusa Street in India further fuelled the ideas for a Pentecostal revival, a testament to the Mission's active promotion of Pentecostalism.

According to Anderson (2011:136), 'the original Pentecostal outpouring in India occurred much earlier than Mukti, in Tamil Nadu in 1860-65 under the Tamil evangelist Aroolappen and in Travancore in 1873-81.' The Mukti Mission Spiritual-Movement, a movement that transcended religious boundaries, was adopted by a diverse range of religious groups, including the Alliance, Anglicans, Baptists, Friends, Methodists and Presbyterians. In terms of conversions and changing lifestyles, the spiritual awakening in the Mukti Mission had a lasting impact on Maharashtrian society (Hedlund 2011:185).

In 1905, a young Hindu named Sadhu Sundar Singh experienced a vision of Jesus Christ, which led to his conversion. Singh, a famous evangelist, is credited

with taking Pentecostalism to many parts of India (Benge & Benge 2005:50–51). This sequence of events illustrates how Pentecostal experiences, such as speaking in tongues, healing, the expulsion of evil spirits, and spiritual awakening, led ordinary people to conversions in India even before Western Pentecostal missionaries arrived. There is undeniable evidence of the Azusa Revival spreading its spirit to the territory of India. Western Pentecostal missionaries in this period further reinforced Pentecostal teachings in India, which stimulated the formation of Pentecostal movements throughout the nation.

2.3.4. Miraculous conversions in Pentecostalism in India

The *MCs* in India served as a potent example of the Holy Spirit's strength. Through their efforts, Pentecostalism grew in India, and they achieved the proliferation of evangelism towards diverse societal groups. These conversions, a result of the *MCs*, continue to inspire and enlighten people today. A historian of the Assemblies of God, USA, McGee (1999:650), explains that the most significant revivals of the 19th century in India, marked by the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit, attracted attention: 'visions, dreams, receptions of the burning, tongues of fire, healing and confessions of sin.' Experiential Pentecostal spirituality has been widespread in India since the mid-19th century. Revival meetings in the Tirunelveli area of Tamil Nadu, in southern India, were among the earliest known manifestations of Pentecostal phenomena in India, dating back to 1860. During these meetings, glossolalia, prophecies, healings, and other charismatic gifts were displayed (Hedlund 2011:184; George 2001:220). Within a decade, the revival spread to Kerala's neighbouring Travancore. The Christian population of the central Travancore region opened the door for Pentecostalism to spread rapidly throughout southern India (Philip 2015:2).

In various parts of India, the Pentecost phenomena were frequent and recurring. K.E. Abraham recounts how divine Spirit manifestations occurred in Kerala through revivals in 1865, 1873, and 1905, as the respected founder of the Indian Pentecostal Church. According to his account, he was among many individuals involved in the religious movement throughout Kerala in 1908. As a witness to miraculous events, Abraham guided believers toward genuine repentance, which ultimately led to faith in Jesus Christ. The divine activities of the

Spirit, which included healing and exorcism of evil spirits, prophesying and encountering God, and experiencing dreams and visions, resulted in numerous individuals joining the Pentecostal church. The church emphasised the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit that led to its growth (Bergunder 2005:197–98; Pulikottil 2002:48–9; Varghese 1999:70–3). According to an article by Singh (2022:11) in The Times of India newspaper, Pentecostal priests who perform healings and exorcists are said to have played a significant role in the spread of Christianity.

Pentecostal churches experienced a surge in adherence because of the mighty works of the Spirit, a phenomenon deeply rooted in historical records. These records reveal rival spirit movements between tribal areas in India, encompassing both the southern and northeastern regions. They understand that the church is the agency of the Spirit to the world. Prioritising the miraculous works of the Holy Spirit brought challenges from other Christian denominations, including major churches that claim Pentecostals are sorcerers. Petersen argues that Pentecostals misunderstand the gift of the Spirit when they focus on individual transformation and neglect social responsibility (Petersen 1999:59). Pentecostals now emphasise social engagement, transforming individuals through the power of the Spirit, and taking on social responsibility.

Indian Pentecostalism underwent a permanent transformation when K.E. Abraham affirmed his spiritual strength by believing in the Holy Spirit's divine power, which produces miraculous healings. He continued practising his healing ministry even after traditional institutions criticised him. In 1923, K.E. Abraham experienced a spiritual miracle through the divine Holy Spirit, which transformed his life and ministry path after he joined the Brethren Assembly Church in India. Abraham's determination was evident as he spent several months in solitary prayer after being denied service in the Brethren Assembly (Varghese 1999:150–53; K.E. Abraham 1955:17, 1983:66–67).

Abraham experienced miraculous healing when a cobra bit a woman named Rachelamma, causing her to fall unconscious due to the poison. Neighbours gathered around her, unsure of her fate and believing she would die. Despite initial doubts, Abraham prayed in tongues for her healing. Then, in a sudden and unexpected turn of events, the woman opened her eyes and sat on her bed. This miraculous, sudden and surprising healing led the entire family and others to come

to Christ (Abraham 2001:70-73). He had witnessed such supernatural acts of the Spirit throughout his tenure.

Pastor P.S. Samuel and his brother, Vaariyapuram Yonaachen, experienced a significant manifestation of the Spirit through the gift of tongues, prophecy, and other charismatic gifts in the 1940s. The result was that, in 1950, with a God-given vision, Pastor P.S. Samuel, founder of the Church of God, died on June 8, 2006, in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, underscoring the need for transformative healing experiences for ordinary people in India (Samuel 2006:75-76). Pastor Samuel reports several miraculous healings in his ministry. One case involves a Hindu devotee, Annaswamy. His sister was hospitalised for many days and almost died in a government hospital. He asked Pastor Samuel to pray for her healing. So, the pastor prayed and witnessed her miraculous healing. The doctors and others who saw this believed in Jesus, confessed their sins, and became followers of Christ. This led to the establishment of a church in Raipur, where many Hindus and self-proclaimed Christians turned to Jesus through miraculous events. The church grew rapidly and with significant momentum in Raipur in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh (Samuel 2006:81–82). Pastor Samuel testified to the effects of divine healing and other miracles, which drew many locals to the church. He conducted many healing revival meetings in Raipur and surrounding villages. As a result, many people who were sick were healed and freed from evil spirits. His efforts had led to the growth of God's Church (Abraham 2021:105).

The traditional church in Banswara, Rajasthan, underwent *Atma ki Jagruti* (Spiritual Awakening), which evolved into a Pentecost experience during the 1960s, characterised by signs such as speaking in tongues and singing in tongues, accompanied by physical reactions including falls, visions, dream states, confession of sins, and body shaking. Church leaders labelled these transformative experiences as demonic spirits because they believed these awakenings diminished spiritual revival power and dedication to Christianity. The key development in North Indian Pentecostalism happened when Thomas Mathews established the Philadelphia Church of God in Udaipur in 1963. Through his extensive knowledge of Pentecostalism, Mathews became instrumental in spreading the church by visiting various locations, where he discussed the theological basis of Pentecostal revelations. His efforts led to the rise of many MCs due to spirit manifestations, miraculous healings, exorcisms, and the proliferation

of indigenous Pentecostal churches, a testament to his significant contribution (Philip 2015:3–4).

Similarly, many other Pentecostal pioneer missionaries and pastors also reported the effects of healing miracles and exorcism, which led to numerous conversions and church growth in various parts of India (Abraham 2021:105). Indian Pentecostal scholar Abraham (2021:11) states, 'Unlike Pentecostal churches, mainstream churches are largely unresponsive to the emotional and spiritual needs of their members (and people outside the church), especially in times of crisis.' Pentecostal pastors often offer healing prayers for all who are sick, demon-possessed, or facing difficulties in life. This is how healing miracles, rooted in faith, attract people to church (Sahoo 2018:101). Sahoo (2018:101) argues, 'Whether they remain in the church or return to their former faith depends mainly on their healing and faith in Christ.' Poorvi Bai tells the story of her healing (Sahoo 2018:101):

Previously, I had various problems and a lot of pain in my neck. Satan had completely taken over my life; I was finished. My family members took me to the *Galeghot Baba* (a saint specialised in treating neck problems). I went there for almost one and a half years, but there was no improvement in my health. One day, I visited my sister in a nearby village, and someone suggested I attend church... I started going to the church and prayed... my neck was cured. I became a believer in 2002, and there has been no turning back since then.

This is an example of how the hopeless in Pentecostal spiritual culture discovered a place to experience God's healing grace and power. Because of this refuge for the disinherited, Pentecostal Christianity became known as the religion of the poor (Martin 2002:4). This is the only reason the Pentecostal mission focuses on powerful evangelism and caring for the poor and marginalised. Pentecostals expect the Holy Spirit to visit these ordinary people through powerful experiences that lead them to social advancement. The Pentecostal community interprets this sign as an urgent call to powerful evangelism, believing the Lord is coming soon. The daily testimonies of healings, exorcisms and miracles further reinforce this urgency. This unique experience of supernatural manifestations makes it a religion of experience (Ma 2007:29).

In this context, Pentecostals believe that individual wholeness can only be restored through the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. This understanding has led to miraculous religious conversion experiences, with faith healing playing a significant role. It has become one of the key features of the growth of Indian

Pentecostalism. According to Bauman (2015:21), 'The emergence of Pentecostal faith healing as a major factor in conversions to Christianity in India today is changing contemporary debates about conversions in significant ways.'

Non-Pentecostals acknowledge the significance of the Pentecostal pneumatological mission strategy in church planting in Rajasthan. Despite the challenging contexts, the effectiveness of Pentecostalism has led to a re-evaluation of church planting strategies and numerous conversions to Christ (Lukose 2009: 103). The Pentecostals' paradigmatic mission strategy involves proclaiming the gospel, healing the sick and expelling evil spirits (active in idolatry and immorality) for the glory of God and human well-being (Jongeneel 2002:64). Pentecostal pastors (missionaries) anticipate that ordinary people will be healed and come to Jesus with a transformative experience. Nevertheless, the faith healing practices, often questioned by other religions and Hindu political parties, have even led to violence against Pentecostals in various parts of the country, highlighting the challenges they face in their mission.

Pentecostal healing methods, influenced by and sharing similarities with Hindu and other non-Christian Indian healers (Bauman 2015:21), have a profound impact on the religious life of Christians and other Indians, as Jones (2009:506) emphasises. Faith healing practices, a cultural norm, are widespread across religious cultures in India. The Indian populace, deeply religious, anticipates daily miracles from their deities. There is a pervasive cultural belief that a potent, accurate God can perform miraculous healings, both large and small (Sahoo 2018: 37). This cultural backdrop explains the significant emphasis that Pentecostal churches in India place on pastoral care and prayer for the sick (healing and driving out evil spirits) as a means to guide people towards conversion to Christ (Michael 2003:362–63). Iyadurai (2015:85) further asserts,

Some converts experience miracles in their lives during difficult times, which lead to their conversion. When they face difficulties or hopeless situations, divine intervention brings a dramatic turnaround. Miracles are events that evade any natural explanation but come with the certainty that they are acts of God. The sense of certainty of God's intervention is the religious dimension that makes an event a miracle. Otherwise, it could be considered a chance or coincidence. Converts' certainty in interpreting an event in their lives as an act of God leads them to follow Jesus. They consider the miracle as a proof or evidence of the truth of Christianity. The event could be a miraculous escape, a solution to a crisis, a healing, an ability to do something that would normally be impossible, and so on.

Through his studies of religious transformation, Iyadurai investigated the exceptional stories of people from different faiths who accepted Jesus as their single religious truth. Medical researchers documented a Hindu woman who experienced a divine healing of tuberculosis. The serious illness without treatment of her relative forced her to ask a Christian woman for assistance despite her lack of faith in Jesus initially. The Christian woman's prayer healed the sick relative, a pivotal moment that reignited the Hindu woman's faith. This miraculous event inspired the woman and led her family, including five children, to unite, turn to Jesus, confess their sins, and acknowledge the need for eternal life (Iyadurai 2015:89).

Pentecostals argue that traditional churches rarely offer miracles and divine healings, making Pentecostalism attractive to tribal peoples struggling with poverty, exploitation, and disease (Sahoo 2018:37). For the ordinary people of India, even a tiny miracle is a big deal; it significantly strengthens people's *astha* (faith) in Christ, and they start attending church; such miracles play a crucial role in enhancing the conversion of the tribal people to Pentecostal Christianity (Sahoo 2018:37). Through miracles, the Spirit of Christ works in their lives and attracts His love to them (Roberts 2016:185). Pentecostals utilise the authority and power of the Holy Spirit, as described in Luke-Acts, to counter people's scepticism about Jesus Christ and demonstrate that He is the true God and Saviour of the world, while also taking into account their religious and cultural beliefs.

Indian religious communities show an intense yearning for God to show his divine powers when people face painful circumstances. Pentecostals' religious and healing activities effectively utilise time by spreading the gospel and performing healing miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit. These liberations, as Sahoo (2018:22) and other scholars, such as Martin and Meyer, note, have propelled Pentecostalism to become the fastest-growing denomination within Christianity, spreading rapidly in what many observers consider a promising trend for the future (see Martin 2011:63-64, Meyer 2010:118). The occurrence of miracles, a familiar sight for Pentecostals, raises the question: Why do not the major traditional churches agree with this? This urgent need for further study, especially in the Indian context, is a call to action for scholars and students of religious studies.

Pentecostals view healing as an essential aspect of the gospel, which influenced the rise of Pentecostalism in India (Bauman 2015:21; Sahoo 2018:99).

Conversion through miraculous healing has attracted the attention of others. Fuelled by a conviction in extraordinary gifts specified in the scriptures, such as healing, expulsion of evil spirits, and prophecy, the Pentecostal expression of faith aligns with the prevalent religiosity of the Indian populace, which believes in divine healing and the presence of evil. This attracts individuals with diverse religious beliefs, making it more accessible to the general public.

Pentecostals' belief in divine intervention and their openness to experiences of ecstasy and mysticism are attractive to outsiders. Nevertheless, some traditional churches disagree with using miraculous healings as the primary means of conversion (Abraham 2021: 97–98; Jones 2009: 504–09). The Pentecostals attract followers through Holy Spirit-inspired miracles that lead to spiritual conversion in an Indian cultural context. The growth of Pentecostalism in India faces multiple obstacles, including opposition from the social framework, theological questions, and the need for cultural adaptation among Indians.

2.4. Understanding miraculous conversions in the Indian Pentecostal Movement

The Pentecostal churches encompass a diverse range of organisations, including various independent churches, missionary groups, house churches, and established Pentecostal denominations such as the Indian Pentecostal Church of God (IPC), the Assemblies of God (AoG), the Church of God (CoG), and Sharon Church. Churches have expanded their presence throughout India as well as in many locations worldwide. Nevertheless, it is nearly impossible to determine the exact number of Pentecostals in India for political reasons. In 1994, more than one million Pentecostals dwelled in South India. The 2006 Pew Survey of Pentecostals revealed that the Assemblies of God, a prominent Pentecostal group in India, had 300,000 members in 1995. Notably, one of the largest churches, the AoG Church in Chennai, had 20,000 individuals in 2002, and demonstrated rapid growth.

The IPC, the largest Pentecostal organisation in India, is a massive entity with approximately eight thousand local churches in all states of India, as well as in the Middle East, America, Europe, Australia, Africa, and other countries, and more than 10,000 congregations worldwide (IPC, 2016). The Assemblies of God Church in India, with 5,200 churches nationwide, and the Sharon Fellowship of India, comprising over 2,050 local churches across India and 34 other countries,

also have a significant presence (The Pentecostal Church of God, affiliated with The Sharon Fellowship Church) (Thomas, 2024). The Church of God (Full Gospel) in India, with thousands of churches across various states, is organised into distinct regions, further expanding its reach (Steve 2023). These organisations, along with many other Pentecostal churches and house churches, have a significant scale, with their membership revealed in the 2006 Pew survey among Pentecostals, possibly for political reasons. Different people and missionary organisations founded these churches in other parts of the world. However, they all underline the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit and are committed to passionate missionary activity (Abraham 2021: 4).

Pentecostalism, a product of a rich theological environment that also gave rise to movements for holiness, healing, restorationism, revivalism and millenarianism, all of which significantly influenced the interpretation of the Bible (Archer 2009:99), emerged in a specific historical context. The aim here is not to delve into the hermeneutic methods of Pentecostalism but to explore how Pentecostals understand and practice *MCs*. According to Martin (2013:3), Pentecostals largely adhere to the populist 'common sense' approach, which accepts the Bible as literal. They take the Bible literally, bridging the gap between the original context of the biblical text and the reader's context. This Pentecostal method was called the Bible reading method. This involved examining the Bible for all references to a particular topic in the scriptures and then combining these references into a theological statement. It is a deductive and harmonising approach (Martin 2013:3; Archer 2009: 99–127).

To understand the implications of miraculous healing, Pentecostal scholars employed a particular hermeneutical approach. They conducted a significant and thoughtful Bible study since the movement's inception (Martin 2013:1). From a Pentecostal perspective, Yong (2017:15) states that 'the Day of Pentecost apostolic experience as exemplary for biblical and theological interpretation.' Yong (2017:15–16) particularly finds the 'Pentecostal way of reading and interpreting Scripture that has normative implications for all Bible believers and practitioners.' Thus, through the hermeneutic approach, Pentecostals develop a practice-oriented theology that is not merely a theoretical exercise. Still, a practical tool crucial to the interpretation of Scripture, and is grounded in their stories, beliefs, and practices (Archer 2004:ix).

The narrative strategy, which forms the experiential, narrative basis for the theological ideas of the gospel, is deeply rooted in the Pentecostal reading of Scripture. This strategy finds its origins in the Pentecostal emphasis on Luke-Acts (Dayton 2011:23). The early Pentecostal movement used Luke-Acts to support charismatic experiences and the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit (Mittelstadt 2010: 3). The Church's goals of community and mission, which were evident in these scripturally inspired and miraculously confirmed events (Macchia 2011:8), played a significant role in shaping the Pentecostal narrative. Pentecostals use individual stories and biblical narratives to encourage and justify the gospel in daily life. This approach can be succinctly described as 'this is that,' aligning the 'this' of the modern *MC* experience with the 'that' of the Bible (Lord 2013: 22; Anderson 2014a: 226–27).

However, the methods of interpreting and understanding Scripture have often drawn criticism from the Reformed traditional churches (Dev 2008: 97–98). Pentecostals interpret the Bible and everyday life events, proposing extraordinary explanations for conversion. Their theology, deeply rooted in lived experience, dependence on Scripture, and the miraculous work of the Spirit, speaks to the personal journey of each believer. (Abraham 2021:187). However, Ma (1999:54) states, 'the Pentecostals in a sense follow the Reformists' cry, *Sola Scriptura*. Their literalistic and simplistic understanding of the Scripture helped early Pentecostals make sense of their movement.' Pentecostals recognised the importance of Miracle healing practices in the proclamation of Jesus and the apostles through the gospel. Indian Pentecostals, like Jesus and the apostles, carried out a miracle-oriented ministry: Healing is not a new phenomenon for Pentecostals, as it was the practice of the early church.

Redemption involves healing, a concept deeply ingrained in Pentecostal beliefs. They recognise the need for healing in all aspects of human life (Maddocks 1995:35). Bauman (2015:177) points out, 'Pentecostals are uniquely positioned to respond to this demand due to their belief in the involvement of spiritual beings in matters of health, healing and prosperity. This belief aligns, in important ways, with those in the realm of popular Indian religion.' Pentecostals, understanding the needs of ordinary Indian society, believe that signs and wonders can help preach the gospel in India, much like the early church's efforts. Heap (2002:4) further explains, 'Perhaps no subject in Christian circles has aroused such controversy as

healing. Nevertheless, God's promises of healing in the Bible are clearly defined.' The Bible is the central focus of the Pentecostal ministry.

Biblical evidence led Pentecostals to devote themselves to a Christocentric and pneumatocentric ministry, inspired by the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, to preach and heal the sick and win the ungodly to Christ (Abraham 2021:5). They believe that the *MC* experience helps converts to remain strong in the Christian faith (Sahoo 2018:98–104; Iyadurai 2011:510–11). This was the main reason Pentecostals went far beyond their homeland to the ends of the earth. The central message of Indian Pentecostals is that Jesus heals and saves. The core of the Pentecostal practice is evangelism, which centres on faith in Jesus as Saviour and Healer, providing a strong foundation for their beliefs. Anderson (2013:146-47) characterises Jesus as,

The saviour, healer, Baptizer and Soon Coming King remained an important concept in Pentecostalism—with regeneration, divine healing, holiness and or baptism in the Spirit, and the premillennial second coming of Christ as essential constituents of the Pentecostal message... Pentecostal includes a message of a personal, experiential, and exclusive salvation, from sin through a born-again or conversion experience. The practice of healing the physically sick through prayer... is seeing Jesus as Saviour is always Christocentric—coming to Jesus, receiving Jesus—and a lifestyle conversion and a radical break with the past or the world is a prominent part of their ...proclamation and implicit theology.

Luiskutty (2015:143), a secular scholar of Indian Pentecostalism, aligns with Anderson's thoughts. Luiskutty (2015: 143) states, 'The miraculous healing of the Holy Spirit leads to conversion, with Pentecostals praying for sick people.' Converts often share their experiences, from everyday insights to supernatural insights with sensory components. Many believe they had a profoundly personal encounter with Jesus that unleashed a transformative power of healing and liberation (Iyadurai 2011:510). This intimate connection is the foundation for the Pentecostal theology of the *MC*. Unfortunately, the teachings of traditional mainstream churches today have significantly eroded the biblical teaching on healing (Heap 2002:11).

At the time of the apostles, the early Christian communities were known for extraordinary gifts (1 Cor. 14:26 ff.), including healing, miracles, prophecies, discerning spirits and speaking in tongues. These gifts are in harmony with the worship community and are marked as gifts from God. The apostolic church is distinguished by its ability to perform miracles, a key factor in its authentication by

the apostles. These gifts are part of the apostles' qualifications as authoritative representatives of God, and they must perish with them (Warfield 2019; Gaffin 1996:25–28). Most Reformed traditions indicate that healings and miracles were common in biblical times. Since it was written down in the Bible, there was no longer any need for supernatural events such as healing (Lawrence 2006:20).

The Pentecostal ministry, focusing on the whole person, significantly emphasises divine healing and health, which is believed to be available through Jesus' atonement on the cross. This raises the question of whether God's will for wholeness and His healing power remain in effect (Dearing 1998:53). Indian Pentecostals, in rejecting cessationist views, follow Luke's accounts as a paradigm. They believe divine healing is crucial in helping ordinary people embrace the gospel, overcome illness, and save lives (Luiskutty 2015:143). When cessationists question *why healing is not universal*, Pentecostals point to the fact that even Jesus did not perform miracles for everyone and that the New Testament teachings do not guarantee healing for everyone due to the cross (Lawrence 2006:35).

Emphasising human interests over theological meaning in interpreting the Word of the Holy Spirit is viewed as an obstacle to the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit and contrary to divine truth. It is also believed to hinder spiritual growth, visions and blessings essential for personal and collective development. This contradicts the Word of God (Dev 2008:7). Yong (2020:267) states, 'For mainstream Christian belief and piety, heaven represents the final overcoming and healing of disability once and for all.' The significance of miraculous healing and the potential of the public profession of faith as an inspiring path to leading people to Christ are highlighted.

Unlike most Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches, the *MC* Project has been a significant force in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Its impact on different Christian denominations in India is profound, with the *MCs* causing reputational damage to other Christian groups and attracting the attention of Hindu nationalists (Sahoo 2018:6; Bauman 2015:170–75). This has led to accusations against conventional churches of using exorcism and healing to convert ordinary people, further deepening the divide with Pentecostals (Sahoo 2018: 6). In contrast to the beliefs of Hindu nationalists, Pentecostalism maintains that conversions do not inherently lead to social disruption (Bauman 2015:102).

With its belief in the ongoing miraculous work of Christ in the Holy Spirit, Pentecostalism has effectively integrated certain aspects of popular Indian religious practices in the context of healing and exorcism. Despite their similarities, Pentecostal healers differ from their well-known Indian religious rivals (Bauman 2015:104; Bergunder 2011:287). The Pentecostal belief in universal salvation, as the gospel's message, distinguishes them. They require all faiths—Catholics, Protestants, Hindus and so forth—to have *visvas* (faith) in God and Christ, who, according to them, came to earth to save humanity. This inclusive approach extends even to members of traditional Christian denominations, such as Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants, whom they consider nominal Christians in need of a conversion experience. Therefore, Pentecostals invite all religious groups to embrace the gospel and free themselves from the bonds of Satan to experience a conversion led by the Holy Spirit. When this *visvas* is activated, various types of healing occur, and there are experiences of signs and wonders that parallel those found in the New Testament. This was the practice of the Pentecostal movements of the last century. In light of such activity, all institutions and institutional systems must yield to or be overcome by the ongoing miraculous work of Christ in the Holy Spirit (San Chirico 2022:238).

Pentecostals consider this one of the most effective methods of spreading the gospel message to non-Pentecostals and non-Christians, ultimately leading them to salvation. They believe the Indian community needs healing from bondage to access the eschatological kingdom. Indian Pentecostal followers share similar pragmatic religious experiences with those found in global Pentecostal communities. Researching miraculous conversions within the global Pentecostal movement should be prioritised because it reveals the movement's strength and impact.

2.5. Miraculous conversions in the Global Pentecostal movement

Pentecostalism, a vast and diverse global phenomenon, has been a part of our world for over a century (Kay 2006:103). As the fastest-growing significant religious movement of the 20th century, it has influenced nearly every nation (Vondey 2019:22). Originally, it was a simple, emotional form of Christianity with a profound goal- to restore the Church and the gifts of the Spirit, including glossolalia, healing and signs and wonders. The movement's growth in the 1950s

and 1960s, despite historical, religious and social circumstances, led to different variations, each with distinct Pentecostal characteristics (Anderson 2014b:158).

Macchia (2011:19) states,

The emphasis on healing in evangelical groups predates the rise of the Pentecostal movement. The belief in divine healing was so much part of American revivalism in the late nineteenth century that by the 1870s the healing movement was a force to contend with in all major evangelical denominations. However, by the time Pentecostalism erupted in 1906 at the Azusa Street revival, the belief in divine healing had [*criticism*] considerably under the influence of intense controversy concerning the biblical justification for such miraculous signs of the Spirit in the modern world.

The Story of Divine Healing highlights the significance of Pentecostal MC theologies and practices in understanding global Pentecostalism (Ervin Alexander, 2020:265). Pentecostals believe that the Spirit miraculously renews hearts and gives entire lives, including physical and social healing (Kärkkäinen 2000:53). Pentecostals emphasise the practice of miraculous healing and conversion, while other traditions do not. Ervin Alexander (2020:257) describes,

Healing practices are essential to the categorisation of a revival movement as Pentecostal. On the one hand, it can be argued that there is no more distinguishing feature of Pentecostalism than the belief in the power of God to heal the sick. Studies of Pentecostalism have described healing practices as salient in the global movement and as a contributing factor to its [*conversion*] growth and global expansion.

While Pentecostal Christianity applies the principle of divine healing to all aspects of suffering, its healing methods hold a significant place in the faith despite not providing a guaranteed solution to every illness or situation. This [healing] is a key reason why Pentecostalism has spread worldwide (Vondray 2017:220; Kalu 2008:264–265).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Pentecostals rebelled against longstanding traditional Protestant practices and called for the return of apostolic, supernatural Christianity (Courey 2016:89; McClymond 2014:31; Dayton 2011b:26;35–37). Using a passage from the Bible (Acts 2), which describes the Church's first Pentecost, they emphasised the abrupt, disruptive nature of their movement (McClymond 2014:31). Thus, the 20th century saw the emergence and phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism worldwide (Burgess 2011:230). Miraculous healings encouraged the establishment of churches in various parts of the world. Non-Christians who claim to have experienced divine healing after receiving Pentecostal prayers are considered truthful and join the churches. Therefore, most

converts say that a miraculous healing event is the reason for their conversion (Tang 2005:481).

The worldwide Pentecostal movement, born out of the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit, is a transformative Experience. It is a popular movement where individuals journey into the Holy Spirit and encounter it. This encounter leads to a profound transformation, drawing people into Pentecostalism (Boopalan 2012:98). According to Boopalan (2012:98), a strong Pentecostal identity includes the following characteristics:

Pentecostal spirituality emphasises the importance of intuition and experience, whereby the presence of the miraculous is sought out in everyday life; a devotion that places an intense stress on the gifts of the Spirit, which include speaking in tongues and baptism of the Holy Spirit; a firm biblical girding; unwritten liturgy; a theology that is narrated; charismatic leadership and significant lay participation and testimonies; and a focus on the works of the Holy Spirit is witnessed through healings and signs and wonders. Dreams and visions are often seen as God's communications. Prayer, prophecy, healing, and exorcism activities are integral to the everyday practice of Pentecostalism.

Studies of the international roots of Pentecostalism provide fundamental knowledge needed to understand both the beginning and development of Indian Pentecostalism.

2.5.1. Bethel Bible College

The exact origin of Pentecostalism is the subject of intense controversy. Scholars agree that it was influenced by revivalism, black-and-white holiness theology, the Keswick movement, the Reformed notion of power for the Christian life, dispensationalism, and the divine healing movements of the 19th century (Althouse 2003:23). The extraordinary body-healing process that Jesus Christ provided through his atoning cross work represents a core practice of the holiness movement (Thompson 2010:144). Perceived divine healing became a crucial teaching of the holiness movement during the early 20th century, as the Welsh Revival of 1904, led by Evan Roberts, gained influence. The revival underscores the Pentecostal presence and the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, with long meetings taking place simultaneously, revealing prayer visions, prophecy, and healing. The Indian Christians who experienced Pentecostal revivals from the 1860s onward, including manifestations of glossolalia and other signs of the Holy

Spirit, significantly influenced the global Pentecostal movement (Anderson 2004: 31–36).

Pentecostalism had its roots in the nineteenth-century Wesleyan holiness movement, which stressed complete spiritual purification. He was educated in various local schools and, in 1891, his recovery from rheumatic fever led him to leave his position at the Methodist church in 1895. He was a preacher in the independent state of Kansas. He was an independent Kansas preacher. He moved to Topeka, Kansas, opened the Bethel Healing Home and published *The Apostolic Faith*. Parham believed in healing, premillennialism, and a global revival before the coming of Christ (Anderson 2004:41–42). In 1898, Parham offered lodging for those seeking religious instruction and supernatural healing. In 1900, he founded an informal Bible school for Christian workers. Forty students gathered to study the Bible's teachings on baptism and the spiritual gifts of the Holy Ghost at Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas (Johns 2010:37; Balmer 2004:73). Zimmerman (1975:9) points out that after careful 'study of the Bible, the students agreed that speaking in tongues [was the first] evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.' What they believed in the Word of God, they soon experienced, each in their own way. Synan (1997:91; 2000) states that:

Apparently convinced that his conclusion was a proper interpretation of the scriptures, Parham and his students conducted a watch night service on December 31, 1900, which was to continue into the new year. In this service, a student named Agnes N. Ozman requested Parham to lay hands on her head and pray for her to be baptised with the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. It was after midnight and the first day of the twentieth century when Miss Ozman began speaking in the Chinese language.

The first-person experience of Agnes Ozman on the first day of the 20th century became the prototype of modern Pentecostalism (Synan 2010:21). Similarly, Vondey (2013:12) reports that 'the origins of the revival in Topeka, Kansas, considered by many the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement in America, can be traced back to a small group of students seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This quest was accompanied by the unexpected event of one student speaking in a foreign tongue.' The Spirit moved all the disciples under the teaching of Parham, a key figure in the development of Pentecostalism. It concluded that speaking in tongues confirmed the baptism of the Holy Spirit. According to Synan (1997:92; 2000), Parham claimed that 'his students never learned these languages and that natives of the countries involved had heard them

spoken and verified their authenticity.' The well-known Pentecostal theologian from India, M. Stephen (2019:27), reports that 'this Bible school was privileged to witness the fire of modern Pentecostalism.'

Pentecostals accept that in 1901, a holiness preacher named Charles Parham presented the teaching that glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, represented divine proof of receiving Spirit baptism according to biblical standards. The teaching spread as a movement that later produced the 1906 Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, making it known as the origin of Pentecostalism (Robeck 2017:16–18; Anderson 2004:26–27). It is believed that the message of Pentecostalism was spread further several years later through the influential ministry of Seymour (Hedlund 2005:68) after he heard Parham's lecture on Spirit baptism and healing. Seymour played a pivotal role in expanding Pentecostalism with his unwavering belief in the supernatural miracles of the Holy Spirit (Miller & Yamamori 2007:18).

Seymour attended Parham's Bible School in Houston as a student. From Parham, he learned about the school's first evidence doctrine. Although he did not receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Houston, he firmly believed that it was essential for every believer and that those who spoke in tongues showed its visible manifestation (Kgatlle 2017:322). According to Parham, speaking in tongues demonstrated the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and later became the hallmark of the Pentecostal movement. These events have led some to reevaluate the theology of the cessation of the charismata and have underscored the fulfilment of the Holy Spirit through speaking in tongues and miraculous healing (Synan 2010:21-22).

The story of Azusa Street raises the complicated and multifaceted question of the antecedents of Pentecostalism. It is impossible to underline one origin at the expense of others (Anderson 2004:42). But, when William Joseph Seymour, a black holiness preacher from Houston, Texas, took the lead internationally, Pentecostalism had a significant impact on Christianity around the world ever since Pentecostalism has played a vital role in the revival of conventional churches the establishment of numerous new denominations and the expansion of Christianity into previously unreached regions of the globe.

2.5.2. Azusa Street Revival

In 1906, Seymour preached the same message to a small congregation in Los Angeles that eventually drew hundreds. An interracial group replicated the miracles of the first-century apostles, including speaking in tongues, healing the sick, and prophecy (Miller 2013:4-5; Cherian 2005:74-5). The Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles began on April 9, 1906, and sparked the modern Pentecostal movement (Boopalan 2012:98; Thomas 2019:62). Synan (2010:21) states, 'The Azusa Street Revival would serve as a major turning point in the world of Christian history. The message that attracted many people to the Azusa Street mission was new and revolutionary.' The meetings took place day and night for eight years (1906-1915). Many missionaries travelled around the globe (Kgatlle 2017:323). Within a few years, Pentecostalism spread to Africa, England, Finland, Russia, India and Latin America (Miller & Yamamori 2007:18; Cherian 2005:73-74). Historical evidence indicates that the Azusa Street revival was centred on two key individuals: Charles Fox Parham and William J. Seymour. Their dedication and leadership were instrumental in the development of Pentecostalism in the 20th century (Zimmerman 1975:10). Various studies consider Parham the father of Pentecostalism.

Several visitors to Azusa Street introduced a new experience of the Holy Spirit, which led to the birth of Pentecostal churches worldwide (Thomas 2008:56; Cherian 2005:75-76). Miller (2013:5) further writes, 'From Azusa Street, hundreds of missionaries took the Pentecostal message worldwide. They created churches, renewal movements, and denominations that have grown, fractured, disappeared, split off, expanded, and taken root in the four corners of the globe in an impressive yet dynamic and unpredictable pattern, led by the spiritual entrepreneurs who often are at the heart of Pentecostal growth. Therefore, Hedlund (2005:68) claims, 'Azusa Street in Los Angeles is the birthplace of modern Pentecostalism.' Despite several modest waves of revivals worldwide, Bethel Bible College is believed to have played a significant role in inspiring the global Pentecostal movement (George 2004:29).

The Pentecost story begins with American pioneers such as Parham and Seymour and then focuses on missionaries sent from the United States. Therefore, the Indian Pentecost story was diverse. South India and Maharashtra reported

Pentecost vigils, a religious observance or service held on the eve of Pentecost, before the Azusa Street movement in North India. In his doctoral thesis, Samuel (2018) examines the work of several Western scholars such as Allan Anderson (2014a), Edwin Orr (1994), Stanley M. Burgess (2001) and Michael Bergunder (2008), as well as Indian Pentecostal theologians such as Paulson Pulikottil (2002), Ivan Satyavrata (2019), Wesley Lukose (2009), Shaibu Abraham (2021) and Indian historians like A.C. George (2001) and V.V. Thomas (2008). From this, he recognises a resurgence in India even before Azusa.

Historical evidence suggests that miraculous experiences and manifestations of spiritual gifts have occurred in India before the arrival of Western missionaries from Azusa in 1907. The Indian Pentecostal movement, deeply rooted in the spiritual experiences of local Christians, began when they experienced and shared the Pentecostal experience (Gelpi 1971:21). Indian Christians viewed spiritual experiences as a manifestation of divine providence. God answered prayers and met their needs. Many believed the movement had strong indigenous roots and received the Spirit of God as a gift. Therefore, the researcher further examines how modern Pentecostal Christians experienced similar outpourings of the Holy Spirit on Azusa Street, resulting in forgiveness, healing, miracles, conversions, church growth, and missions.

2.6. Miraculous conversions in modern Pentecostal Christianity

Modern Pentecostal Christianity in India, emphasising miraculous healing in a multicultural religious context, continues the Pentecostal tradition of speaking in tongues, healings, miracles, and other spiritual gifts. These unique aspects, which distinguish Pentecostal practices from different Christian denominations, are likely to play a significant role in the future development of the church (Yong 2010:51).

Yong (2010:51) argues that the testimonies of the most prominent Pentecostal converts 'rejoiced over the fact that while the devil and his minions had intended to harm their lives, the Holy Spirit had instead preserved them from the works of the evil one' provided for their material needs, healed their bodies and saved and sanctified their souls. Through their belief in the Holy Spirit's anointing, believers achieve both empowerment and increased confidence in ministering

healing miracles. Pentecostals believe healing against suffering becomes possible when their ordained leaders receive the Holy Spirit's anointing. Kwiyani (2023:286) suggests that 'the healings, the exorcisms, and even the teachings can only be explained in the context of a Spirit-anointed ministry' to those who are ignored or unbelievers.

According to Heap (2002:46), there are many thousands of individual cases of people whom the power of God has miraculously healed through the name of Jesus Christ. These personal testimonies, one after another, serve as a potent reminder for many who look to Him that God is fulfilling His word. Pentecostal believers eagerly await witnessing a radical change in their own lives. The converts first should testify to their *MC* experiences by stating what sort of life they have been saved. According to Iyadurai (2011:511), 'The spark, the perceived divine-human encounter in the conversion experience, ignited the transformation.' Converts claim that the supernatural experience affected all dimensions of their lives.' For Iyadurai (2011:511), 'the effects of the transformative religious [miraculous] experience are divided into spiritual, psychological and cognitive effects.' Effects on attitudes and behaviours, physical and social impacts and economic impacts. To what extent is such a transformative, miraculous experience practical in the lives of converts? It is about their obedience and relationship with Christ, as well as how they walk in the Spirit and trust God's Word.

Supernatural experiences can help people gain a new understanding and perspective on sin. This encourages them to confess their sins and turn to Christ, realising God is with them in their suffering. Boopalan (2012:101) recounts, 'Conviction of sin and the individual experience of rebirth are essential elements of Pentecostalism.' Consciousness of sin is often presented in testimonies—people's miraculous conversion stories—as a description of a person's life of sin and their subsequent conversion. These testimonies, rich with personal experiences, are a robust relation to the struggles and triumphs of others. The testimonies even contain a list of acts considered unacceptable for Christian practice. The emphasis is always on a radical break with these past actions after accepting Christ. This reborn *MC* experience is the most essential and fundamental part of the Pentecostal experience (Anderson 2013: 147). Macchia (2011:19) notes that 'healing [constitutes] a prominent' and indispensable part of the modern Pentecostal message, particularly in India. They believe signs and wonders should

be the sermon's content to fulfil the Great Commission. Anderson (2013:149) states, 'Recent studies have emphasised that healing, more than any other factor, is the most important category for understanding the [spread] of Pentecostalism in the 20th century.'

Pentecostalism has influenced many charismatic movements in global Christianity, all of which maintain a normative belief in signs and wonders. Healing ministries have focused on the miraculous throughout Pentecostal history. Healing evangelists gained an international reputation for their preaching and healing campaigns. God's people, such as Aimee Semple McPherson, Branham, Roberts, Kuhlman, Osborn, Wimber, McNutt, and Bonnke, possess healing gifts, including the ability to heal the sick and perform miracles, which distinguishes Pentecostal movements from charismatic movements (Del Colle 2011:245).

Samuel and Sugden (2021:7) explain, 'At the heart of reconciliation is forgiveness and healing, restoring relationships to their intended state and [enabling] God's purpose for all relationships in his creation.' God's redemption and supernatural power in the church, perhaps more pronounced through the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit (Dayton 2011:115). This does not mean that Pentecostal churches overlook the baptism of the Spirit. Mittelstadt (2013:29) considers Yong a leader of Pentecostalism and claims, 'Spirit baptism is essential to Pentecostalism.'

Traditional mainstream Christians often ask questions about healing practices. Is physical healing directly related to Christ's atoning work on the cross? Pierce (2008:57) and Thompson (2019:144) express a similar idea that Pentecostals have long associated with the substitutionary atonement work performed by Jesus on the cross, particularly about healing and wholeness. As manifestations of the Holy Spirit's power, the healings demonstrate Christ's triumph over many sufferings and life's problems (Anderson 2002: 525; Menzies & Menzies 2000: 159–60). The healings of the Holy Spirit are evident in biblical times, as demonstrated by Pentecostals' belief in eternal deliverance from sickness and death through the eschaton. Jesus' miraculous healings and exorcisms depict the kingdom's incursion into the present order and symbolise new creation and renewal. These healings support Jesus' message that the kingdom has come (Thompson 2019:145). Pentecostals emphasise that this is the age of the Holy Spirit (Lawrence 2006:28). In fact, we can witness the coming of the eschatological

kingdom through the miraculous works of the Spirit in the church today, as mentioned in the Bible.

Pentecostals acknowledge the Holy Spirit's diverse miracles, always with Jesus in the healing context (Sahoo 2018:99; Maddocks 1995:9; Lawrence 2006:34). Hong (2001:293) argues, 'Pentecostals [possess a profound] understanding of the Spirit's miraculous work in the community, the world, and creation.' For Hong (2001:301), 'Healing is a [conduit through which] the gospel is proclaimed, [addressing] the physical and spiritual dimensions of life's reality. Pentecostals [ground] their beliefs in the unity of mind, body and spirit through healing.' Modern Pentecostalism has become a refuge for those disenchanted by the lack of emphasis on healing in mainstream Protestant churches. It integrates healing as a core aspect of the church's mission and addresses their dissatisfaction (Macchia 2011:19).

Similarly, Alexander (2006:80) claims that the 'Pentecostal church is the destination of the one wanting to receive prayer for healing' and has also become an integral part of Pentecostal worship and evangelisation.' With its rich healing tradition, Pentecostalism promotes a gospel that involves healing the whole person to legitimise the message (Alexander 2006b: 80; Anderson 2002: 525). On the other hand, Anderson (2002: 525) claims that 'the role of signs and wonders, particularly that of healing and miracles, has been prominent in Pentecostal praxis and reflection all over the world since its inception, and one of the most important emphases of its mission and outreach.' Therefore, Pentecostals' ultimate emphasis on miraculous healing could help non-Christians and professed Christians. For this reason, with its historical continuity, the *MC* occupies a prominent position in modern Pentecostalism, connecting believers to a rich tradition.

Myers (2015:116) and Macchia (2011: 20–21) bear witness to the reality that [miraculous] 'conversion is personal, affective, exuberant and accompanied by signs and wonders. Healing and deliverance are now lived realities with personal and social consequences.' This shows that *MC* has individual and social effects on the lives of converts. The Pentecostal faith healing practice offers hope to the poor and afflicted in today's suffering world. Miracles of healing were expected where the power of the Holy Spirit manifested itself. The testimonies of the converts originated in the Pentecostal church and spread over a larger

geographical area. Modern Pentecostalism employed these practices to disseminate information through personal recommendations as it gained popularity. Modern Pentecostalism experienced explosive growth due to the essential role of miraculous testimonies in its development. Although Pentecostals encountered various hardships, *MCs* upheld Biblical practices because their faith remained steadfast. Miracle healing became the central theme of modern Pentecostal theology and spirituality. Likewise, *MCs* have played a significant role in the growth of Pentecostalism in India.

2.7. Emerging theology of miraculous conversion in Pentecostal Christianity

Emerging *MC* theology in Pentecostal Christianity is a complex and evolving field. However, some key themes are evident. The focus on the experiential aspect of conversion is one theme. According to Pentecostals, conversion is a life-changing experience with the living God, and it is not merely an intellectual acceptance of a doctrine. Miracles and wonders such as healing, speaking in tongues and other manifestations of the Holy Spirit frequently accompany this encounter (Vondey 2017:44–46; Osoba 2013:670). Another theme is the emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals believe that the Holy Spirit is the convert and that people are transformed from darkness into light by the power of the Spirit. This power is not limited to the moment of conversion but is also available to believers throughout their lives (Booth 2010:18; Bruner 1998, 2001:60). *MCs* are seen by Pentecostals as a sign of the end times. They believe that as the world approaches Christ's second coming, there will be an increase in miraculous signs and wonders (Sahoo 2018:24). God thereby validates His veracity through these signs, reassuring believers and preparing the world for His return. Although not all Pentecostals agree on every aspect of *MC* theology, the above themes represent emerging trends.

Pentecostals often argue that miracles and divine healings are rare in traditional churches, and that Pentecostalism, therefore, has an advantage in attracting people (Abraham 2021:106; Sahoo 2018:37). The Pentecostal churches, in their resilience, take up the often-ignored mission of other traditional churches in India. While Pentecostal ministries focus on the miraculous healing of illnesses often considered incurable, conventional churches simultaneously

concentrate primarily on providing educational, health and home care resources for people with disabilities. This paradigm has led to the rapid growth of Pentecostal *MCs* despite facing criticism and challenges from the traditional churches and especially the Hindu fundamentalists in India.

2.7.1. The concept of miracles in larger Christianity

All Christians concur on the significance of scriptural wonders; nevertheless, traditional Christians, who follow the teachings and practices of early Christianity, oppose contemporary supernatural encounters and their implications. These 'today's miracle experiences' refer to the reported instances of divine intervention or supernatural occurrences in contemporary Christian communities. Popular piety, religious aspirations, expectations, and judgments in theology, teaching, and preaching have a significant impact on Christianity (Del Colle 2011:235). Miracles and conversion have been a central theme in Christianity for centuries, with some individuals transcending traditional boundaries. Miracles and conversions have been a topic of controversy recently (Flinn 1999:51), with some disputing whether they have ceased to occur or continue to happen. Nevertheless, miraculous divine interventions and conversions are the most telling stories of Indian Pentecostal believers (Dobe 2015:256). Flinn (1999:52) states, 'In every conversion, there [appears] to be a cognitive aspect, a religious aspect, a moral aspect, and an emotional aspect.' This contributes to another Christian perspective on miracles: the religious conversion experience.

2.7.1.1. Protestant Reformed churches.

During the Reformation, the miracles were criticised by influential Protestant reformers (*PR*), Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564). They argued that the healing gifts had disappeared, but that the Lord, in His enduring presence among His people, healed weaknesses when needed (Calvin 1960:1467; Luther 1955:79). According to *PR*, the apostles marked the end of the era of miracles. In particular, *Counterfeit Miracles* (1918) by Benjamin Warfield, a former professor at Princeton Seminary, had a significant influence on conservative Christians (Nathan & Wilson 2009:37). The post-reformation effort to organise the Reformers' theological principles preserves the pivotal theological

aspects of Scripture authority and church doctrine alongside Christology (Tennent 2010:417). During the patristic period, when pneumatology received minimal attention, essential elements about the Holy Spirit were omitted from Western Protestant theology after the Reformation (Tennent 2010:417).

Throughout history, various theological developments have led to distinct understandings of the Holy Spirit, particularly regarding supernatural occurrences, divine healing, and other miraculous aspects, including demonic deliverance, prophecy, and speaking in tongues, which are central to Pentecostal convictions about the Holy Spirit. This continuous debate keeps the convention lively and advancing, from the early expressions of transformed philosophy to the subsequent improvement of dispensationalism (Tennent 2010:417). The most Protestant End of Miracles doctrine, for instance, argued that miracles ceased with the founding of the early church or during the biblical period, suggesting that God no longer needs miracles to convert people to the gospel of Christ (Shaw 2006:1). During the final decades of the twentieth century, scholars renewed their fascination with researching the doctrine of the Trinity. The surge in Pentecostalism heightened interest in the supernatural role of the Holy Spirit that missionaries should perform (Tennent 2010:419).

Kendall's perspective (2014:122) starkly contrasts Ma's, as he suggests that 'Cessationists formulated a doctrine to justify the lack of miracles, even suggesting that God never intended miracles to extend beyond a specific timeframe.' This view, which regards anything supernatural as demonic, is in direct opposition to Ma's (1999:55) argument that 'Pentecostals believe not only in the supernatural events described in the Bible but also in God's ability to perform similar miracles today.'

However, *PR* rejected the idea that human institutions had the power to perform miracles and focused on a relationship with God. They believe that conversion as a process is the result of a cognitive understanding of the truth of the gospel as well as repentance and faith in Jesus, not from the experience of miracles (Flanagan 2009:56–57; Shaw 2006:22). God initiates the conversion process by drawing a person to himself through the proclamation of the gospel (the word) and the inner work of the Holy Spirit (grace). In India, Dobe (2015:254) states, 'Protestants use the Bible to control their converts.' According to Gerrish (2004:291), *PR* believes that 'conversion to God is a work of God's grace alone.

[Through] an infusion of love for God, a radical reorientation' can be brought about from the guilt of seeking life within oneself to receiving life by faith from the trustworthy source of life. Taylor (1999:39) argues that 'some Protestant denominations (Anglican and Presbyterian) emphasise conversion experiences and those people who have had such an experience are also known as 'born again Christians'.'

Lamb and Bryant (1999:18) note that 'the picture is more complex and complicated when conversion is perceived as a calling or an election – especially if, as Calvin taught, not all are of the elect.' *PR* comprehends salvation as something achieved by the grace of God, not by signs and wonders. On the other hand, Pentecostals believe that salvation is also a form of healing. In the 16th century, Protestants objected to the miracles of the past (Shaw 2006:22). Reformed traditions believe that the gospel's teachings were confirmed by heavenly miracles, Jesus Christ, prophets, apostles, and other faithful clergy. After such confirmation, there is no need for new miracles. Instead, they must only believe the Scriptures, the ultimate authority, and beware of false miracles of the Antichrist, which Satan performs to confirm idolatry, errors, abuses and misdeeds (Shaw 2006: 26). At the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries, *PR* created the doctrine of the cessation of miracles doctrine to counter Roman Catholic claims to miracles (Shaw 2006:23).

2.7.1.2. Roman Catholic Traditions (RC)

Catholics believe that miracles are crucial to developing a person's faith and accepting Christ as their Saviour. They follow different methods to have such experiences in life. Weddle (2010:155) explains, 'The *RC* veneration of saints [raised] accusations by *PR* that the records of saints' miracles were exaggerated fictions and constituted no proof of their sanctity or intercessory power.' In response to the Protestant Arguments, *RCs* suggest that the saints' miracles during their lifetimes prove their holiness with a high degree of certainty while maintaining respectable norms of historicity in their stories (Weddle 2010:156). For them, participating in a spiritual pilgrimage can lead to excellent, direct contact with God and a profoundly transformative religious experience that can sow the seeds of conversion (Swatos 2009:124). Shaw (2006:27) reports that from the *RC* perspective, 'miracles, visions and exorcisms are very effective as tools for

proselytising.' The *RC* and the Orthodox churches had stronger folk/pilgrimage traditions. They assume that religious experiences can change the world of individuals (Swatos 2009:127).

Therefore, *RC* prioritises pilgrimages and rituals at shrines, experiencing miracles, especially healings, in connection with sacred places, rituals and objects (saints, relics). These rituals are central parts of their religious tradition. However, Protestants questioned the *RC*'s connection to mediating figures and objects for miracles and developed the doctrine of the cessation of miracles. This doctrine, arising from the 16th-century conflict between Protestants and Catholics, discredited Roman Catholicism by pointing to potentially false or evil origins and interpreting its miracles as satanic with intense criticism (Shaw 2006:21–23).

Shaw (2006:26–27) extends the *RC* belief that miracles are still necessary for three reasons: 'First because this was a time of atheism and heresy; secondly because miracles were signs of the true Church; and third, to convert the many 'heathens' that exist. Miracles and exorcism are integral to the *RC* mission. Although *RC* adheres to all of these traditional practices, according to Lamb and Bryant (1999:16), 'the conversion process occurs through participation in the sacraments of baptism, Eucharist and confirmation.' Nevertheless, *RC* emphasises that religious experiences and miracles are more important than conversion. Roof (1999:183) argues that 'many Catholics identify with the movement, underscoring the large number of charismatics and others who report having had a religious experience within or outside the Catholic community; It shows how great the religious diversity is among Catholics.'

2.7.1.3. Evangelical churches

Evangelical churches with Protestant Reformed backgrounds, deeply rooted in their faith, value born-again experiences and the transformative power of personal faith in Christ. They proudly describe themselves as 'charismatics,' a term that signifies their life-changing encounters with Christ. To gain public recognition, they also align themselves as born-again Christians. This narrative's defining features are personal faith, conviction, and a redemptive salvation experience (Roof 1999:182). A turning point in their lives, marked by transformation through a personal relationship with Christ and devotion, is the experience of rebirth —a powerful and inspiring element of the evangelical movement. (Roof

1999:188–89). Miller (2011:41) notes that 'some evangelicals often disagree on doctrinal issues, but 94 per cent of evangelicals still believe that miracles, healing, and the casting out of demons are still possible in our time.' This shared belief in the possibility of miracles further inspires and strengthens the evangelical community. Evangelicals experience and witness miraculous healing, and they give miraculous testimonies of salvation from sin, with some reporting a sudden, radical conversion while others report a gradual change (Herriot 2009:145). Sahoo (2018:24) states, 'Pentecostals are most similar to evangelicals when it comes to being born again. Nevertheless, they differ from evangelicals and other Christians in emphasising the miraculous works of the Holy Spirit.'

This brings to mind the argument that the pneumatological and charismatic perspectives on the Christian life provide a rich and complex context for understanding miracles in Christian theology. The larger context in which miracles are performed is the work of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) and the gifts that the Spirit bestows (charisms or charismata). One of these charismatic manifestations is healing (Del Colle 2011:243). While for some, the miracles have already ceased, for others, they continue to work for the salvation of people. This diversity of perspectives is a reality among Pentecostals in the Indian context. However, this has created various problems with the fundamentalist Hindus in India, and they oppose such activity to convert the Hindu society.

2.7.2. Miraculous experiences and religious fundamentalism

The phenomenon of fundamentalism, a highly controversial concept, is deeply rooted in religious beliefs and has evolved in Indian contexts, with religion constantly at the centre. Religious fundamentalism, currently dangerous, has infiltrated all major religions (including Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity), but our focus will be on Hinduism and Christianity. It is a global phenomenon (Marcovitz 2010:28). Antes (2021:252) states that the term is more than interpretive. It does not describe reality but evaluates and even produces it.' Furthermore, Peels (2022:1) states that the definition of 'fundamentalism is one of the main drivers of conflict in our world.' Käsehage (2021:20) views 'Religious fundamentalism... as a misleading concept.' For this reason, understanding religious fundamentalism, a concept deeply intertwined with religion, is crucial to

discussing the research topic here. Scholars such as Altemeyer & Hunsberger (2005:379), Barton (2009:439) and Baumann (2007:157) refer to the term fundamentalism as 'beliefs or belief systems' (see Peels 2022:3). Taylor and Horgan (2001:38) identify the term as 'religious behaviour' rather than belief, but our discussion focuses exclusively on beliefs.

Several dictionaries describe the term as follows, providing a range of perspectives. Merriam-Webster defines it as a movement or attitude stressing strict and literal adherence to a set of fundamental principles; the Cambridge Dictionary explains it as 'the belief in old and traditional forms of religion, or the belief that what is written in a holy book, such as the Christian Bible, is entirely accurate.' In contrast, the Free Dictionary expresses the term as a usually religious movement characterised by a return to fundamental principles, rigid adherence to those principles, and often by intolerance of other views and opposition to secularism. These definitions, drawn from reputable academic sources, instil confidence in the information presented. Merriam-Webster, Oxford English and the Cambridge Dictionary do not allow for non-religious fundamentalism, although the Free Dictionary does (see Peels 2022:6–7).

One of the defining features of fundamentalism is its reliance on authoritative texts. Fundamentalist Christianity, which emerged in the Protestant movements of the early 20th century, advocated the inerrancy of the Bible, scientific compatibility, and gender roles (Peels 2022:9). It asserts that religions have core beliefs and values from these authoritative texts and that authentic life exemplifies these beliefs (Ram-Prasad 2003:160–61). This emphasis on scripture is a common thread in all active faiths, as Antes (2021:252) points out. Weinberg and Pedahzur (2004:2) assert that 'the recent rise of religious fundamentalism in the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia, among others, occurred when the millennial hopes placed in secular political religions had been lost.' From Weinberg and Pedahzur's perspective, this is the primary reason why the Hindu Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has recently become more critical of the Hindu fundamentalism it had previously promoted. Although the details vary, RSS is a movement in India that is part of several religions. They support Hindutva ideology. This can be seen from the fact that RSS shares attributes with religious fundamentalisms, embracing symbols, rituals, and identity, and aggressively aims

to control social, political, economic, cultural, and religious life (Peels 2022:10; Clarke 2017:154).

Beit-Hallahmi (2004:28) posits, 'The ideology of fundamentalism becomes important for politics when it is transformed from a religious belief system into a political ideology embodied in a political movement, and when this movement gains political power or mass support.' An example is Hindu fundamentalism, as embodied by the Hindutva organisation RSS and ideologically supported by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. There is widespread agreement that this movement has both religious and ethnonationalist elements (Peels 2022:11). Religious fundamentalism has become a source of conflict and violence in India. The meaning of fundamentalism can become more unclear when people interpret it differently from its original meaning. However, fundamentalism itself does not necessarily have a unified political stance or call for violence. This complex issue calls for further research and engagement.

Nevertheless, religiously motivated and justified violence continues to occur in South Asia, particularly in India, due to religious conversion and truth claims (Barkun 2004:61). The urgency of this issue is underscored by the fact that India's nationalism has increased in recent years, influenced by the Hindutva ideology that promotes violence against Christianity. This combination of religious fundamentalism with religious nationalism highlights the political and religious aspects of Hindutva (Ram-Prasad 2003:160). Teltumbde (2006:247) states, 'The religious fundamentalist politics of the Hindus have long been a thorn in the side of India's religious minorities.'

Hindu fundamentalists disagree with the claims and practices of Pentecostal Christians. They argue that their traditions include supernatural experiences, such as encounters with a god or Krishna. Based on the Samkhya understanding, yoga leads to a calming mind, allowing yogis to realise that they are not identical with or connected to the physical body and freeing them from suffering (Webb 2022:8–10). Vaishnava Hindus focus on spiritual encounters with ultimate reality and promote world peace, social justice, and human dignity, much like a devout Christian experiences Christ (Lang 2019:14–17). The emphasis is on the direct experience of ultimate reality, a central theme in the teachings of modern Hinduism (Long 2019:7). They prohibit the conversion of their people to another religion based on a miraculous experience. Hindu fundamentalists are adopting a

new approach. They are trying to return to the core of their beliefs and oppose any religious activities such as proselytism, faith healing and exorcism to convert their people. When someone tries to do this, they often resort to violence. Because of the conversion of ordinary people, they always target Pentecostals.

Hinduism is rich in stories of divine intervention and natural miracles. Unlike some religions, Hinduism does not make a clear distinction between nature and the supernatural. Justice (2004:588) states, 'Hinduism recognises supernatural abilities, including mind-reading, clairvoyance and levitation, as a natural result of spiritual development.' The tantric traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism value supernatural powers as a sign of the spiritual journey. While the elite may have reservations, these powers remain revered by the ordinary people and occupy a significant place in mythology (Justice 2004: 588). Weddle (2010:4) claims that 'miracles are manifestations of the power of the human mind to transcend natural boundaries' in Hinduism and Buddhism.

In Hinduism, deities are not just powerful beings. They are the essence of the natural world. People worship gods during worship services while showing reverence for the deities, their associated natural elements, and their energising attributes. Fervent devotion and religious rituals enable specific holy individuals to acquire exceptional abilities, allowing them to perform spiritual wonders, such as healing disabilities and manipulating natural forces. The belief system about miracles represents how divine power connects people and the natural world. People consider religious river baths in the Ganges and Yamuna capable of wiping away sins. The Himalayas and other mountains are considered spiritually energising and divine dwelling places. Nature becomes a place of pilgrimage and connection with the sacred (Aithal & Srinivasan 2024: 892). Nature is both revered as holy and recognised as impermanent. Creation and destruction are integral to the sacred game.

In Indian religious culture, people have a strong desire for miracles. Hindus believe in miracles, yet they define these phenomena according to their perspective, contrasting with how Pentecostals perceive them. From the Pentecostal perspective, miracles appear as divine manifestations through natural elements, yet they still lead toward fully redeeming the world and the divinely scheduled transformation. In Hinduism, miracles are often viewed as reflections of the cosmic order, or *dharma*, rather than as contradictions to natural laws (Devare

2011:182). Pentecostals affirm the goodness of creation, while Hindus view the natural world as impermanent, obscured by *Maya* (ignorance). Pentecostals believe in a future new heaven and a new earth, a changed reality. Hinduism does not posit a single, eternal supernatural realm that supplants the natural world; rather, miracles are seen as manifestations of the divine within the natural world, not in a separate realm. Moksha, liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is the ultimate goal in Hinduism. Miracles can inspire faith, but the emphasis is on achieving moksha through self-realisation and leading a dharmic life (Weddle 2010: 68-69; Olson 2015:173). *Moksha* (liberation) is the ultimate goal achieved through self-realisation in the existence cycle (Howard 2017:13; Varghese 2003:350).

Both Hinduism and Pentecostalism believe in miracles and divine interaction with the world. They both value spiritual experiences and transformation. However, the great diversity of Hinduism allows for different views on miracles and the natural world within various schools of thought. Pentecostals root their faith in the Bible, which affirms that creation (nature) is good. They believe that God became man through Jesus Christ, meaning that he took on human form (which is part of nature) while still being fully God. After his resurrection and ascension, Jesus' human nature is said not to have been 'absorbed into God himself' but instead united with his divine nature. The Holy Spirit is then sent to dwell within believers and strengthen them, transforming their lives here on earth. As a result, according to Nel (2017:301), Pentecostals always see 'the natural world' as a means for visiting the 'supernatural.' At last, Pentecostals believe in a transformed reality that incorporates both the spiritual (supernatural) and a renewed natural world.

Pentecostals' goal in proclaiming the Word of God is not to intellectually stimulate or entertain listeners but to transform their actions, leading to a new way of life (Cartledge 2015:9-11; Ragoonath 2004:102- 03). Pentecostal preachers embody the Word of God to stimulate conversion, enabling their listeners to experience a divine encounter —a profound and personal experience of God's presence and power (Nel 2017:294). For Pentecostals, therefore, the most essential part of their message lies in the results of experiencing healing or other manifestations of miracles and conversion (Ragoonath 2004:37,75; Nel 2017:297).

Since Hindu fundamentalists display hostility, Pentecostals use Articles 19 (1) and 25 from the Indian Constitution to defend their freedom to profess their faith

and conduct religious practices while spreading their beliefs. Fundamentalist critics usually label Pentecostals as such because they maintain that personal encounter with Christ defines every aspect of their spirituality. Beliefs based on personal experiences make Pentecostal faith overwhelmingly profound. They declare Jesus to be the sole Saviour and Healer in the world through a process in which the Holy Spirit brings miraculous change, resulting in spiritual metamorphosis and personal, complete restoration.

According to Pentecostals, the salvific work of Christ on the cross stands as the only path to redemption that fails to rely upon human accomplishment. The growth of Pentecostal Christianity follows the imperative to convert new believers who become central to the mission of evangelisation. Pentecostal Christians in India face brutal treatment from the Hindu fundamentalist religion while trying to gain new members through their conversion efforts. The recent decades have provoked violent encounters between Hindu fundamentalists and Indian Christians, with their primary attacks focusing on Pentecostal Christians in the country.

2.8. Conclusion

In conclusion, Pentecostalism in India has experienced rapid growth since the 20th century. Pentecostals have always linked miraculous healing with conversion experiences, such as the atoning act of Jesus Christ on the cross. Its driving force is the emphasis on miraculous healing and conversion. The Wesleyan concept of sanctification emerged during the 1700s to provide central theological guidance on how the Holy Spirit works to sanctify Christians in their lives. In 1906, the Holy Spirit delivered a mighty outpouring, which led to the birth of Pentecostalism through the Azusa Street Revival. Multiple spiritual awakenings spread throughout different national regions and international locations after the movement originally began to inspire large-scale revivals. Since its inception, Christians have observed an essential expansion of the Holy Spirit's miracles.

Miraculous healing stands as the essential foundation of Pentecostalism because it signifies God's presence, demonstrating that Jesus heals these believers in the present and will sanctify and strengthen them before returning to reward them. Through their supernatural activities, Pentecostals present the

Gospel message by performing spiritual miracles to heal people and drive away evil spirits, while drawing people towards faith in Jesus. From the beginning of the movement, Indian Pentecostals believed evangelising the nation(s) through the miraculous power of the Spirit was an urgent matter to prepare people for the eschatological kingdom.

Modern Pentecostals follow the divine healing movement as a continuation and teaching of the biblical miracles and pragmatics of the early church, as mentioned in the accounts of Luke-Acts. Despite the diversity in the teachings of Pentecostal churches, the constant presence of miraculous healing as part of conversion is a testament to the enduring power of Pentecostalism (Anderson 2013:149). Healing is likely the primary reason for Pentecostalism's appeal in the Global South, particularly in India, where the religious culture yearns for the supernatural and the miraculous, yet only as a means of liberation from the natural world of illusion. Pentecostals believe that in the global revival of the last days, miracles of healing have been restored to the church and that healing is an indispensable part of their message and means of bringing nations to faith in Christ. This study demonstrates that healings and miracles continue to be prominent in Pentecostal practices worldwide, including in India. Pastors' healing abilities are often the primary cause of church growth. This study highlights faith healing as the most crucial concept for comprehending the 20th-century spread of Pentecostalism in India.

According to the study, Pentecostal Christianity has endured over the ages along with the miracles, signs and mighty acts of the New Testament. The empowerment and miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit in ministry will always encourage the Church to carry out missions in India. Nevertheless, the theological position of the Reformed tradition (Cessationism) challenges Pentecostalism's beliefs and practices about the 'miraculous manifestation of the Spirit in conversion.' The chronicled and social understanding of the Enlightenment plays a critical part in this challenge, because it frequently addresses the credibility and plausibility of the wonders of past decades. Cessationism, a Reformed tradition, contends that all marvels and otherworldly endowments ceased after the time of the apostles, as these miracles were vital for the witnesses to perceive the truth; subsequently, they are considered superfluous today. Affected by the realism of the Enlightenment, they essentially changed it as an intellectual

acknowledgment of the need for atonement and forgiveness through the death of Christ.

Theological research reveals that the Reformed tradition rejects miracles that can be traced back to the power of the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, Pentecostals maintain that God operates miracles through spiritual manifestations to empower his representatives in the current period of Christianity. Experiences of religious conversion confirm how the Pentecostal Church expanded its influence by leveraging its healing powers and other miraculous occurrences. Pentecostals have historically faced several challenges to their claim to proclaim the truth. Pentecostal theology has not developed without challenges and resistance from traditional churches and religious fundamentalism.

The study shows that both Hinduism and Pentecostalism recognise the presence of miracles and the influence of the divine on the world. Despite sharing some basic concepts, the religions hold divergent views regarding miraculous events. Pentecostals interpret miracles as supernatural expressions of grace that transcend natural boundaries, whereas Hinduism views them as ordinary processes.

The uncompromising nature of Pentecostals and their proselytising through miraculous healings to convert ordinary people is questioned by the Hindu fundamentalists. As a result, anti-conversion laws are being enacted in various regions of the country. Nevertheless, in a profound spiritual encounter, ordinary people often make the decisive decision to follow Christ. The Pentecostal churches are experiencing significant growth, and conversions are occurring throughout the country despite numerous challenges. This rise sparked hostility among Hindu fundamentalists and also traditional Christians. Pentecostals in the country often face persecution, harassment, physical attacks and violence. Under all circumstances, Pentecostals follow Jesus' instructions by serving His ministry. Their extensive awareness of what ordinary Indians seek from miracles and protection against evil powers demonstrates their deep emotional connection.

In Indian society, Pentecostalism is a driving force that establishes the dignity, self-respect, and social equality of numerous people. It has facilitated social change and created spiritual and economic independence. Pentecostalism, as a religious awakening, is a liberating force in contemporary Indian society. Its emphasis on unity in the body of Christ has transformed the lives of the most

marginalised in India's culturally diverse religious landscape. It has enabled the untouchables to join the kingdom of God and experience freedom in Christ. This study confirms that the promotion of dignity and equality by Pentecostal witnesses and *MC* can bring about significant change in India. It helps us to understand and empathise with the role of *MC* practices in Indian Pentecostal churches, fostering a deeper understanding of social change.

Chapter - Three

Contemporary theological understanding of miraculous conversions in Pentecostalism

3.1. Introduction

The dynamic Indian Christian movement of Pentecostalism emphasises the transformative power of supernatural spiritual encounters with the Holy Spirit, which mark pivotal spiritual events in the conversion process, bridging the gap between divine call and human choice (Vondey 2017:6-7). Some notable religious phenomena of Pentecostalism include divine healing combined with exorcism and the practice of prophecy and performing miracles. The Pentecostal movement gained fame through its *MCs*. The *MC* describes the dramatic life transformation that occurs instantly when a person encounters divine intervention through the Holy Spirit, although gradual development of these experiences is also possible.

Pentecostalism has experienced significant expansion in recent years, while *MCs* played a fundamental role in developing religious identities and community life principles for their congregations. This chapter studies the current theological perspective of Indian Pentecostalism on *MCs*. The investigation focuses on the Pentecostal teaching of the Holy Spirit to explain how they understand *MC* experiences as a supernatural act of the Spirit. The analysis of *MC* narratives enables this study to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the religious conversion concepts employed by Indian Pentecostals.

The chapter investigates how *MCs* are understood through a phenomenological lens and how this perspective influences the Pentecostal theology of conversion. The study examines the influence of Pentecostal narratives by *MCs* on Indian culture and its socio-religious environment. This study focuses on key aspects, such as pneumatology (the study of the Holy Spirit) and *MC* categories, to provide a comprehensive understanding of *MCs* in Indian Pentecostal churches. Finally, this chapter examines explicitly theological arguments that question the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit.

3.2. The role of the Holy Spirit in miraculous conversions: A selected study.

Pentecostal theology fully accepts that the Holy Spirit appears through healing events and various spiritual occurrences. The analysis of *MCs* in Indian Pentecostalism evaluates their connection to the Holy Spirit and their understanding through pneumatological inquiry. *MCs* are robust evidence of the Spirit's ability to transform people's religious perceptions and behaviours. This study investigates how the Holy Spirit inspires profound personal transformation within the Indian Pentecostal context.

The study of the Holy Spirit reveals contrasting approaches to understanding conversion in Pentecostal and Reformed traditions. Pentecostals emphasise the supernatural work of the Spirit and view the contextual and experiential elements of conversion as evidence of the Spirit's transformative power. Pentecostals view conversion as a process that mostly depends on experience, whereas Reformed theology emphasises God's grace through Scripture, preaching, and thought. According to reformed traditions, it is a process of forgiveness and repentance in which the Spirit helps people become more convinced and enlightened, but does not always require a supernatural encounter.

Reformed theology emphasises a specific understanding of conversion rooted in Scripture and the writings of key figures such as John Calvin. However, the word “conversion” is not what Calvin prefers (DeVries 1995:32). Rather, Calvin (2001:76; 2022) states that the whole 'sum of the gospel is held to consist in repentance and forgiveness of sins' [Lk. 24:47; Acts 5:31], and these two gifts of union with Christ—repentance (regeneration) and forgiveness (justification)—shape his soteriology (DeVries 1995:32). Calvin believed that conversion occurs when one believes in God's loving purposes made known through the gospel (Gerrish 2002:94-95). Calvin's teachings were consistent with Reformed theology in recognising conversion or repentance as both a gift and a process.

According to John M. Mulder (2001:43), Reformed theology teaches conversion as 'the experience of God's forgiveness and love and the reorientation of a person's life away from sin toward grace and faith,' in the heart and mind of a person with a profound transformation brought about by the grace of God. In Calvin's view, the saving work of the Spirit penetrates deeply into the innermost being of a person. Morimoto (1995:16) quotes from Calvin's Institutes (see

Institutes 1.15.6, 7), in which Calvin calls the Holy Spirit 'the inner teacher' who opens 'the eyes of the spirit' (Morimoto 1995:16). The powerful and effective effect is confirmed by the Holy Spirit penetrating and inspiring the heart. However, in Calvin's view, the intellect plays a crucial role in shaping volitional actions.

In contrast, American theologian and revivalist Jonathan Edwards believed that supernatural experiences played a crucial role in the process of religious conversion. Lee (2000:232) states that 'grace infusion, as described by Jonathan Edwards, has the power to heal the will and provide a transformative understanding that enables one to know God.' He emphasised that conversion is not merely an intellectual acceptance of religious teachings. A direct encounter changes a person's heart and affections through the grace of God (Chun, Strobel & Minkema 2020:33–40; Edwards 2009:50–58). A supernatural experience resulted in the birth of a new heart or spiritual transformation. The new way of thinking caused people to shift their focus from sin to God. According to Edwards (2009:58–59),

So, it [is] the great work of God, his calling the Gentiles, and converting the Heathen world, after Christ's ascension, after that the world by wisdom knew not God, and all the endeavours of philosophers had proved in vain, for many ages, to reform the world. It was by everything that it became abundantly evident that the world was utterly helpless by anything else but the mighty power of God. And so it [is] in most of the conversions of particular persons, we have an account of in the history of the New Testament: they were not wrought on in that silent, secret, gradual, and insensible manner, which is now insisted on; but with those manifest evidence of supernatural power, wonderfully and suddenly causing a significant change, which in these days are looked upon as sure signs of delusion and enthusiasm.

Edwards' understanding of conversion contrasted with rationalist approaches that emphasised intellectual understanding. He believed that true conversion was a personal and transformative encounter brought about by God's supernatural grace. According to Reformed theologians, regeneration occurs when the believer, during his conversion, receives a habit of divine grace imbued with the virtues of faith, hope and love. The Holy Spirit instils true and justifying faith as a habit in the hearts of the elect (Cleveland 2020:35). Reformers view conversion as a comprehensive process involving intellect. They will, and they underestimate the miraculous role of the Spirit by viewing it as external and provisional (Morimoto 1995:17).

God chooses whom to save in His absolute sovereignty. God's gracious plan will determine the outcome of this election, not any candidate's qualifications. People need the Holy Spirit to be persuaded of their sins, comprehend the gospel, and change their perspective on God. However, most Reformed theologians do not believe that understanding the gospel requires 'supernatural works of the Spirit' (Sytsma 2020: 86). While the Holy Spirit provides lasting and effective conviction of the gospel, Reformed theologian Sytsma believed that the Spirit must also increase our understanding beyond ordinary levels for us to accept the gospel. Nature endowed our knowledge with a sufficiency provided to it, provided it is free from its desires, passions, or interests. Sytsma does not mention the need for supernatural enlightenment, but instead emphasises the faculty of reason in determining which spirits are from God and which are not (Sytsma 2020:86).

St. Thomas Aquinas distinguished between human faculties and the realm of the supernatural. Although natural reason and virtues are essential for a good life, they are insufficient to achieve the highest happiness in communion with God. Aquinas (1981:77) argues that 'God cannot be known by natural reason' because he says that the feeble eye of the human mind is not directed to this excellent light unless it is 'directed by the justice of the purified by faith.' Aquinas (1981:647) further points out that 'man, to direct his own life and the lives of others, must know not only the things that can be known naturally, but also things that are beyond the natural.' We must know the truths of faith to direct our lives towards God. God's supernatural grace enables us to grow beyond our human nature and to rise to the divine life, allowing it to take hold. By His grace, God endows our souls with supernatural qualities that lead us to God and enable us to live according to His desires. It allows us to connect more deeply with God and fosters a greater understanding, love, and devotion to Him. According to Thomas Aquinas (1981:77), 'God works miracles in physical things, and so He also performs supernatural miracles beyond the ordinary order and exalts the spirit of some who live in the flesh above the use of the senses, even to His vision and His being.' Thomas Aquinas sees a relationship between the supernatural and the natural or between the divine and the created (Hart 2022:110). However, Reformed theology focuses only on the miraculous gifts mentioned in the New Testament and does not believe in the ongoing supernatural work of the Spirit in the conversion, enlightenment, and regeneration of hearts.

The European Enlightenment had a complex relationship with the supernatural and the natural in the Age of Reason. During the Enlightenment, people developed curious minds about religion because they critically analysed beliefs while doubting spiritual occurrences (Rubies 2016: 130). Deism emerged during the Enlightenment era with its core philosophy being transcendent divine beliefs that accepted the Creator God as having left humanity alone after the universe's formation. Deists denied divine revelation, miracles, and supernatural events, instead emphasising the rationality of the universe and human reason to understand natural laws and moral principles (Rubies 2016:130). Enlightenment thinkers emphasised reason and scientific observation as the primary methods of understanding the universe. Experimentation and critical thinking were thought to reveal the natural laws that governed the world (Cross and Livingstone 2005:550). The supernatural was seen as less significant due to the focus on reason. Miracles, religious doctrine, and divine interventions were frequently questioned, or their significance was downplayed (Clayton & Knapp 2011:138). The strength of human reason and the natural world were the main topics of the Enlightenment. It did not entirely deny the existence of the supernatural, even though it minimised it in daily life. The movement significantly impacted religion, which promoted a more sceptical and inquisitive view of faith (Clayton & Knapp 2011:138).

The emphasis on reason in Enlightenment thinking made reformed theology less receptive to supernatural beliefs, thus creating broad scepticism toward spiritual phenomena. As a result, the miraculous elements of conversion became less significant. Acrimonious discussions regarding the nature of conversion have characterised Reformed theology's history. While John Calvin acknowledged that knowledge of God and self-knowledge were so intertwined that they could not be separated, scholastic Calvinism increasingly insisted on a stricter view of God's sovereignty and humanity's inability to do anything to achieve salvation (DeVries 1995:35). This debate about human will and free will formed the core of the Arminian controversy and continued to shape Reformed attitudes toward evangelicalism and revivalism in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries (Mulder 2001: 43).

Reformed theology recognises the role of the Spirit but emphasises God's work through Scripture and the historical work of the Spirit. Conversion is viewed as a process that occurs within a community, rather than just through individual

experiences. True conversion completely turns a person toward God, leading them to renounce sin and evil deeds (DeVries 1995:35). According to Pentecostal theology, the modern-day spiritual work of the Holy Spirit produces mature believers. The Pentecostals emphasise spiritual experiences through miracles, whereas Reformed theology bases its beliefs on intellectual understanding combined with communal insights about the Holy Spirit's activity in conversion processes.

Pentecostals place the foremost emphasis on how the Holy Spirit enables healing effects and delivers people, while creating spiritual battles. Conversions in this context often exhibit these striking characteristics (Abraham 2021:246). Pentecostals identify that the Spirit of God is the source of all remarkable deeds and the author of all miracles in human life. The Spirit creates extraordinary moments to prove the gospel truth by teaching human transgressions and atonement, which enables spiritual connection. According to their theological doctrine, what specific roles does the Spirit play in Pentecostal gospel proclamation and ministry?

Pentecostals conduct their ministries based on the Trinitarian approach. However, according to an Indian Pentecostal scholar, Kanjamala (2014:307), 'The Holy Spirit is the principal agent of mission.' The Holy Spirit remains the transcendent and principal agent for realising this work in the human mind and the world's history. This is witnessed by the Pentecost experience and subsequent proclamations (Acts 1:8; 2:17-18) (Kanjamala & Arles 2014:307). Conversion requires the intervention of the Spirit into the normal cognitive-psychological process because human beings are sinners. Our minds are already corrupted because of sin. It shows our inability to understand the reality of life. The power of this world has already blinded his eyes and hardened his heart. The Pentecostal theologian Vondey (2014:26) states, 'The Holy Spirit is the agent of God, active primarily in the context of the gospel of Christ and bringing about personal conversion.' Therefore, Pentecostals trace intellectual conversion to the Reformed tradition to the supernatural work of the Spirit that opens blind eyes. While Pentecostal theology emphasises an intense spiritual experience, the encounter with the Holy Triune God occurs (Resane 2022:3).

According to Anderson (2014:179) and Kärkkäinen (2010:364), Pentecostals associate the pneumatic presence with supernatural experiences

known as 'signs and wonders.' Reformed Christians disagree on this issue and advocate cessationism. Page (2021) states this is 'the belief that believers have not performed the miraculous gifts and signs since the completion of the New Testament.' The possession of the Spirit, the inappropriate works of the Spirit - miracles of healing and power, miracles of knowledge, whether in the form of prophecy or the discernment of spirits, miracles of language, whether in the gift of tongues or their interpretation. The Apostolic Church was typically a miracle-working church (Warfield 1976, 2010:1-2).

In Warfield's view, the early Christians did not regard these gifts as their possessions. He believed that the possession of the charismata was limited to the apostolic era. The passage in 1 Corinthians 14:26 ff discusses the repetition of various gifts deemed appropriate for worship gatherings and the peculiarities of the early apostolic churches. However, Pentecostals believe that the divine Spirit is essential for individuals to accept Jesus Christ, and some Reformed Christians agree with this act of the Spirit. Some believe the Spirit saves people through verbal communication, such as preaching and teaching (Beeke & Smalley 2021).

Abraham (2014:84) argues, 'The Bible presents the Spirit of God as the agent of liberation, with liberating deeds inherent in the spirit, both mental and physical.' Yong (2003:48) emphasises the conversion as a 'dynamic process of transformation' pneumatologically. Paul D. Lee (1994: 68–69), a Catholic scholar from Rome, Italy, comments, 'Pentecostal spiritual conversion would not be a mystical, dramatic event. However, a gradual adaptation of the human subject to the image of Christ by the Spirit (Rom. 8:29-30)' (cf. Kärkkäinen 2002:14). According to Indian Pentecostals, the Spirit of God performs miraculous works of healing, comforting and guiding people to eternal salvation. The divine presence promotes spiritual rebirth, a prerequisite for Pentecostal membership (Abraham 2021:246).

Most people who experience spiritual healing and deliverance in India become Christians (Lukose 2009: 140). Pentecostal conversion stories show that miraculous healings led ordinary people to believe in Christ. The miraculous 'experience of conversion had a profoundly transformative impact on the lives of converts,' according to Sahoo's (2018:99) research on Pentecostalism and the politics of conversion in India. Conversion, sanctification, Spirit baptism, divine healing, and glorification all represent the Holy Spirit's transformative role in

Christian salvation in this context. The Holy Spirit is used in Pentecostal pneumatology to unite the natural and supernatural, the historical and biblical, and the church and creation (Vondey 2017:125).

Pentecostal pneumatology encompasses theological and experiential aspects of faith. According to Lukose (2009: 164), ordinary people experience the active ministry of the Holy Spirit through their Pentecostal beliefs. The occurrence of miracles among Pentecostals prompts consideration of their relationship with natural phenomena. Andrews (2019:94) argues that

The scientific method is built upon observable, repeatable and predictable phenomena. When ... miracles are examined under this lens, they defy natural explanations and sit outside the boundaries of scientific verification. This underscores the distinctiveness of miracles as acts of God that transcend the natural order.

The miracle encounter is the moment when God's miraculous power becomes tangible to human agents (Lewis & Melton, 1992:195). Part of the power of these encounters is that they often seem to defy the laws of nature, such as the healing of the sick or speaking in tongues. Regardless of a cultural context that readily accepts supernatural events as part of the human experience (Andrews 2019: 95), the status of miracles could be questionable – are these encounters authentic or merely coincidences or psychological events? -The presence of miraculous events in religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam adds complexity. The connection between these supernatural encounters and the natural realm raises a central question: What defines reality?

Pentecostals accept both natural and supernatural realities. Supernatural experiences that grant access to the spiritual realm enhance reality and validate Jesus as the faithful Saviour and Healer. Miracles both confirm the veracity of the gospel and act as a catalyst for faith. Faith is about responding to God's revelation, not just the miraculous act (Jn. 20:29) (Andrews 2019:96). Pentecostals hold that one's perception of reality is enhanced, and Jesus' status as a faithful Saviour and Healer is confirmed when they can enter the spiritual realm through supernatural experiences. Miracles validate the veracity of the gospel and serve as a stimulant for faith. Miracles strengthen faith and attest to the veracity of the gospel. Faith involves responding to God's revelation rather than simply focusing on miraculous events (Jn. 20:29) (Andrews 2019:96). While Pentecostals acknowledge that the supernatural can operate on various levels, such experiences—miraculous or

otherwise—can lead to transformative changes in people's lives. Understanding similar religious experiences in other faiths can lead to a profound understanding of the divine presence. Whether these experiences are miraculous, this awareness can change people's lives. Nevertheless, the meaning ultimately depends on one's perspectives and interpretations of these experiences.

The primary difference between Pentecostals and Hindus lies in their explanations of miracles—Pentecostals attribute them to the Holy Spirit. At the same time, Hindus may view them as acts of deities or the result of karma. For Pentecostals, miracles mean God's grace and the supernatural power of the Spirit. Karma, divine intervention or the power of a deity, led to their appearance in Hinduism. The Pentecostal belief entails recognising spiritual power, enabling the Holy Spirit to reveal God to people in a tangible way. According to Hindu religious teachings, one could attain moksha through dharma practices and by obtaining liberation from earthly life without requiring divine salvation. A society defines miracles through its evaluations of cultural values and religious beliefs. In Indian culture, disability is often viewed as an opportunity for spiritual growth, aligning with the concept of karma (Ghai, 2019). Ghai (2019) states that 'healing from pain and suffering has been a major concern of Indian society.'

Pentecostals, along with Hindu worshippers, both recognise the existence of supernatural elements yet maintain significant dissimilarities regarding supernatural origin, nature, and their capacity to help people reach their spiritual objectives. The power of the supernatural transforms lives according to the Pentecostal understanding. The reality of miracles depends on individual belief and perspective. Pneumatology within Pentecostalism explains the role of the Holy Spirit. People continue to research and debate the relationship between supernatural and natural elements.

Despite the various criticisms, Pentecostals continue to strongly emphasise the miraculous role of the Spirit in conversion (Kgatlé 2020:2; Conradie 2015:71). Miraculous spiritual healing fascinates both rural Indians and city dwellers, drawing them to the teachings of Christ. Particularly miraculous experiences in conversion stories that describe recovery from severe pain that doctors could not treat, for example, healing from demonic possession, cancer, heart attacks and paralysis. (Navarro 1998:357). Those who have encountered *MC* often testify that it was a transformative experience that strengthened their faith in God (Kgatlé 2020:2).

However, Hindu fundamentalists criticised and questioned it for manipulating their people differently. We will delve into this in more detail in Chapter 4.

Instruction in Pentecostal pneumatology is necessary to fully understand the *MC* experience. Excellent spiritual encounters have a significant impact on people's knowledge, social being, and relationship with the divine (Bauman 2015:36). Applying phenomenological methods to the *MC* will help us understand pneumatological operations and the experiences of converts.

3.2.1. Defining phenomenological understanding of miraculous conversions

A phenomenological approach examines miraculous, authentic personal conversion experiences that drastically alter their religious beliefs, values, desires, and worldview, often attributing them to the Holy Spirit's miraculous intervention — a profoundly spiritual and intimate experience. However, conversion is not the same as a miracle. In this context, miracles can be seen as key, enigmatic moments within the conversion process that often catalyse a period of cognitive reconstruction. Day (2023: 59) comments, 'One could map phase changes in a variety of areas, including moral cognition, where ordinary people might move from decisions based on external factors to more autonomous decisions that take diverse perspectives into account.'

This approach aims to understand the process from the individual's perspective – a unique and deeply personal experience – by focusing on perceptions, emotions, and cognitive restructuring. It recognises a powerful transformation, a profound, dynamic, and lifelong process that integrates concepts and practices, as well as life changes and developments. This method helps examine the convert's 'lived experience' and incorporates external interpretations and judgments to capture the essence of the phenomenon from their perspective. The advantage of this method is that we can make predictions about *MC* by understanding how the convert perceives and interprets his experiences rather than analysing their external validity.

In this study, the interpretive framework for understanding religious encounters, conversions and changes is derived from the participants' accounts and experiences rather than the researcher's preconceived notions (Devenish 2001:95). It prioritises the convert's subjective representation, feelings, thoughts,

and sensations during the conversion experience (Marshall & Rossman 2016:19; Hendrickson 2001:v). To understand *MC* phenomenologically, we must view each conversion story as unique and distinct. The phenomenological approach values individual narratives of lived experiences, particularly those describing 'born-again' conversions in the Indian Pentecostal setting. This approach aims to understand the meaning and significance of the attributes converted to the experience and the resulting transformation (Johnson & Armor 2018:2013–14).

Conversion, often described as a journey with distinct phases, is a profound transformation. *MC*, the inner world of conversion, signifies a fundamental shift in the place or nature of the sacred in a person's life and a transformation in the ultimate goals and style of pursuing the divine (Mahoney & Pargament 2004). With its comprehensive approach, phenomenology delves into the *before*, *during*, and *after* of the *MC* experience, revealing how their lived perception of time evolves. It considers the totality of a person's experience, analyses various elements from different angles and perspectives, and appreciates the experience as it is experienced, with its specific context and sequence of events (Iyadurai 2015:4; Moustakas 1994:58).

Phenomenology explores the nature of the miraculous conversion experience. What is the convert attracted to? What new meaning and purpose does the new belief system offer? Evaluating conversion experiences for their true importance requires detailed, descriptive explanations to achieve a comprehensive understanding of their significance. Understanding *MC* within India requires open-mindedness from individuals who want to eliminate preconceived thoughts and biases (Iyadurai 2015:4). The inclusion of miracles adds an element to the conversion experience.

The phenomenological study examines the specific aspects of an experience that lead people to believe it was a miracle, aiming to understand how individuals attribute their transformation to divine intervention. The phenomenologist gains the capacity to comprehend and value different converts' *MC* opinions and ideas through this interaction, rather than dismissing them. It is helpful to consider specific conversion narratives, for instance, to gain a better understanding. This study employed a qualitative approach, conducting interviews with converts to yield rich phenomenological data that illustrated how people perceive and understand their transformations. Finding parallels and

discrepancies in how these experiences are perceived and interpreted can be accomplished through qualitative case studies.

However, a phenomenological approach does not aim to prove or disprove the objective reality of *MC*. Instead, it provides a valuable framework for understanding the convert's inner world and exploring the subjective meaning and meaning he attributes to his experience. James (2004:36) describes it as 'the feeling of insight in conversion with experience.' *MC* often triggers a profound change in the person's self-confidence, values and relationship to the world. For example, healing and exorcism offer the chance for a final transformation (Watts 2006:158). Therefore, the phenomenologist examines how experience restructures the individual's internal landscape (Bridgers 2005:9).

The convert actively seeks to understand the meaning of their experience within their existing framework or by developing new interpretations. The phenomenologist's role is to diligently study this hermeneutic process, the active integration of the experience into the person's life. Understanding *MC* through a phenomenological lens is a multifaceted process (Yong 2003:47) that triggers individual transformation (Iyadurai 2017:3). The *MC* process is defined by considering converts' understanding of their experiences within a phenomenological framework.

3.2.2. Beliefs and practices of miraculous conversions in Indian Pentecostal churches

Understanding the beliefs and practices of Indian Pentecostalism is imperative to understanding *MCs*. People who experience divine intervention with the Holy Spirit undergo profound conversions. The experience of miraculous healings, combined with exorcisms and prophecies, represents a typical fantastic occurrence that often accompanies divine encounters. A person can undergo a transformative event that leads to developing unshakable faith in Jesus, known as *Isa* or *Yeshu*. Pentecostal theologians analyse spiritual transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit when underprivileged people pursue spiritual healing, physical recovery, and social elevation. The section examines the distinctive beliefs and practices of Indian Pentecostalism, with a significant focus on profound spiritual transformations.

According to a Pew survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (Ruby et al. 2006:27), a significant portion of the global Pentecostal community, including Indian Pentecostals, firmly believes in the continued occurrence of miracles in contemporary times, which reflect the events of past eras. In every country, over 80% of Pentecostals hold this view. Similarly, significant majorities in every country, such as India, have reported personal encounters or observations of miraculous healings and exorcisms that subsequently led to religious conversions (Ruby et al. 2006:27). Therefore, the spread of ideologies and traditions related to witnessing or experiencing miraculous healing is widespread in the Pentecostal church. Furthermore, the report's results indicate that most Pentecostals claim to have experienced or witnessed miracles, such as divine healings, exorcisms, and divine revelations (Ruby et al. 2006:27).

The extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit is not limited to the theoretical realm of the Indian Pentecostal community, as seen in several conventional Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christian traditions (Bauman 2015:32). Pentecostal and Protestant traditional churches differ in their views on the ability of God's Spirit to heal and maintain health. However, almost all Christian communities in rural India believe in divine intervention for healing (Bauman 2015:32,33). Miraculous healings are a central aspect of Pentecostal belief and practice, integral to the proclamation of the gospel. This emphasis has spread throughout India, leading to an increase in Pentecostal conversions (Kutty 2000:39). Nonetheless, Reformed traditions interpret conversion as a matter of grace and faith (Hey & Waugh 2015:52).

At the heart of Pentecostalism is the belief that the Holy Spirit intervenes in people's lives by restoring their physical or mental health and accompanying them on a new step in faith in Christ. In his work *'To Me to Live is Christ: A Study in Christian Discipleship'*, C.T. Luiskutty (2008: 123) states that 'sometimes people are interested only in physical healing and neglect the completeness of their being.' Jesus' mission involves bringing back individuals, both men and women, from various afflictions encompassing both spiritual and bodily ailments (Luiskutty 2008: 117-23). Likewise, Jesus gave his disciples the power to perform various miracles. Pentecostals claim that miracles still occur in the church today (Luiskutty 2008: 117). Au (2017:540) suggests that the emergence of 'Pentecostalism within the

Hindu milieu in India, the cradle of Hinduism, flourished through evangelism and the demonstration of miraculous healing.' In the religious pluralistic context of India, the phenomenon is deeply entwined with people's belief systems and has important implications for their personal growth and influence, according to Pentecostals. Bringing familiar people to faith is the foundation of the significance of a miraculous act of the Holy Spirit in India (Wilson 2019:202).

The healings and exorcisms performed by Pentecostals particularly fascinate Indians, who are influenced by the teachings of popular Hinduism (Bergunder 2008: 123). The primary appeal of Pentecostalism lies in its ability to address not only issues of evil spirits, illness, and premature mortality, but also concerns such as fertility, family discord, professional setbacks, and material scarcity (Bergunder 2008:123; Au 2017:540). To combat evil spirits and adverse circumstances, Hindu exorcists use their spiritual abilities, while Pentecostals rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals have adopted the beliefs surrounding popular Hindu demonology, with some minor adjustments (Bergunder 2008:125; Au 2017:540). This strengthens the popularity of the Pentecostal faith in India. Pentecostalism, in particular, introduced a Christian framework that effectively combated evil spirits and acknowledged their existence (Bergunder 2008:126). Pentecostals are also highly regarded among Hindus because they perform skilfully miraculous phenomena and extraordinary events (Au 2017:540). As a result, numerous people feel drawn to the Pentecostal faith, which facilitates the rapid expansion of churches. Au (2017:541) states, 'Pentecostals successfully contextualise the gospel and win millions of converts within Hindu society.'

Both Hinduism and Pentecostalism share beliefs in the miraculous and the demonic. However, their core views of reality differ significantly. Evil, as commonly defined, may have a different meaning in Hinduism. According to Gilbert (2020:8), 'Hinduism is generally defined as monistic, a system that views everything as an aspect of God. All reality is part of the Divine, and the Divine is part of everything.' Some believe that the idea of our world as a sole reality or separate from the Divine is an illusion (*Maya*). The core concept remains unchanged, mainly whether the ultimate reality is Shiva or Brahman. All things are interconnected in a single reality and form an integral part of an indivisible unity (Gilbert 2020: 8).

Hinduism, which believes that evil lacks a real essence, offers a unique perspective. It posits that evil will eventually merge into the entirety of God's reality

(Gilbert 2020: 8). Reat and Perry (1991:54) elaborate, 'Most of the philosophical activity surrounding ultimate reality as [understood] in Hinduism is a debate between believers [about the intricacies] of the nature of that reality.' Hinduism's monistic absolute transcends subjectivity; in this context, objectivity is the only reality. The meaning of all other realities originates from Brahman, the fundamental reality. Compared to this ultimate point of reference, monistic Hinduism considers realities other than Brahman as illusory. Furthermore, the lives of gurus in Hinduism serve as spiritual symbols of ultimate reality (Reat & Perry 1991: 53-54). In Hindu monism (Advaita), the incontestability of the ultimate referent is confirmed twice: by the revelation of scripture, a key source of knowledge, and the mystical experience of the successful practitioner (Reat & Perry 1991: 53-54). The deity is believed to have divine power to heal people possessed by evil spirits (Siddiqui 2016:40).

In contrast, Pentecostalism takes a dualistic view that distinguishes between God and creation and recognises the devil as a real opposing force. The prince of darkness, Satan, is a real being. In Pentecostal belief, the devil is believed always to promote destruction and pain (Abraham 2021:20; Oldridge 2012: 2–3). The devil also has his character. Satan is not simply an abstract principle. He intentionally caused suffering and death and used his voice to lead people to destruction. Despite opposition to divine intentions, Satan manipulates people into rebelling against God and leads them into a life of sin and darkness (Oldridge 2012: 3–5).

Indian Pentecostals believe that God is present and caring in the world, answers their prayers, and is the ultimate authority for goodness and justice. Nel (2022) states, 'Christians believe that the most significant event [in salvation history] is the incarnation of Jesus Christ, his ministry of love, heal[ing] and forgive[ness], and his crucifixion and death, [which were] a ransom for sin.' According to Pentecostals, God heals and miraculously repairs the world and people through the Holy Spirit in Jesus. These different perspectives on reality significantly impact how Hindus and Pentecostals interact with the world and their respective religious practices.

Pentecostals share a common understanding of their experiences with, and behaviours associated with the Holy Spirit. Through their firsthand accounts, the converts assert that they were drawn to Christ by miraculous interventions,

healing, deliverance, speaking in tongues, prophetic encounters, and other extraordinary experiences. Gurnam Singh, a Pentecostal pastor at Jesus Bethel (Complete Gospel) Church in Punjab, shared with *India Today*, a secular magazine covering Christianity, that 'miracles are possible and crucial to faith in Christ' and life-changing (Sharma 2022:54). One convert, Sukhwinder Raja, has testified that a 'miracle changed his family and his life' (Mahajan & Menon 2022:48). Most converts describe positive changes in life and family following miraculous healing from fatal illnesses (Sahoo 2008:118).

Pentecostals believe that a transformative encounter with the Holy Spirit leads to conversion and a change in self-perception (Bauman 2015:84; Gooren 2010:93). Gooren (2010:93) examines 'People who [have] a conversion experience reconstruct their lives, giving new meanings to old events and [placing] different emphases in the [larger] 'plot' of their life stories.' Healing could also change broader psychological and socioeconomic meaning (Mahajan & Menon 2022:54–55). In India, Abraham (2021:229), Sahoo (2018:118), and Bauman (2015:83–84) unanimously agree that [miraculous] conversions have led to social and personal changes in individuals, particularly those belonging to marginalised groups, facing social exclusion and experiencing economic disadvantage. That is their main attraction. Therefore, Pentecostals emphasise the importance of the convert's direct contact with the divine manifestation of the Spirit and believe faith must be intensely experiential. This is not insignificant since the majority of the flock comes to Pentecostalism from the most exploited Dalit/tribal communities (Sahoo 2018:158). These communities are excluded from the rites and ceremonies of Hinduism by the caste system and, therefore, have no formal access to Hindu priests and rituals that could bring them healing and miracles.

MC changes a person's attitude and character, improving self-image and aligning it with reality. At the same time, it also helps people abandon outdated religious practices, fear of demons, and exploitation of traditional healers (Abraham 2021:229). The faith and practices of Pentecostal miraculous healing inspire hope for better social and economic situations (Sahoo 2018:118). Therefore, in India, Pentecostal beliefs and supernatural healing practices – the main attractions of non-Christian culture and non-Pentecostals – can convert people and transform their lives (Bauman 2015:21).

In the context of Indian Pentecostalism, the success of church planting is primarily associated with the practice of miraculous healing and spiritual deliverance (Sahoo 2018:159; Garrison 2004: 46–48). They believe that illness, suffering, and oppression are expressions of sin or demonic activity. That is why ordinary people always seek deliverance and healing from their terrible sufferings. I.P. Singh (2022) states that 'exorcism and healing open gates for the spread' of Pentecostalism in India. Singh (2022) points out, 'Catholics, Anglicans and Protestants are the main groups, but there are splinter groups (Pentecostals) who often engage in aggressive proselytising, which leads to problems.' Singh (2022) further notes, 'Pastors perform miracles. Healing from mental and other serious illnesses such as cancer, paralysis, skin problems, snake bites and infertility.' Miller and Yamamori (2007:19) state, 'Pentecostals are about it convinced that the Holy Spirit is still busy working supernatural miracles.'

Certain traditional Christians believe that miracles were everyday only in the early church and ceased after the apostolic era. Pentecostals believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as miraculous healings and prophecies, are still available to believers today, as described in the New Testament (1 Cor. 12). The two theological traditions agree on divine omnipotence and the crucial function of faith in Christianity. Pentecostals and Reformed traditions should engage in dialogue on the miraculous aspects of conversion with respectful and open-minded attitudes, as key biblical passages refer to miracles and various interpretations of those verses. To understand converts' perspectives on miracles in conversation, respecting their experience and viewpoints is crucial, and we should not force our discussions on them.

Regardless, the concept of miraculous healing has greatly benefited Pentecostals in India (Sahoo 2018:159). The Pentecostal approach to conversion has faced significant criticism both within the Christian community and from external sources, particularly from the Cessationist groups and the Bharatiya Janatha Party, as well as Hindu fundamentalists from India. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Nevertheless, Pentecostals actively pursue *MC's* agenda through healing and exorcism (Bergunder 2011:287–88). Members of traditional churches have expressed discomfort with Pentecostal efforts to evangelise and convert people to the Christian faith (Sahoo 2018:160). The Hindu fundamentalist groups have always vehemently opposed the ideas and practices

surrounding *MC* within the Pentecostal movement. The act is criticised as a manipulative tactic and seen as a final attempt to deceive uninformed and innocent persons of Indian descent by disguising the true nature of Christianity with the outward appearance of Hinduism (Goel 2010; Bauman & Young 2014: xix). Despite the challenges to Pentecostal practices, *MC* has proven to be a decisive factor in its growth.

3.3. Categories of miraculous conversions in Indian Pentecostal churches

Throughout Pentecostalism, *MCs* receive various classifications that underline the Holy Spirit's transformative ability. *MCs* arise from two significant factors: healing people with chronic conditions or facilitating miraculous rescues from accidents, freeing individuals from demonic powers or witchcraft practices, and spirit encounters, as well as prophetic messages or visions that mark God's interventions, leading to conversion.

Biblical records indicate that God grants conversion because it saves humanity from everlasting punishment. God commanded sinners in the Old and New Testaments to repent and be saved (Ezek. 18:21-22, Luke 15:1-7; Acts 17:30). When people sinned against God, their hearts hardened to evil deeds. People cannot approach God because they are sinful. Sin binds our will; sinners cannot respond to God through free choice. If change is to take place within us, it must come through God's miraculous act. Our sinful nature prevents us from choosing and accepting the message of Christ, except through the Holy Spirit, who gives us faith (McKim 2001:11). This does not mean that conversion to Pentecostalism is not a cognitive process. Many come to Christ through the Pentecostal movement in search of the faithful Saviour and Lord and find Jesus through repentance and faith. The doctrine of Trinitarian belief is at the heart of Pentecostal doctrinal teachings. Most Pentecostals experience conversions that drive them to repentant faith in Christ through divine manifestations of the Holy Spirit. That is why it is called an *MC*. Pentecostals believe that the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit helps people recognise their sins and turn to Christ when they are healed and their hearts are cleansed (Abraham 2021:273; Mathew 2004:13–14).

In systematic theology, rebirth, conversion, and regeneration are treated under various titles and exhibit slight differences. For Pentecostals from India, these are all indistinguishable, and they seek the consequence of repentance (Abraham 2021:272). Pentecostals believe that it is only through the miraculous work of the Spirit that someone can repent. Historical evidence in Pentecostalism in India suggests that people often come to the Christian faith following miraculous events in their lives (Sahoo 2018). In the Indian context, Sahoo (2018) discusses the miraculous transformative experiences of converts. Bauman (2015:96) states, 'Healing, power encounters, [and] casting [out] of evil spirits [are] a major factor in church growth throughout India.'

The emphasis in this section is given to the experiences of Pentecostal converts and their theological perspectives on *MC*. We apply a phenomenological perspective to the *MC* narrative, interpreting it as a social construction rather than an empirical account of extraordinary occurrences in an individual's life. It is imperative to understand the lived experience of Pentecostal *MCs*. People who undergo a conversion experience are believed to reconstruct their lives, giving a new meaning to old events and finding different emphases in the bigger picture of their stories. Further, categories of *MCs* in the Indian context will be studied using an empirical-phenomenological model.

3.3.1. Miracle healings

The Hindu, Christian and other Indian faiths consider miraculous healing essential, while Indian cultural traditions also emphasise its significance for religious purposes. Each religion has its unique tales and explanations of supernatural intervention in the healing of illnesses. People believe that deities or spiritual saints can heal illnesses (Sonn 2015:62; Jackson 2017:56). According to Indian customs, people habitually seek religious blessings in temples, mosques, and churches during times of need. People who face illness or struggle turn to prayer to achieve peace, hope and control, yet they usually feel disappointed when their prayers yield no response. As a result, many people actively seek conventional medical care while also seeking spiritual comfort to support their recovery (Jackson 2017:56). Although the medical effectiveness of these practices

is controversial, their psychological and cultural significance is undisputed, as they provide a sense of comfort and security to those in need.

The concept of miraculous healing is of great importance in the context of Indian Pentecostalism, as demonstrated by scholarly works such as Bergunder (2001:103), Sahoo (2018:37), Bauman (2015:21), and others, including Gooren (2010:93–97), Studebaker (2021:165), and Warrington (2008:266). Certain people experience extraordinary events during challenging times, which subsequently serve as catalysts for their religious conversion, often characterised by miraculous events. For example, when people encounter challenges or seemingly insurmountable circumstances, the extraordinary intervention of the Holy Spirit results in profound and sudden transformation. Iyadurai (2015:85) states that 'miracles are events that defy natural explanation but are accompanied by the certainty of God's intervention in the religious dimension, which makes an event a miracle.' One's own life as an expression of the Divine intervention of the Holy Spirit motivates one's decision to embrace the teachings and principles of Jesus Christ. Iyadurai (2015:85) further expresses that 'the event could be a miraculous escape, a solution to a crisis, a healing of the ability to do something that would normally be impossible.'

Pentecostals emphasise that the gospel is a powerful medicine for those who regularly endure sorrow and presents itself as good news for those suffering (Anderson 2014: 229). The healing experience can encourage the individual to accept Christ while inspiring others who see it to believe in Christ (Acts 9:32-43). This is evident in many *MC* stories. Additionally, most people think physical healing is essential to Christ's redemptive work. At the same time, illness is seen as a curse resulting from the devil's influence (Bauman 2015:32). Restoring everyone's health is seen as part of God's will. This section examines the empirical data behind the remarkable stories that encourage people to believe in Jesus. Hembai Devi (2022), a woman who converted to Pentecostalism from a tribal background, shares her statement in an interview as follows:

In 2014, my physical well-being was significantly compromised because of engaging in erratic behaviour influenced by malevolent spiritual forces. My life situation became terrible. Evil spirits forced me to walk a long distance of around 25 miles on foot from the city of Raipur to reach Durg, where I would explore several Hindu temples. This activity caused sores to form on my feet. The condition had a pervasive impact on my entire physiological system, leading to the onset of intense and debilitating pain. The manifestation of a malevolent entity

has led to several adversities in my personal life. Within the confines of my neighbourhood, there was a sacred temple dedicated to divine entities. Over five years, I knelt before the deity and fervently beseeched it for the restoration of well-being. Regrettably, my supplications yielded nothing but anguish and desolation. I experienced severe bodily discomfort, and it was exceedingly challenging to endure. Frequently, I get temporary alleviation; the subsequent resurgence of pain is characterised by heightened severity.

Once, I was invited by a woman belonging to the Pentecostal faith community in the area to accompany her to their church, where she expressed confidence in the healing potential. I sought consent from my husband, who permitted me to visit a particular location on one or two occasions. During my initial visit on a Sunday, I noticed difficulties in comprehending anything. However, the pastor prayed for me after the worship service. Despite experiencing limited bodily sensations throughout that period, I saw a noticeable physical state change by the following Sunday's meeting. While attending Sunday service, I had a profound experience with the Holy Spirit, which restored my well-being. This vital life event transformed my life, strengthening my faith in Christ while building my confidence in Him. I comprehend my status as a sinner and have duly acknowledged and shown contrition for my transgressions in the sight of Jesus. Subsequently, I received profound blessings and attained a wholeness and peace unparalleled in my personal history.

Although brief, the woman's narrative of her encounter with God is carefully crafted to convey a powerful, transformative experience. It highlights the initial difficulties, establishing the baseline of the struggle and the sense of distance or discomfort. This woman's story is set to show the clear transition from early struggle and indifference to an intense spiritual encounter and subsequent transformation. This aligns with the concept of conversion, a fundamental aspect of the Christian experience, where a person turns away from sin and towards God. Her sophisticated vocabulary of bodily experience—neither dramatic nor unusual—can make her experience seem more realistic and relatable. During Sunday service, the woman felt the heavenly influence of the Holy Spirit, which led to her complete recovery. This is the crux of her story, underscoring the profound impact of her spiritual encounter. The phrase 'divine encounter' suggests an outside force acting upon the woman. The term 'total recovery' underscores the comprehensive nature of the transformation. Well-being spans three critical relationships, connecting spiritual health to physical and emotional balance. The Christian theological concept of salvation encompasses spiritual, physical and emotional balance through its holistic interpretation. It draws attention to the internal transformations and the external results of having a direct encounter with God, such as improved health and increased trust in God.

The divine encounter profoundly changed the woman's life, instilling in her a deep faith and trust in Christ. The mention of trust and faith represents an inner transformation that surpasses physical recovery by focusing on one's mental state. The woman establishes herself as a sinner following Christian doctrine through confession and genuine repentance. Christian devotion through Jesus includes believers' confession of sins, followed by repentance, which signifies their humility as they accept divine forgiveness. According to traditional Christian teachings about conversion, acknowledging sins, repentance, and receiving God's forgiveness are unified as theological principles. This is common in conversion stories, as it shows humility and introspection, and recognises the need for divine mercy. While sharing the testimony, her facial expressions and gestures revealed her gratitude to the Lord Jesus for complete healing and good health. This narrative effectively highlights the key aspects of her experience in a clear and concise manner. The woman's firsthand account aims to inspire spiritual faith in others by illustrating how the Holy Spirit brings about transformation.

For most of the 20th century, there was extensive discussion of the role of miracles as a fundamental element of religious belief (McGrew 2017:152). Regarding the main characteristics of Pentecostalism in contrast to traditional churches, Roberts (2017:282) states: 'The Holy Spirit speaks directly through the mouths of ordinary believers and can reveal new teachings not explicitly mentioned in the Bible' (cf. Sahoo 2018:96). The convert passing on his personal experiences as a witness is a common practice in the church. Testimony often justifies adopting beliefs that might otherwise have been discarded (McGrew 2017:155). Miracles include recovery from serious illnesses and terminal illnesses and resolution of situations that converts believe no human being, no amount of medical science, or money could handle (Ware 2016:355). Sony Vijay (2022) (Anonymous name), for example, shares his conversion experiences in the interview as follows:

My mother was a heart patient. She had undergone significant bypass surgery. Her physical condition worsened. During the treatment, she started having seizures. The doctor consulted us and said that the mother was in a very critical condition and could not give any hope for her life. However, we will monitor the next 24 hours for the final report. I cried deeply after hearing the doctor's news. He was a Pentecostal Christian doctor who told me if I believed in Jesus and prayed, he would completely heal my mother. He shared about the miraculous healing of people by Jesus from the Bible. His faith and his words gave me hope. Then I prayed to Jesus: If you are a living God, heal my mother completely.

As a strong Hindu Brahmin, it was initially a struggle to pray to Jesus. The idea of turning away from the idols in our house and the pujas we used to offer felt like a betrayal of our faith. But my parents had a glimmer of faith in Jesus, and I clung to that. I thank God; He heard my prayer that night, and Mother experienced complete healing, a miraculous touch of the Holy Spirit, at 12:30 a.m. in the middle of the night. The doctor certified that she was completely cured. It is the healing of God. That night, I recognised the mighty works of the Holy Spirit on my mother, which changed my life, and I came to understand the true love of Christ throughout my family. On the same day, we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, asked Jesus for forgiveness for unbelief and sins, and rejected all idols from our home. Twelve years later, my mother still lives and worships Jesus with our entire family. That same day, I felt great happiness and joy in my heart. The Holy Spirit completely changed all our lives.

The man's story of his mother's incredible recovery demonstrates the strength of tenacity through his family's transformation from despair and doubt to acceptance and faith. He highlights the initial dejection, which is reinforced by the doctor's gloomy diagnosis. The contrasting hope offered by the Pentecostal doctor, emphasising belief and prayer, introduces the conflict with his Hindu Brahmin background. A turning point is his parents' increasing faith, which validates his fervent prayer, which he feels was answered by his mother's immediate recovery. This display of miraculous healing propels his family to Christianity, signified by their acceptance of Jesus and rejection of the other gods. They maintain their good health and motherhood for the next twelve years, underscoring the significance of faith. He and his family were convinced of the might of the Holy Spirit.

Similarly, another participant, Sam Enosh (2022) (Anonymous name), along with his mother, Santhi Bai, spoke about the *MC* through healing:

Sam, I had an accident when I was 20 years old and fell into a coma. There was no chance to get up from the bed. My mother informed me I was practically lying on the bed like a corpse, totally paralysed. There was nobody else except my mother to take care of me in such a pathetic situation. Meanwhile, a Pentecostal pastor met my mother. Then, the pastor shared the story of Jesus with my mother. The pastor said Jesus is the real saviour and healer of all sickness. Then, my mother introduced me to the evangelist and invited the pastor to their home for a prayer. The pastor visited and prayed for me by touching my body. It was extraordinary and miraculous. After three years, I opened my eyes, moved my hands and legs, and looked at my mother. The pastor continued to pray until I got complete healing. While the pastor prayed, I could sense the Holy Spirit's manifesting power, like a freezing body. In just a couple of days, I experienced a complete healing. After that, we realised Jesus is the true God. We received Jesus as our Lord and Saviour by confessing our sins. After making this choice, we faced obstacles. Both of us were expelled from our residence and village. Villagers asked us to reject Jesus and join their religious community. However, we decided not to return to our previous religion. Despite these challenges, we persevered in our faith, and today, we have better health, joy and peace.

Enosh's healing story highlights how Jesus delivered him from a coma through the prayers of the Pentecostal pastor. The man chooses his words to vividly express his desperate starting point and the hope that the pastor's prayer instils, while demonstrating how his divine healing has changed his and his mother's religious beliefs. The man tells a moving account of how Jesus' miraculous help changed his life through faith. Through his language, the man expresses his desperate starting point alongside the hope provided by the pastor's prayer and the physical presence of the Holy Spirit, which led to miraculous healing that deeply affected both his and his mother's lives. The story serves as a tool to build faith while illustrating how prayers are utilised in Pentecostal practices.

The testimonies of the converts reveal how miraculous events transformed their lives, bringing them serenity and peace. Miraculous healings are interpreted differently in the Indian Pentecostal movement. Some believe it is a sudden, dramatic event that heals the body or mind. Others believe it is a slower process that improves health. Both supernatural acts and experiences of the Holy Spirit cause individuals to believe in and follow Christ. The miraculous event may include extraordinary events such as remarkable evasion, resolution of a critical situation, restoration of health, completion of often unattainable tasks, and similar events (Iyadurai 2015:85). Miraculous events always catalyse individuals to recognise Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. In the focus group discussion, a lay leader shared one of the miraculous stories of his friend, a pastor in Madhya Pradesh.

The livestock of a Hindu family was mysteriously dying. The situation deteriorated despite many prayers and rituals. They sought the help of a Pentecostal pastor in desperation, and he consented to pray for their surviving cow. The pastor dedicated an intense prayer of faith that restored the ill cow to full health. The surprising intervention of God transformed the family into Christians as they abandoned their traditional faith and promoted conversion to Christianity. They came to realise that the god they were worshipping was a false one who was unable to support them through their trying times. When the family realised their ignorance, they all turned to *Ishu Masih* (Jesus Christ), confessed their sins, and followed Him. An entire family came to the Pentecostal church and firmly believed in Jesus Christ. As a result, some other Hindu families also went to the church.

They testify that Jesus Christ (*Ishu Masih*) changed their lives through the miraculous works of the Holy Spirit. Divine intervention through prayer restored the cow, underscoring the power of faith and the influence of the Holy Spirit. The family underwent a complete transformation of their faith system after they decided to convert from Hinduism to Christianity. The family's recognition of the shortcomings

of their previous religion raises concerns about how well conservative Hindu customs handle life's obstacles. This event led the family to experience a spiritual awakening, which in turn resulted in a deeper understanding of their faith and a desire to adopt a different one. Significant effects resulted from the family's conversion, demonstrating the broader impact of personal spiritual journeys and encouraging other Hindu families to explore Christianity and consider undergoing a similar spiritual transformation.

The aforementioned accounts of miraculous healing provide a compelling narrative of religious conversion. They demonstrate the capacity for life-transforming events and the strength of faith in the face of hardship. They also raise issues regarding the nature of faith, the role of miracles, and how religious beliefs impact people's lives both individually and collectively.

Twenty-two of the seventy participants in the interviews and discussion groups of the empirical studies reported similar miraculous healing and conversion experiences. These individuals described miraculous healing experiences as the catalyst for their conversion, such as healing from various illnesses and other life events that prompted them to make a sudden decision to turn to Christ. The conversion was a proximate cause of healing miracles. Qualitative interviews with all these individuals provided comprehensive and detailed accounts of their experiences, including miraculous healings and conversion experiences.

Converts often discuss experiences that may be incomprehensible to others. Although they failed to find a rational explanation, they accepted the remarkable work of the Holy Spirit. Miracles attributed to God and the Holy Spirit are not based on logic or preconceived notions. Converts believe the Holy Spirit influences their lives and facilitates conversion and change. Such testimonies have contributed to the growth of the movement, providing hope and confidence to many people.

3.3.2. Exorcism

The practice of exorcism was of considerable importance for the development of early Christianity. Yong (2020:202) states that 'the early church continued this ministry of deliverance with the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:16; 8:6-7; 13:6-12; 16:16-18).' Pentecostal pastors worked as exorcists worldwide and

employed exorcism as a highly influential approach to their mission and the spread of their faith (Twelftree 2007:26). In contemporary scholarship, Twelftree has presented an argument for the remarkable and unprecedented growth of early Christianity as a result. Healing played a crucial role in facilitating conversions during this period, and he further suggests that exorcism may have been one of the most respected practices within the early Christian community. Likewise, Pentecostal churches, through their healing and exorcism practices, attract those who experience torment, resulting in profound personal changes in their lives (George 2019:103).

Indian Pentecostal religion relies heavily on exorcism, both for promoting conversion and maintaining its expanding growth across India. Pentecostals view sickness together with adverse fortune and social troubles as possible evidence of demonic control, and performing exorcism procedures helps followers defeat these demonic influences to achieve spiritual liberation. Many hardships and tribulations in Indian society are ascribed to real-life instances of demonic possession and the forces of evil.

In the focused group discussion (2022), one participant shared the real-life story of a girl who happened in the ministry of one of his friends, a Pentecostal pastor in Andhra Pradesh:

A Hindu family's daughter was possessed by a demon and put on a chain for twelve years, causing immense suffering. Despite numerous Hindu rituals and prayers done in various temples and spending a lot of money on deliverance, her condition worsened. Desperate, they sought help from a Pentecostal pastor. Using the power of the *Pavithra Atma* (Holy Spirit) and faith in *Ishu Masih* (Jesus Christ), the pastor expelled the *dushtatma* (demon), healing the girl. Such a miraculous event led the family to receive Christ as their Saviour. However, their concern about social rejection by their network of friends and community members caused fear until they underwent complete spiritual growth. The fantastic miracle changed their lives forever, demonstrating the transforming strength of God's love through their lives. Their shameful lives and status in society are being changed. Later, they could save money, and their family life improved with good health.

Strong contrasts in the narrative emphasise the power of the Christian faith. The narrative of conversion becomes convincing through the suffering from demonic possession and the ineffectiveness of Hindu rituals, which leads to dramatic deliverance by the Pentecostal pastor using the awe-inspiring supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. Christian-specific language, emphasis on miracles, and social and material benefits combine to create a powerful testimony that promotes Christianity in this setting. The narrative follows the traditional

problem-solution-resolution structure, where the Pentecostal pastor and Christian faith miraculously resolve the family's suffering.

In empirical studies, the researcher found that attacks by evil spirits and the associated suffering are a growing problem for ordinary people in India. While other traditional churches keep silent about the Holy Spirit's work and reject the ground reality, Pentecostal churches consider it seriously to liberate people from demonic power and lead them to Christ in repentance and faith. Through exorcism, Pentecostals aim to bring hope, healing and spiritual transformation to those affected by addressing the root causes of their suffering and providing a path to redemption and salvation.

The healing miracles, particularly exorcisms, played a significant role in the charismatic churches in India and early Christianity, particularly Pentecostalism, convincing many to accept their teachings as authentic (Twelftree 2007:27; George 2019:103). This starkly contrasts with the traditional Protestant churches in India, which reject such a practice and believe that miracles no longer exist. However, Pentecostalism views the manifestation of extraordinary spiritual phenomena attributed to the Holy Spirit as crucial to advancing and developing its faith tradition (Friesen 2013). In the empirical study, the focus group examined the practice of exorcism, a distinctive feature of Pentecostalism that has broad appeal and may be a key factor in why individuals find Pentecostalism attractive and choose to convert.

Cures from illnesses often lead to religious conversions. Ordinary people believe that demonic spirits cause infection and other problems in their lives and communities. Most people, especially tribals, believe every disease is caused by a deity or evil spirits (*dushtatma*) (Sahoo 2018:82, 104). Pentecostals address these problems of evil spirits with the divine power of the Holy Spirit. According to Bergunder (2008:123), 'Pentecostals have adopted the demonology of folk Hinduism, with some minor differences.' In folk Hinduism, the diversity of evil spirits is striking, often localised and associated with specific places, objects or rituals. They could be vengeful ancestors, malevolent deities, or nature spirits. Their motivations can range from mischief to causing illness or misfortune. Obsession is a common explanation for illness, psychological distress or misfortune. Special rituals and offerings are performed to appease or drive away the possessing spirit. Priests, shamans or exorcists with exceptional knowledge and rituals deal with

spiritual problems such as possession or demonic interference (Sahoo 2018:105; Laycock 2015).

Pentecostalism conceives of evil as fully embodied through Satan and demons, which the religion understands as rebel fallen angels that oppose God. These forces unite as a dark power which attempts to mislead human beings during their spiritual journey with God. Although obsession exists, it is not the primary explanation for suffering. Greater emphasis is placed on the spiritual struggle against invisible, demonic forces that influence individuals and society, engaging every believer in spiritual warfare (Bridges, 2022). Deliverance and exorcism are often viewed as gifts of the Holy Spirit available to every believer. Prayers, fasting, and spiritual warfare methods are used to combat demonic influence. Sahoo (2018:104-05) and Bauman (2015:106) note that 'Pentecostal exorcism invokes the power of the Holy Spirit to confront and defeat evil spirits.' Both Pentecostalism and popular Hinduism are diverse, with local variations and interpretations. Thus, Pentecostalism in India evolved into a distinct religious subculture, facilitating effective exorcism of evil spirits by incorporating Christian resources while acknowledging their existence (Bergunder 2008:125).

The practice of healing and exorcism, which is critical in Indian Pentecostalism, has proven effective in connecting with Hindu mysticism, facilitating the acceptance of Christian healing and exorcism in India (Mathew, 2022:90). Pentecostals share similar phenomenological practices with mainstream Hinduism and Islam, particularly in the area of exorcism. Nevertheless, this resemblance also leads to sporadic disputes between Hindu-appointed exorcists and Pentecostal pastors, which complicates and adds tension to the topic. Although these disputes are complex, they maintain a strong connection to the local populace. The acceptance of Pentecostal healing claims by individuals can be attributed to the experimental approach that Hindus and Christians affiliated with major churches take to such offers (Bergunder 2001: 103). Exorcism is inherently complex, and these aspects derived from popular Hinduism exert the most significant influence in this context (Bergunder 2001:103). According to Bergunder (2001:103), both the Pentecostal exorcist and the *mantravadi* (black magician) claim professional expertise in popular Hinduism. This is confirmed by the statement of Rose Jamni (2022) (Anonymous name), a Hindu convert from North India, who shares her experiences in an interview:

My family worshipped various gods and goddesses. We performed multiple rites and sacrifices in different temples. We had no peace at home because demons possessed my mother. She often becomes violent. It caused numerous problems, and we lost our peace. Someone should always accompany my mother. Following the instructions of Hindu temple priests, we performed several ritual sacrifices and pujas for her delivery at various temples. After the Hindu exorcism failed, we took her to a Muslim imam, but nothing helped. Freeing my mother from demonic spirits cost us a lot. Finally, a member of the Pentecostal Church told us about his church near our house. When we brought my mother to this church, the pastor told us to believe in Jesus, who would free her from demon possession. After praying in tongues for my mother, the priest cast out demons. She falls, rolls and screams. My mother was freed from demons after three years, right after prayer. She has been chained for the last two years. It was so painful for us to see her in chains. We understood that it was the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. Healing with my mother helped our entire family realise that Jesus is the true God and Saviour. So, we accepted Jesus as our Saviour by confessing our sins. My mother's healing deliverance from evil spirits drastically changed our family. We are blessed with both physical and spiritual life. Now, we have happiness and peace at home. Our lives are renewed through the miraculous act of divine intervention.

Rose Jamni presents a story of contrast and transformation centred on her relationship with the supernatural, primarily through the Pentecostal church. She distinguishes the obstacles her family encountered due to their prior religious customs from the transforming power of Pentecostal belief. The woman's narration skilfully employs terminology to highlight the difference between her family's current tranquillity and their previous hardships, attributing this change to the influence of divine intervention and the Pentecostal faith. Her word choice emphasises the alleged miraculous aspect of her mother's recovery and the subsequent conversion of her family while also producing a potent witness of faith.

Similarly, Sahani Mrudu (2022), a Pentecostal convert from Hinduism and a professor at the National Institute of Information Technology (NIIT), testifies about her *MC* experience in the interview as follows:

My affluent Hindu family faced significant challenges after my marriage in 2005. Depression and other issues plagued my life, marked by frequent nightmares and feelings of anger and despair. I struggled to understand what was happening to me, and my family seemed unable to comprehend my suffering.

I suffered through seven years of evil manifestations. These vivid and harrowing visions deprived me of sleep at night and tormented me throughout the day beyond mere dreams. My mother-in-law performed many rituals and accompanied me to other places of worship in search of a resolution. However, these efforts brought no relief. During these episodes, I experienced suicidal thoughts and physical discomfort. A fellow Pentecostalist suggested that attending church might be helpful. Initially sceptical, I finally agreed to participate in a prayer meeting in Raipur with my mother-in-law. A mighty spiritual deliverance freed me from evil

spirits during that particular meeting. The extraordinary occurrence shifted the direction of my life by bringing immense comfort through Jesus Christ and spiritual serenity. The place served as my source of hope when I faced my darkest moments. All members of my family joined Christianity as we publicly disclosed our sins and acknowledged Jesus to be the one true God. Through unity, we faced our relatives' opposition yet became a source of inspiration to other believers because of our steadfast faith.

Suffering from years of disturbing experiences and finding no relief through traditional methods, Sahani, initially sceptical, encountered divine intervention through a Pentecostal prayer meeting. Her dramatic deliverance from evil spirits led to a profound personal transformation, bringing her peace and a deeper faith in Jesus Christ. This experience extended to her entire family, resulting in their conversion to Christianity and a strengthened belief that helped them overcome subsequent adversity. The woman's story highlights the stark contrast between her past hardships and the life-changing impact of her conversion, underscoring the perceived power of divine intervention.

These narratives typically follow a pattern: first, a period of trouble and unease caused by evil influences, followed by a transformative period after conversion, marked by deliverance from these forces and a positive shift for the entire family. The above testimonies provide valuable insights into the various subjective experiences of possession.

During the empirical studies, the researcher observed that people often possess high levels of self-confidence and cognitive ability after experiencing a miraculous deliverance. However, once malevolent entities had used their mental powers to manipulate and place them in precarious situations, they were unaware that they could not flee. As mentioned earlier, it is a touching, miraculous story about a Hindu family from Andhra Pradesh. For twelve years, evil spirits attacked a family girl until her parents chained her inside a room. The family repeatedly visited various temples while performing religious rites with abundant spending, which failed to improve the girl's health. Finally, the story reports that they approached a Pentecostal pastor in desperation and shared their dire life situation. Through prayer and faith, a pastor freed a girl from a twelve-year affliction. This transformative event led the family to abandon their former beliefs and wholeheartedly embrace Christianity, finding newfound peace and joy. Afterwards, they became a firm believer in the Pentecostal church.

The study reveals that the family attempted to expel the evil spirits through alternative means and sought assistance from their respective religious *mantravadi* (exorcists), but their efforts were unsuccessful. It is vital to remember that when people receive prayers from pastors, they can find a fantastic solution to their problems. Individuals often recall specific events related to their exorcism and subsequent encounters. This profound encounter allows the individual to realise the existence of a deity who shows love and care for them. This does not mean that those who do not have a miracle experience will never find Jesus and convert to Pentecostalism.

While interviewing people, the researcher noticed that two individuals, Gopi (2022) and Daniel (2022), both of whom are anonymous, shared that their family members had MC experiences. Nevertheless, their conversion occurred through cognitive thinking and decision-making. There are various cases in which people come to Christ by seeking God, understanding the gospel, and hearing the message of Christ. In the empirical study, the focus groups opined that most Pentecostal converts have a personal miraculous experience as part of their conversion process.

Modern Christianity acknowledges people who grasp the divine essence of the Holy Spirit and confess their faith in Jesus as their personal Saviour and Lord. People who believe in God openly admit their wrongdoings by acknowledging them. Once they confess, they enjoy freedom from demonic possession and a holistic life. Their testimonies show that Satan (*Saitan*) causes both physical and spiritual harm and can ruin a person's life. In the socio-cultural context, people prefer the help of a *pujari* (Hindu priest) in temples or an *imam* of the mosques in many other ways to get relief from demonic possession. However, suppose they cannot liberate themselves from evil. In that case, they come to Jesus Christ to free themselves from evil powers and learn the truth (Bauman 2015:96). The main reason for non-Christians and professed Christians to join Pentecostalism is miraculous events such as the expulsion of evil spirits (Bauman 2015: 96). A traditional Christian woman, Leesha (2022) (Anonymous name), testifies in an interview about her miraculous healing from evil spirits:

I have a Christian background from CSI (The Church of South India- a traditional church). I suffer from an illness and have unnecessary weight in my body. I could not walk or work at home due to breathing problems. The doctors thought it was just a strain. Following the recommendations, we visited various hospitals,

including those in distant states of India, for check-ups. Someone advised us to go to a Muslim Mosque for treatment, but my body did not change. Despite my repeated visits to the hospital, the doctors were unable to diagnose any illness. We went to a central medical facility in Kerala and found that my heart artery was shrinking. The specialist recommended an emergency operation. My husband was hesitant because of the financial situation at home. My stressed-out husband started drinking to calm down. The doctor suggested that he take medication for two weeks because he was afraid of surgery. We went back to the doctor, and he recommended further testing. My thyroid was diagnosed with swelling.

Meanwhile, a Pentecostal convention was taking place nearby. We went to the meeting with our two children. The speaker at that convention called my husband's name and said, 'If you are concerned about your wife's illness, please come to the stage.' He explained that she would receive the miraculous touch of the Holy Spirit tonight. So, he led me on stage to pray. As the preacher prayed, demonic spirits appeared, and I fell on the platform and screamed. Suddenly, the pastor drove out evil spirits, and I was freed that evening. The pastor told us to confess our sins to be completely healed and believe in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. So, we confessed our sins, *Isu Masih* and accepted Him as our Lord and Saviour.

We were nominal Christians, but we heard nothing about salvation and confessing sins to receive salvation from the CSI church. The pastor informed us that God had completely healed me. Therefore, I do not require any further hospital check-ups. After the miraculous touch of the Holy Spirit, I slept soundly that night. After a few days, I started having breathing problems. When the priest came home, I was suffering from breathing problems such as asthma and could not sit properly. Pastor prayed fervently with the Holy Spirit, and I was completely healed. I got up and sat on the bed. The next day, we went to the doctor. My appearance startled him, and he asked why I healed so well, considering my weakness. How is that possible? I told the doctor that a pastor had prayed for me and that I had been healed. From then on, we attended Pentecostal churches instead of CSI. Now, we have peace of mind and joy in our family life. My husband completely stopped drinking alcohol and got rid of all his bad habits. We all have a transformative experience through the Spirit of God. Our social and economic status also changed.

The story of this nominal Christian shows that life before her conversion was terrible for her. The evil spirits caused disease and excessive fat on her body, causing her family to suffer and lose their peace of mind. After being healed of evil spirits, the entire family came to Christ in repentance for their sins. Until then, they had never heard that they had to repent of their sins to accept Jesus as their personal Saviour. After experiencing deliverance from evil spirits, their conversion led to life-transforming changes in their social and economic conditions. The period before conversion was marked by a harrowing situation and the loss of peace of mind and joy at home.

The practice of Pentecostal conversion involves more than a mere inner spiritual transformation, as some conversion narratives explicitly attribute the occurrence of conversion to a physical or psychological disorder. In empirical

research, some people, like Shanti (2022), Niya (2022), Litha (2022), Chandhu (2022), Sagu (2022), Param (2022), Matha (2022) and many more, claim similar *MC* experiences because of liberation from evil spirits and their domination. The researcher found that approximately fifteen out of seventy participants had similar experiences, excluding those involving evil spirits or demon possession.

As mentioned in the stories, they constantly battled with demonic entities that invaded their physical being, disrupted their home environment and disrupted their lives and sleeping habits. Therefore, a miraculous transformative experience helped them think from the impossible to the possible, from hopelessness to hope, and to move toward a new religious belief and practice, leaving the old belief behind, especially when it came to embracing new hope for the future and the wholeness that offers life. The researcher observed the participants' facial expressions during the interview, which revealed a distressful life that had become filled with happiness and joy after the miraculous encounter with the Holy Spirit and their conversion. In the focus group discussion, a pastor and a participant emphasised that demonic possession, evil fights, and associated illnesses or misfortune are widespread in Indian society. People are struggling to overcome this, and it presents an excellent opportunity for Pentecostals to approach them and pray for their healing, which will ultimately lead them to conversion. Once they receive healing or deliverance, they will have a *MC* narrative to share with people.

Pentecostals believe that only the power of the Spirit can confront and defeat evil forces, leading people to a life of everyday faith (Bauman 2015:106, Bergunder 2001:103; Sahoo 2018:105). Acts 16:16-18 describes the exorcism of a demon on a young girl, which led to her encounter with the redeeming power of God through Jesus Christ (Schreiner 2008:770). Demon possession and influence are real and terrible conditions that many ordinary people in India suffer from and fight against. Liberation is only possible in a decisive encounter in which Jesus' name is invoked and prevails (Waugh & Oliver 2015:62). In Pentecostalism, practices focused on supernatural healing are closely related to those focused on liberation from demonic oppression. Healing of the physical self and liberation from demons are considered two sides of the same coin. The exorcism of evil spirits is often the focus of healing practices in India (Brown 2011:18–19). Divine healing or exorcism of demons was successful in Pentecostalism and led to conversion (Sahoo 2018:105).

The disciples of Jesus employed healing methods while casting out individuals possessed by evil entities. The gospel message required discipleship from followers who needed training, as instructed by Jesus in Mark 16:15-17, which commanded them to heal and cast out evil spirits. Luke 4:18 shows Jesus instructing his followers to deliver salvation and healing to the poor and those with broken hearts. With all your heart, free the prisoners and heal the sick. Pentecostals believe that witchcraft can affect anyone. However, they trust in the power of the Spirit's revelation to deliver people from evil forces (Eph. 6:10–12; Matthew 11:12). Matthew 17:21 shows that fasting and prayer are essential for providing and healing people from evil attacks. Fasting is a fundamental part of the Pentecostal belief system and can facilitate healing and deliverance (Anderson 2020:25). Only through the power of prayer and with the help of the divine manifestation of the Spirit can a believer drive out troublesome spirits.

3.3.3. Liberation from witchcraft

This study examines the personal conversion narratives of Pentecostal Christians, focusing on their reports of encounters with evil spirits resulting from engagement in witchcraft or occult practices. Although demonic possession and witchcraft seem similar, witchcraft is about more than just demonic possession and its effects on life. Witchcraft torments people's spiritual, physical, financial, and even social well-being, as seen in the ministry of Jesus (Mark 9:14-29). Mark tells the story of the boy with epilepsy, who was possessed by demonic spirits. Pentecostals interpret the tale as caused by a witch (Princess Ayelotan 2022:527). Through Mark 9:14-29, Pentecostal faith serves as a foundation to battle against the harmful effects of witchcraft.

One must first understand witchcraft before continuing to the essential matter of discussion. A person believes an event has a secret, magical reason if it follows a particular sequence or seems too egregious. This phenomenon is known as witchcraft. It is considered a symbolic means of representing and coping with misfortune. Furthermore, the popular opinion between witchcraft and counter-witchcraft is only relevant in terms of the subjective perspectives of the narrative (Tarabout 2000:652). *Mantravādi* or *Manthrik* (witches or sorcerers) are experts in *mantras* or *mantravādam* (spells or witchcraft) and are believed to be capable of producing enmity, immobility, seduction, expulsion, shattering and various other

effects (Mohan 1981: 52 -53; Tarabout 200:657). Witchcraft, defined as the deliberate use of demonic powers by specific individuals to cause harm, is well-documented in various communities worldwide (Gershman 2022:1).

Some people never engage in *mantravādi* because they consider it a superstitious belief. Regardless of whether one holds a particular faith or disbelief, this approach to addressing misfortune is widespread across all sectors of Indian society. Many people across India believe that witchcraft is a reality (Kapur 1983:19-23; Tarabout 2000:652). It is essential to acknowledge that witchcraft, as a system of beliefs and values, is grounded primarily in two respected disciplines often considered scientific in India: astrology and mantras (Tarabout 2000:652).

The fear of witchcraft is widespread in Indian society, and overcoming it is a significant challenge. This is also seen as a subjective experience often arising from distrust and social conflict (Chophy 2020:247-48). In such an environment, Pentecostals provide a sense of empowerment to those actively seeking deliverance from witchcraft and lead them to Christ by addressing their concerns. They promise to use prayers and drive out evil forces to free people from the influence and power of witchcraft. However, Pentecostal practices are frequently condemned by Hindus and other Christian traditions because of their potential for manipulation and their goal of converting others to their faith. The fundamental tenets of various religions may also be unintentionally called into question by Pentecostal practices.

The conversion stories describe the powerful effects of witchcraft on the lives of individual people. The practice of witchcraft is widespread throughout India. People believe that many unfortunate events, such as crop failures, diseases, sudden and unexpected deaths, or depletion of water sources, are attributed to malevolent supernatural forces under the influence of a witch or sorcerer (Alam & Raj 2017: 134; Singh 2011:16). Kumari & Alam (2021:3149) examine 'the highest number of witchcraft-related' problems in India during the period between 2006 and 2008. People associated with witchcraft are often accused of causing harmful events and inhumane practices. It is claimed that the practice of witchcraft affects the cognitive perspectives of the individual and leads to many negative consequences, such as psychological instability, domestic discord, family dissolution, diseases, economic decline and other related consequences (Kumari & Alam 2021:3150).

Pentecostals believe, according to Richie (2013:176), 'occultism and witchcraft are inherently satanic' or personal circumstances (Bloomer 2017; MacNutt 2009:104). Therefore, a particular form of Pentecostal Christianity focuses on deliverance from witchcraft or malevolent entities, ancestral curses and various tragedies. People are afraid of witchcraft because of its effects on the individual. Pentecostals have effectively addressed this specific requirement in a manner that demonstrates cultural relevance in the Indian context (Bergunder 2011: 287–89). Poornima Devi (2022), a Pentecostal girl participating in the interview, explains:

Once, when I came to my uncle's house, I attended a Pentecostal prayer meeting. My uncle's family were a believer in this church. This was my first time attending a Christian prayer meeting as a Hindu. I have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ before. I have not spoken for almost five years because of the effects of the witchcraft of our neighbour. Doctors searched for medical symptoms in different hospitals but failed to detect any signs of the illness. Our temple visits included performing numerous religious rituals and devotional acts to find a solution, but they were unanswered. My whole family was depressed because of my situation. However, nothing changed in my situation. I even stopped my education. Whenever I wanted to talk to my parents and siblings, I would write on paper and show it to them. I did this even when travelling alone.

During the meeting's final session, the pastor prayed in tongues while laying his hand upon my head for his blessing. The pastor executed an exorcism through Jesus' authority to fight the power of witchcraft. Soon after, I felt a heavy burden leave my head and body. I felt ice cold and light. Soon, I spoke clearly to the people over there. I experienced a mighty miraculous act of God and was delivered from the clutches of satanic forces of witchcraft. From then on, I told my uncle and pastor that I needed Jesus in my life. Then, the pastor told me more about Jesus. My understanding was that, as a sinner, I needed to confess to accept Jesus as both Saviour and Lord. I soon acknowledged Jesus by admitting that I would follow Him. I understood that Jesus is a healer and saviour of my life. I returned to my hometown to explain the miracle healing I underwent while witnessing, which made my parents accept Jesus as their saviour. Our family has experienced peace and happiness together since then. God has changed our family. We cherish the freedom of spirit within our family and are blessed by Jesus.

The narrative reveals that the victim endured five years of speech impediment after witchcraft attacks but received no help from medical remedies or Hindu practices, so they became isolated while suffering from depression. A Pentecostal religious meeting combined an exorcism that invoked Jesus' name as the power behind it to restore the disabled person's capacity to speak instantly. Through this divine intervention, it is believed that Jesus showed his power against spiritual forces, thus leading the narrator to conversion and transforming their entire family. The whole family was pleased after this life-changing event, which

helped them gain a deeper understanding of Jesus as the true God. The happiness, together with peace, demonstrated the complete transformation enabled by their newfound religious beliefs. Through this personal account, the reader gains evidence that Pentecostal spiritual practices produce results and that God actively intervenes in human affairs, starkly contrasting previous unproductive healing efforts. In essence, the entire household turned toward Pentecostalism following the rescue of their daughter from witchcraft, making it an essential transformation in their lives.

According to his interview, Sasi Kumar (2022) and his family had a spiritual transformation that caused them to join the Pentecostal Church. He recounts an *MC* story about his freedom from witchcraft:

Jesus was unknown to me because I was raised as a Hindu. My parents believed that the Hindu gods were real. My mother and sister fasted and performed poojas three to four days a week. However, someone practised witchcraft against our family, and satanic spirits plagued us. The spirit of the goddesses appears in an animate form on my sister. She drops into intense pain by moving her wrists and legs while rolling her eyes, hanging her tongue and chomping her teeth. She suffered from difficulty breathing, which caused her stomach to swell, often leaving her breathless and appearing lifeless. Although we took her to several doctors in major hospitals because we thought she was not well. We spent more than a million rupees to free her, but her life remained unchanged. We then took her to various expensive magicians, but they had no effect. Meanwhile, my mother's kidney was severely damaged. No medicine could help her. My father lost both eyes. My brother suffered from the devil and fell regularly. None of us had family peace. We endured a lot. My mother suggested the whole family commit suicide. So, I took a day off and brought home a poisonous insecticide. Since I did not report for duty, my friends came home to ask about me.

When they learned about our predicament, they asked me to believe in Jesus Christ, who is the true God and prevented us from consuming the poison. Later, they invited me to a Pentecostal assembly in our hometown. As I sat with them, I was able to experience the intervention of the Spirit and suddenly realised how great God is. This instilled faith in me, and I experienced a profound transformation and inner peace. My heart was full of joy. I confessed all my sins to Jesus and accepted Him as my personal Saviour from that convention site. I took my sister, who was suffering from evil struggles caused by witchcraft, to a Pentecostal church meeting to pray. The pastor laid his hands on her to pray. My sister suddenly vomited blood, and the condition worsened. She became like a dead person on the spot. However, the pastor continued to pray in tongues and broke the power of witchcraft. Soon, she received a great salvation from the Holy Spirit and asked us to attend the meetings regularly.

She later testified that the evil force had compressed her body by vomiting blood. It was a great liberation. The burden was lifted from her, and peace returned to her life. Various doctors had previously said that she was suffering from a respiratory disease. Nevertheless, she was completely healed. She is still alive. Hallelujah! God healed and loved all family members, and each came to Christ in faith, confessing their sins and rejecting all idols from home. Of course, it was painful to

give up our old faith and adopt a new one. When we experience the miraculous healing of our family, we cannot leave Jesus. He freed us from evil forces. Now, we are firm in faith and worship him alone. He is the true God. We enjoy more freedom in our lives and have been blessed by the presence of Jesus in our family. We have peace. Our social and economic status has undergone significant changes.

The narrative reveals that the family experiences great helplessness in solving the problem, despite trying multiple medical and magical treatments at high costs. Through her desperate proposal of suicide, the mother demonstrates the despair that grips the family, along with their total loss of hope.

Jesus Christ appears to the narrator through his friends when they initiate his introduction to Christianity, marking a significant turning point in his life. The sister experiences striking spiritual healing, which commences when she vomits blood before barely surviving her encounter with death at the Pentecostal church. According to the healing story at the Pentecostal church, the spiritual healing process involves two main steps, where pastors use tongues for appeals and break the supernatural powers of witchcraft.

Salvation holds significant importance for the narrator in their experience at the Pentecostal assembly due to the Spirit's divine involvement. Pentecostalism is based on the core belief that individuals have powerful religious encounters with God. The formal acknowledgement of sin and acceptance of Jesus are essential elements of conversion.

The story illustrates the struggle between spiritual entities and the forces of good and evil. Christian faith represents healing miracles as one of its fundamental aspects. The entire religious transformation of the family illustrates the profound impact of faith in bringing about change. Jesus maintains supreme divine authority to heal people, liberate them from all obstacles, and lead them to salvation. The story showcases Pentecostalism's primary characteristic by depicting people speaking in tongues, accompanied by miraculous healing events. The narration depends significantly on the personal sharing of religious experiences between characters.

According to Pentecostal beliefs, different types of evil entities, which include demonic spirits together with occult activities and family-based legacies, have the power to confine individuals. They think that these dark forces harm people's lives and can lead to addiction, depression and physical illness. Abraham

(2014:40) emphasises that Pentecostals believe that witchcraft can be used by 'evil spirits to inhabit people and use them for evil things.' The Holy Spirit can only free people from these spiritual forces and renew their minds to understand the need for a Saviour. Therefore, the deliverance of people from evil forces is a set of principles in the New Testament that should not be abruptly excluded from the realm of Christian encounters. (Abraham 2014:41).

Indian Pentecostalism views *MC* in the context of liberation from spiritual bondage, evil forces, or afflictions. This liberation is attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit, who frees individuals and leads them into a new life in Christ (Mark 16:17). They believe that the Holy Spirit saves human beings by liberating them from sinful bondage, thereby leading them into a new life with Christ. Paul describes in Acts 26:16-18 (KJV) how God's appointment of Christ made him a gospel minister to extract people from Satan's power and lead them through enlightenment toward God for spiritual salvation and future inheritance among God's sanctified believers by the faith found in Jesus. The Holy Spirit employs deliverance as a powerful ministry that leads individuals to faith in Christ.

In the empirical study, six participants shared their *MC* stories related to the deliverance from the sufferings caused by witchcraft. During the interviews and focused group discussions, the researcher observed that people in the stories and discussions stated that witchcraft was the leading cause of all demonic possessions, evil spirits, misfortune, illness, family problems, and suffering. People from North India or South India attest to similar experiences as part of their narratives. Observing the empirical study, the researcher understands that once people return from the clutches of witchcraft to everyday life and enjoy freedom in Christ, they have no choice but to turn to Christ in repentance and faith, where they will find peace and joy as they walk with the Lord.

During experiences of deliverance, people might have visions of Christ needing help when no other assistance is available. After deliverance, people become more receptive to the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

3.3.4. Visions /Dreams of Christ.

All Christians are convinced that the conversion process occurs through hearing the Word of God. Pentecostalism believes that, on certain occasions,

through a visionary experience, an individual can have a transformative encounter with Jesus that leads them to repent. Apart from Paul (Acts 9), many other individuals in early Christianity demonstrate similar transformation experiences (Jn. 9:35). Acts 10:1ff shows Cornelius experiencing a visionary dream that prompted him to listen to the gospel and begin reading the Bible before following Jesus. Pentecostalism has experienced significant growth in popularity, with many adherents declaring their faith after experiencing visions of the heavenly realm (Abraham 2021:273). A survey was conducted by Dudley Woodberry and Russell Shubin, scholars at Fuller Theological Seminary, involving 600 people identified as believers from a Muslim background. These participants came from 39 different nations and represented 50 distinct ethnic groups. A significant proportion, namely 25 per cent, of believers with a Muslim background find dreams or visions to be a catalyst for their conversion process (Woodberry, Shubin & G. Marks 2007:80-81).

Iyadurai (2015:13) states:

Religious experiences involving a vision have visual auditory and automatic elements that involve the sensory organs. In automatism, one does something apart from conscious thought. While having a vision, the convert is passive, however, some sensory organs are active during the vision and the convert returns to waking consciousness after the experience. Although prior knowledge is a tool for interpreting the vision, prior religious beliefs are redundant. In conversion to Christianity, converts identify the divine with Jesus in their vision. Converts' prejudices against or enmity toward Christianity disappear at this vision of Jesus. Fervour and pride in their religion of birth also vanish from the religious experience, and then they follow Jesus without hesitation.

The individuals who experienced conversion were those with a common background who did not actively seek to bring about their religious encounter, but instead experienced a profound vision of Jesus (Iyadurai 2015:13). Pentecostals believe that the Holy Spirit can communicate with people through visions and reveal the nature of Jesus. These visions can help individuals overcome obstacles in their lives. When someone sees Jesus Christ in a vision, they genuinely encounter the divine. This encounter can lead to MC. Sarada Chandal (2022) (Anonymous name), a Hindu tribal girl who converted to the Pentecostal faith, shared her statement during the interview:

My family has a Hindu background. At one point, someone practised witchcraft to drive my father away from home, portraying him as a madman. This caused significant domestic problems for my mother. We sought help from many gods to heal and deliver my father by visiting occultists, mosques, and temples. We performed numerous 'pujas' at home, but despite our efforts, my father's condition did not improve; in fact, it worsened. He became irritable and angry when the

demon manifested, even resorting to physical violence against my mother, my siblings, and anyone nearby. He expressed a desire to harm us all. Eventually, we had to tie his hands and feet in the corner of the house. Our neighbours advised us to either leave or take him to a psychiatric hospital.

My father demanded freedom from his constraints and promised not to harm anyone. My mother believed and set him free. Shortly afterwards, he became angry and violent, striking her on the head, which caused profuse bleeding. Fortunately, her condition was not critical. Afterwards, he left home. We felt ashamed about speaking to outsiders about our father. Even then, the city and our school referred to us as 'children of the madman.' While they were compassionate and concerned about our future, education, and the unique circumstances at home, our financial situation was dire, and we often had nothing to eat. This lack of resources hindered our ability to learn. After our father left, we experienced deep sorrow and many sleepless nights. No family member stepped forward to support us during this terrible time, and we found ourselves socially isolated.

My mother turned to Hindu divine powers to mend my father's mind by praying at full strength for his complete recovery. My mother experienced a strong vision of Jesus on the cross. At the same time, someone spoke what she later recognised as the revelation that Jesus stands as Healer of the world and God of all existence before returning to his role as Saviour. She discovered inspiration from this vision, which led her to pray to Jesus for the healing of her hospitalised husband.

In December 2009, a Christian rally occurred at the Pension Wada Church in Raipur. At the rally, a pastor, guided by the Holy Spirit, felt compelled to pray for my distressed father. The pastor and other participants laid hands on my father as they prayed. During this prayer, my father experienced a powerful release, and the evil spirits that had tormented him departed with a loud cry. Afterwards, he regained his senses, felt rejuvenated, and returned home revitalised. He recounted to his wife and children everything that had transpired during the pastor's prayers, never forgetting his radiant face. The pastor reassured my father that Jesus had healed and saved him from the evil spirits.

This miraculous encounter with Jesus and His healing touch profoundly transformed my family, leading us to accept Him by realising His love and grace and joining a Pentecostal church. Acknowledging our sins, we all confessed and accepted Him as our Saviour and Lord by faith. For over a decade, we have dedicated ourselves to worshipping Jesus exclusively and living joyfully. Our lives, finances, and social standing have undergone significant transformation. Worshipping Jesus brings us incredible peace.

Jesus' vision for Sarada's mother and her father's healing deliverance made her realise that Jesus is the true God. It was a miraculous act of the Holy Spirit, who revealed Jesus in a vision. The vision encounter led them to pray and seek Jesus's help to change the father's life. The most extraordinary and miraculous transformation occurred in the entire family when they accepted Jesus and gained peace; their social and economic status in society also changed. The narrative reveals that the family found a new and meaningful life in Jesus, leading them to

abandon their old faith. Pentecostals emphasise changing individuals' social and economic circumstances, not just their spiritual existence.

As frequently mentioned in the Bible (e.g. Paul's vision and conversion in Acts 9:1ff), visions have a life-changing effect that leads to conversion. The idea of miraculous transformation through vision is a compelling belief that has influenced Indian Pentecostalism. It has given various people a sense of encouragement and conviction. Visions are a valid means by which God communicates with people. A participant in the interview, Shivani Manhar (2022), a Brahmin Pentecostal, shares her testimony as follows:

I come from a traditional Hindu Brahmin family and work as a lawyer at the High Court. It has been five years since I became an ardent Christian. Until five years ago, I lived a worldly life and had many physical ailments. The doctors were unable to diagnose my illnesses. We visited various important temples across India, met astrologers, followed the instructions of the pujari (priest), and spent a considerable amount of money. After returning from college in Dehradun, I was depressed by the evil forces and never wanted to go back there. I threatened to commit suicide if my parents sent me to Dehradun for education, and that scared my parents. My mother and younger brother took me to an *imam*, a well-known Muslim cleric, in our city.

Nevertheless, all his efforts and rituals could not help me escape the evil force. When I got home, the evil manifestations reappeared. I suffered from evil spirits for almost a year. Whenever evil spirits harmed me, my mother would immediately invite an imam or pujari (Hindu priest) to recite mantras and perform rituals at home. However, instead of calming down, my situation got worse. One day, my condition was terrible. The demon told my mother that today would be her daughter's last night and that nothing could stop her from killing me. I cried as I listened to these words. Even though my parents comforted me, I screamed and screamed for help. Suddenly, to everyone's horror, I laughed like a madwoman. This act was repeated again and again - the demon warned my parents. I cry and then laugh. My family stood in profound helplessness before all their spiritual entities and watched as I wriggled in pain.

While my father stood completely motionless in shock, my mother questioned the supposed deities and their existence, as they could not help us. She wailed, searching for an authentic deity, pleading, "Please help me, God! My daughter is going to die. Help me find a faithful God. If there is a real God, come tonight and save my daughter. I promise always to worship you."

All these religious elements remained foreign to us because we had no exposure to pastors, churches, or essential religious texts such as the Bible and the name of Christ. We did not understand the power of the Holy Spirit. No one presented information about Jesus or shared the Christian message with us. That night, a battle took place for my life. When my mother saw the name of Jesus engraved, she prayed, 'Jesus, if you are a true God, deliver my daughter immediately.' Suddenly, the demon inside me screamed and stopped my mother from saying His name.

My mother recognised the strength in the name of Jesus. She continually prayed to Him and held my hands. As she continued to call on the name of Jesus in her heart, something incredible happened to my body and mind. My mother noticed a significant change in me. Within seconds, I blacked out and fell to the ground. After a while, I got up and asked my mother to eat and drink like a normal person, not as someone who has schizophrenia, because I had not had an appetite for the last three days.

My mother realised that Jesus is the true God of all creation. Through a divine encounter, He revealed Himself in my room and freed me from the power of Satan. The Holy Spirit miraculously healed me in front of my parents. My mother's happiness overflowed when she shared the experience with my father. After the event, he visited his office to explain his remarkable nighttime adventure to his colleagues. He openly questioned who Jesus was. One of his friends invited him to a nearby Pentecostal church that day. We attended the service, where the pastor prayed for complete deliverance. A slight demonic manifestation occurred during the prayer, and he cast out the evil spirits. I experienced complete healing and restoration. This remarkable transformation brought peace and joy into our home. The visionary experience taught us that life without Jesus is incomplete. It awakened a sense of sin we had not recognised before, prompting us to confess our wrongdoings to Jesus and accept Him into our lives. I later completed my legal training and now work as a High Court lawyer. For the past five years, my family has been declaring Jesus as Lord, and we thank Him for the welfare He has given to our family.

The story depicts Jesus fighting between good forces and evil while ultimately prevailing against demonic powers. The narrator's worsening situation, through demonic expressions and bodily changes, results in an escalating crisis. The mother expresses grief while questioning traditional religious gods, thus showing that family members have lost their faith. The mother shows her need for assistance and acceptance of the actual divine being, creating an opening for God's divine intervention. The divine healing act demonstrates how God uses his divine abilities to influence human existence. The narrative illustrates how an individual underwent a sudden transition between different faiths during an extensive spiritual transformation. The elimination of evil spirits and the complete restoration of health indicate a profound spiritual metamorphosis. The Holy Spirit and Jesus remove all abnormalities as the narrator reaches ordinary life. The story demonstrates how Jesus' name carries the power to transform people. The narrative illustrates why each person must acknowledge their sins before accepting Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. When the mother admitted Jesus was the genuine divinity, this prompted the father to investigate Christianity, which culminated in familial conversion. This account reflects the fundamental human

desire to uncover the reasons behind existence and the purpose of life. The mother's prayer catalyses the event.

The narrative reveals how Indian society accommodates multiple faiths, as people turn to different religions for guidance and support. India has witnessed an increasing emergence of Pentecostal Christianity, with these religious denominations focusing on spiritual events alongside miraculous healings and recoveries. The testimony shows how Hindu rituals stand in opposition to the Pentecostal Christian practice of building personal relationships with God.

The story of Shivani Manhar's Pentecostal supernatural intervention starkly contrasts with her family's extended suffering and futile attempts at healing via traditional Muslim and Hindu rituals. The Pentecostal church became a source of comfort as she was miraculously liberated from demonic powers. As an observer, noticing her facial expressions and gestures, she communicates how much she enjoys her life with Christ. The Holy Spirit, who transformed her and the entire family, is credited with her incredible healing. The researcher observes that the family's conversion and the renewed sense of peace they experienced starkly contrast with their former sorrow, highlighting the profound strength of their faith and the role of supernatural intervention.

There is also no scientific evidence to support the argument that a vision can bring about a miraculous transformation. However, for Pentecostals, trust in *MC* through vision is a matter of faith and inner transformation. Pentecostals claim that the Holy Spirit works in extraordinary ways to lead people to Christ, and visions are a method through which the Holy Spirit communicates with individuals. Shivani Manhar's life-changing experience was precipitated by her mother's divine encounter during a critical crisis. Jesus offered a ray of hope even though there was no way to escape the demons through other deities. This experience was made possible by the miraculous, liberating work of the Holy Spirit.

In empirical research, some individuals have shared their stories of spiritual transformation, similar to those of Sarada and Shivani. They describe experiences with visions or dreams of Jesus that led them to seek help from Jesus. Approximately six people have reported *MCs* as a result of this. Although they had no prior knowledge of Jesus or Christianity, they were compelled by divine intervention through a vision, which led them to turn to Christ. These experiences,

which included visions or dreams as encounters with God, radically changed their lives and instilled faith in them.

The appearance of Jesus gave them firm faith and a positive influence. The vision helped them emerge relieved from their challenging life situation. Visions provide them with hope and help them overcome challenges. Through this experience, they could connect with the divine and gain a deeper understanding of the ultimate truth. In all cases, converts reported that they sought a genuine deity and felt a sense of mutual connection. Individuals can see Jesus in their visions regardless of context, defying their religious beliefs and expectations. Next, conversion experiences related to the miraculous encounter with the Holy Spirit are examined.

3.3.5. Miraculous encounter with the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit creates an extraordinary experience that produces spiritual renewal and empowers believers for inner metamorphosis (Acts 9:3-6). Such a meeting is the fundamental catalyst to revive both hearts and slumbering faith. The experience fosters a profound spiritual connection and has the power to transform individuals and communities deeply. Pentecostals firmly believe that preaching with the power of the Holy Spirit can profoundly influence people's minds and create anticipation for God's miraculous works (Abraham 2021:178). This is clarified by Ma (2005:20–21) by stating the following,

Healing or the supernatural work of God causes a 'wow' effect in the mind, and it causes a 'crack' in their tight worldview, reinforced by community life in a tribal setting. A tangible experience of the power of God brings changes in numerous areas of personal, family, and even community life. Such a healing or miracle plays a decisive role in a conversion.

The process of understanding the mind addresses personal issues and challenges, thereby promoting healing and restoration. If you want a life-changing encounter with the Holy Spirit, be open, surrender, and have faith. During the qualitative interview, George Joseph (2022) (Anonymous name), the son of a Pentecostal pastor, narrated his fantastic encounter with the Holy Spirit. He describes,

I ignored my parents' warnings to stop drinking and engaging in otherworldly habits, and during college, I spent time with drunks and criminals. As a result, I became increasingly ill and eventually left home to get involved in drug smuggling. For five years, I was part of a drug gang. On one occasion, when the police arrived,

I fled into the bushes. The police accused me and our organisation of various crimes, and those cases are still ongoing.

I made a significant amount of money from the drug trade. However, one of my parents had a problem that led to negative comments about their service. I believed that the police would not arrest or punish me. There was a time when I transported drugs worth over five lakh rupees to drug dealers. As I was walking, the police started following me. To evade them, I drove fast and threw the drugs into nearby woods.

Based on the information they gathered, the police arrested me. Although law enforcement could not substantiate the allegations, I was detained for six months before being released. I considered rejoining the drug smuggling groups I had been part of for years. The team decided against accepting me after police authorities filed charges against me, yet no group member extended assistance. After a long time working with them, I began reflecting on the reasons for my organisation's exclusion. I experienced a profound moment of divine contact when God spoke to me. The Almighty Spirit touched my heart and revealed the love of Jesus to me. In a gentle voice, the Spirit urged me to acknowledge my wrongdoings and to follow Jesus Christ. I sensed a calling to serve God's kingdom with my life.

I began weeping and revealing my wrongdoings because I knew the Holy Spirit dwelt among us. The powerful spiritual encounter completely changed me. Before me, I stated that Jesus Christ was my Saviour and my Lord. My return home drove me to make amends for my disobedient actions and my immoral behaviour towards my parents. I expressed my inner search for the holy presence of the Lord through a sacred lifestyle that involved fasting and prayer because I dedicated my entire life to His divine purpose. The Christian television station selected me to serve as their project manager in 2017, as they uphold all Christian values. I encountered the Holy Spirit, which transformed every aspect of my life. I have deepened my faith relationship with God and my family ties with my parents, after this event. I have grown into a faithful child of God and actively bear witness to Jesus among the youth and younger generations. Today, I am grateful to be a blessing to many.

The story of George Joseph's conversion revolves around an intense spiritual experience. His moment of tranquillity and astonishment came when he heard God's voice, felt the touch of the Holy Spirit, and experienced the love of Jesus in a season of personal strife and solitude. God's voice encouraged him to repent and follow Christ. From this moment, George acted deeply and instantly, converting to Christianity and declaring Jesus his Lord and Saviour. This moment brought about a transformative shift in him. His acceptance of forgiveness for his parents extended far beyond mere forgiveness because his dedication to God became boundless. This conversion had a lasting impact on him, as he pledged to share his faith and deepen his bond with God and his family.

Similarly, a Pentecostal believer, Joshua Raj (2022) (Anonymous name) shares his personal conversion story. He testifies,

Throughout my life, my father has guided me to maintain exemplary behaviour at home and within our church community as a Pentecostal pastor. However, my life outside these environments was marked by immorality. A significant change occurred after a preacher addressed a massive gathering of people in a crusade. I paid no attention to the sermon until a preacher warned about damning those without entries in the Book of Life to eternal hell. At that moment, I became utterly attentive. The message from the preacher brought me to tears in the presence of God, so that I might receive the Holy Spirit.

I was paying close attention when the preacher called on the altar for anyone who wanted God to intervene in their names in the Book of Life. Without thinking, I got up and moved toward the stage, only to duck under the sound system. The speaker surprised me by speaking directly and giving me a future prophecy. The experience with the Holy Spirit became an influential religious revelation that motivated me to repent before I chose to embrace Christ.

The Spirit of Christ showed my sins to me at that instant, so I broke down in tears as I admitted my mistakes and committed to follow Jesus for salvation. That evening marked a miraculous experience with the Holy Spirit that transformed my life. I was granted a second chance, allowing me to replace my negative thoughts with a renewed mindset. Since then, I have dedicated my life to serving God.

Joshua conveys the impact of his divine encounter through expressive and colourful language. His story employs strong terminology, striking imagery, and an emphasis on the dramatic events of the crusade and his encounter to illustrate the profound and life-changing nature of his encounter with God. The encounter's central theme is God's revelation of His life purpose. He turns from his sins toward Christ as a result of this revelation, marking a significant turning point. The wording highlights the man's emotional vulnerability, the strength of the Holy Spirit, and the long-term effects of his conversion.

Both George and Joshua had similar experiences related to their encounters with the divine. Both individuals were descendants of pastors and led a secular lifestyle. Through experiencing an interaction with the Spirit in an unforeseen temporal and spatial context, individuals became aware of their sins. Subsequently, they embarked on a path of repentance and devotion to the divine.

The people in question received a message during the encounter that led them to abandon their old way of life and follow Jesus in devotion. People frequently confess their sins and turn to Jesus as their personal Saviour. Language is one of many means of communication. Instead, they consider the message personal, divine, and pertinent to themselves. Some people encounter divine

communication when they study the Bible. In the empirical study, a traditional Christian participant, Aleyamma Mathew (2022), narrates her conversion story:

I come from a well-educated, wealthy family within the Church of South India (CSI). I have undergone many struggles in my fifties, which were quite challenging. I sought advice from several people while searching for answers, but I needed help locating the answers I hoped for. I consequently lost my inner peace. I started reading the Bible regularly at that point. Once, as I was sitting in a chair and reading the gospel of Matthew 7:21-23 (NLT): 'Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as 'Lord,' but they still won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven. On judgment day, many will tell me, 'Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Go away; the things you did were unauthorised.'

Reading the text made me recognise the Holy Spirit's presence. The divine power shifted my body; I remained unable to rise from the floor. The Holy Spirit revealed that repentance, followed by accepting Jesus as my Lord and Saviour, was needed. I identified as a Christian by name only but had no understanding of what it meant to admit wrongdoings and change behaviour patterns. I was deeply touched when the Spirit spoke to my heart. I took time to reflect on my identity and God's true nature. At that moment, I understood that I was nothing and nobody was without Him. I surrendered completely to God, asking His forgiveness through endless tears that perhaps kept me lost in time for multiple hours.

My eyes drifted automatically toward two feet sitting in front of me before my mind identified them as belonging to God. My fear of looking upward caused me to weep more heavily. Then, I heard the Spirit of God say, 'I died for you.' After this experience, I felt weightless. I consequently started setting aside more time to read the Bible, which considerably calmed me. The incident brought about a significant alteration to what my future would look like. A desire to learn more about Jesus and His teachings led me to seek worship at a Pentecostal church the following day, where I prayed in the Spirit. I developed a profound belief in my faith because I follow the Lord Jesus' commands precisely as He intended them. Worshipping Him fills me with immense joy, and I feel spiritually blessed.

The narrative depicts how a woman moves from religious apathy to genuine faith. Through biblical influences, the narrator experienced a transformation. The account illustrates how one should acknowledge their weaknesses before surrendering to God's leadership. In her experience with the Holy Spirit, she received two divine messages through visions and auditory experiences, which became vital symbols of God's loving presence. The narrator displays awe-struck fear through her tears, which indicates her humility. Through the Holy Spirit, divine power changes individuals by revealing absolute truth and creating internal conviction. The spiritual encounter triggers three powerful states: a feeling of weightlessness and calm, leading to immense joy. After this transformative moment, people recognise their need for repentance and accept Jesus as their

saviour. People choose Pentecostal churches for their experience-based worship, which engages the Holy Spirit.

This passage intensely exposes human emotions, coupled with spiritual traces of longing. Physical and spiritual experiences verify the psychological and emotional intensity they create. The story demonstrates how humans seek spiritual meaning alongside purposes and meaningful connections in the divine presence. The text shows how profound spiritual transformation reveals the powerful effects that faith and an authentic relationship with God bring to life.

As an observer, the researcher noticed that while the woman shared her story, she moved emotionally and in awe as she described her encounter with the divine. The joy of a divine personal encounter led her to a significant transformation, marked by a deepening zeal to learn more about Jesus. The woman's gestures while sharing her testimony reveal her confidence in conversion, resulting in a positive relationship with God. This is a positive result of the profound transformation.

Transformational conversion alters the self-image (Gooren 2010:93). The concept of a 'miraculous encounter' involves recognising fundamental truths or personalising a message. It is an important event that reshapes lives and leaves a lasting impact. Such a message may include admitting one's sins, asking Jesus for forgiveness, asking for His support in difficult times, recognising that one's worship is misguided, or accepting Jesus. The story shows how the Holy Spirit helps people to receive Christ. Encounters with the Holy Spirit are crucial to the conversion process. There is excellent disagreement (Cessationism) about how the Holy Spirit converts sinners. Traditional Christians question the authenticity of these conversions.

Many Pentecostals believe that an encounter with the Holy Spirit occurs shortly after conversion. This experience often results in notably positive reactions, including increased conversions to Christianity (Hey & Waugh 2015:15). A supernatural encounter can lead to a dramatic transformation, causing people to believe in and obey God. The tremendous impact of the Spirit of God on people's lives develops a fresh conviction and experience of the divine, leading to humility, repentance, and a desire to welcome God's transformational activity. This movement is frequently accompanied by the conversion of many unbelievers to Pentecostal Christianity (Hey & Waugh 2015:11). Milton (2015:6) claims that

‘conversion is always associated with the moment... of encounter with God which leads to a transformation [that] can be considered as conversion.’ In an interview with a doctor, Ragesh Anu (2022) (Anonymous name), a Hindu convert, says:

When I was young, I experienced my mother's departure. I started experiencing symptoms of depression. I thought about the possibility of suicide. I thought my life was over. Our family experienced a state of isolation, without fellowship with anyone or visitors. Before graduating from high school, I prepared for the Pre-Medical Test (PMT), an annual medical licensing examination. Soon after my father remarried, my relations with my stepmother had become so awful that I was struggling with an acute depression that led to multiple suicide attempts.

God saved my life, and He has prepared a specific path for me. A Pentecostal believer introduced me to Jesus when I was experiencing my most difficult time; therefore, I began to wonder about an Almighty power that could understand everything I said and thought. The encounter with the Holy Spirit happened during a prayer meeting following my experience introducing Christianity. I was overwhelmed by a sense of peace (Shalom) and deep joy during this encounter, while negative thoughts vanished from my mind. Experiencing this life-transforming moment brought back my sense of self and granted me peace, wholeness, and inner contentment. I had fresh energy and no negative thoughts. In my own experience, this incident ranks among the most remarkable miracles.

From this moment forward, I am convinced that Jesus is both the divine being and the Saviour of my life. In an instant, I was able to recognise and admit my sins. Tears streamed down my face as I embraced Him as my Saviour and Lord. I later cleared the PMT through divine intervention and was accepted into the MBBS program. Despite all the difficulties, I passed my tests with flying colours. My spiritual path in Christianity starts at this point. As a child from a Hindu family, it was predictable that my parents, together with my extended family, would resist my acceptance of Jesus as a significant life element. My parents showed extreme dislike toward my faith, so I had to obey their instructions about idol worship and stay away from church services. Eventually, however, I was granted permission to attend Sunday Pentecostal services and to embrace any faith of my choosing—a freedom that continues to be upheld.

The narrative reveals that Rajesh was depressed after his mother left him and considered suicide. The Pentecostal Christian he accidentally met led him to find Jesus, which launched his futile pursuit of meaning. At his prayer group gathering, the man experienced a supernatural encounter with the Holy Spirit that ended his pessimistic mindset and brought his conquest over despair and anxiety. Christ led him to experience joy after he spiritually connected with the revelation. His experience of conversion occurred after he witnessed an extraordinary event that revealed his errors and led him to accept Jesus as his personal Saviour. He attributes his life's following blessings to divine intervention. This profound spiritual

awakening gave him a new sense of purpose and belonging, helping him overcome adversity.

The encounter between the divine and the human experienced during conversion triggers a personal transformation. All dimensions of converts' lives are touched by the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit (Iyadurai 2015:169). A transformative effect will occur in a person's life when they encounter the Spirit. A person becomes a new spiritual being through divine transformation when the Holy Spirit heals them, as described in Acts 3:19. Changing existing thoughts, lifestyles and relationships with God and people will result in refreshment. People experience spiritual transformation after encountering the Spirit because their spiritual experience profoundly touches them (Warrington 2009:14). This experience includes a personal awareness of God's presence, as well as a recognition of one's need for repentance and salvation. Additionally, this process establishes new social relationships through the restoration of life.

The experience of encountering the Spirit manifests itself in various ways. It is often influenced by a person's personality, temperament, or immediate circumstances (Warrington 2009:18). Different individuals' experiences connect with the divine in various ways. Some miraculous encounters with God through the Spirit occur during spiritual worship, while others arise in silence. Certain people experience a divine encounter through intense emotional experiences. Likewise, some people connect with God through intellectual pursuits, such as reading the Bible, while others do so through prayer (Warrington 2009:18).

The Pentecostal belief instructs people to encounter God's Holy Spirit to enhance their trust in Jesus and generate transformative outcomes. The participants in the focus group explained how people discover God through the Holy Spirit's work either during quiet time, Bible study, or when facing testing situations, which can help them turn to Jesus Christ for salvation. Several instances can lead to spiritual awakening, either gradually through small steps or suddenly through a dramatic life change. A personal relationship with God emerges through the process, which includes conversion and repentance and leads people to have faith in Christ. Approximately nine participants in the empirical studies shared their stories about encounters with the Holy Spirit that led them to repentance and faith in Christ. Such an encounter often causes them to move emotionally toward God by crying out and confessing their sins.

The experiences of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus mark the beginning of the mind's activities, rather than fleeting occurrences that come and go (Moltmann 2009: x). When someone encounters the Spirit, their old values, beliefs, and behaviours will change, enabling them to live a new life. Moltmann (2009: x) states, 'The experience of the spirit is an inner liberation from dark and oppressive forces that torment the soul.' Spiritual advancement within the Christian faith requires spiritual experiences that foster spiritual growth and maturation.

3.3.6. Prophecy

Pentecostals emphasise the need for prophetic ministry to address society's practical difficulties and challenges successfully. The emphasis on practical application makes it particularly relevant to leading people into a relationship with Christ. Prophecies are of great importance within the Indian Pentecostal movement. Believers view them as explicit communications from God or the Holy Spirit, providing guidance, understanding, and occasionally prophecy. Klingshirn (2021:156) refers to Jerkings (1909:36) to explain Origen's definition of prophecy as 'the science of signifying things that are unseen by means of language.'

A prophet communicates directly with an individual, revealing hidden realities, past, present or future. The personal connection and seemingly divine interaction can have a profound impact, evoking a sense of wonder and stimulating the search for spiritual meaning. Abraham (2014:64) expresses, 'In the strict sense, the prophets are not theologians, but rather conscious instruments of an immediate divine commission and demand.' Some converts experience a divine form of communication known as a prophetic encounter, which is especially suited to their situation, prompting them to abandon their previous religious beliefs and embrace the teachings of Jesus. Rani Indu (2022) (Anonymous name), an unmarried Hindu woman in the focus group, describes her encounter with religious conversion.

I come from a family that practices Hinduism. My father was an alcoholic and caused numerous problems in the household. There was no peace at home. Constantly fighting each other. Once, I thought of committing suicide because there was no peace at home. I faced many challenges in life, although I practise idol worship and perform pujas. I battled demonic possession for almost two years, which constantly pushed me to end my life. The devil's influence led me astray. As the elder daughter, I participated in every family puja and religious function without believing in the family gods.

When my brother has a profound spiritual experience with Jesus, he chose to follow Christianity. He often advised me to go to church. However, I did not go to church because I hated Christians. One time, I accompanied my brother to church. On this particular day, the pastor prophesied to me. He exposed all the immoral acts of my life and the challenges I faced. He even mentioned what was happening at home. I was particularly impressed when the priest revealed something I had never shared with anyone at home. It had a profound effect on me and led me to decide to attend church regularly. I started reading the Bible and praying. After attending church, I gradually stopped performing pujas. Then, my father and others got angry and wondered why I did not perform pujas. Even though I heard all these things from them, I remained silent.

I knew what I was saying might make my father angry with me. I have felt secure and have been delivered from demonic battles ever since I turned to Christ. My faith and trust in the Lord remain unwavering, regardless of my father's reaction. My ability to stay firm results from the Holy Spirit's strength. I saw Jesus as the only God deserving of all adoration during that journey. I acknowledged my transgressions and accepted Jesus as my Saviour and Lord by faith. It took a year, but eventually, my parents also became followers of Christ. I felt immense gratitude to God as my entire family now worships Jesus. No longer participating in puja and sacrifices to idols, we now honour Jesus by following His Word. Our household is filled with harmony, and my father has also stopped consuming alcohol.

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Noteworthy is the fact that Rani Indu used to despise Christianity. Nevertheless, when the Prophet revealed a message to her, it completely transformed her life. This encounter altered her perspective on Christianity, and she began attending church regularly. She was ultimately moved to convert and abandon her prior religious practices as a result of the prophetic encounter. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, she gained the courage to confront obstacles, which transformed her into a steadfast believer. She developed absolute faith that the demon spirits would depart from her life. Peace became a permanent presence in her life.

As part of their faith, Pentecostals teach that the Holy Spirit enables persons to receive spiritual messages through prophecy. The Holy Spirit displayed its power through Paul in the town centre of Paphos in Cyprus. Paul uses a prophetic message to scold the sorcerer Elymas, which leads to Elymas losing sight. This encounter led to the conversion of Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor living in the area (Acts 13:9-12) (Soderlund 2019:246). Pentecostals believe that prophecy

has the potential to be a powerful means by which God speaks to people and helps them turn to Christ. They recognise that prophecies can help individuals overcome challenges in their lives. The prophecy is a powerful belief that has influenced Indian Pentecostalism. It has instilled a sense of hope and confidence in various people. Josymol (2022) (Anonymous name) and her family experienced a prophetic encounter and deliverance. During the interview, she shared her story of conversion despite her nominal Christian upbringing:

My parents belonged to the Hindu community but later embraced the Christian Marthoma faith. Being the only daughter in a Marthoma family, I was raised this way. In May of 2022, my parents and I were prompted to switch from the Marthoma religion to Pentecostal because of a powerful prophetic message that freed us from evil spirits. Evil forces in my life prevented me from pursuing my education. The primary reason for this was the personal pujas, prayers, and other rituals observed by those in my family who belonged to the Hindu faith. Their goal was to destroy us. This bothered me a lot. The devil spiritually tormented me.

The primary reason for this was the personal pujas, prayers, and other rituals observed by those who belonged to the Hindu faith in my family. Their goal was to destroy us. It bothered me a lot. The devil spiritually tormented me. In Hindu temples, my image was constantly involved in performing sorcery and pujas directed against me. There was an instance where I felt as though the satanic spirit had taken my life. After experiencing a range of challenging physical experiences, I was almost killed. My parents were distraught and unable to help me due to the absence of any assistance from their Marthoma church.

A Pentecostal prophet, a family member, visited our home. While praying for me, the Prophet revealed the whole story of my life and my evil possessions. As I showed them individually, I could suddenly feel the divine encounter and intervention of the Holy Spirit in my body. A great heaviness lifted from my body, and I experienced a profound sense of freedom from the evil spirits. After this, the Prophet instructed my family and me to "reject all sins and take Jesus as our saviour." The Holy Spirit provided us with the means to comprehend, confess our sins, and embrace Jesus, our redeeming sacrifice. The Holy Spirit led my family to pray in the Pentecostal church, despite this being our first time experience.

Accepting Jesus as our Saviour and Lord has filled our lives with peace, happiness, financial prosperity and other blessings. Jesus, our divine ruler, has brought about a profound change in our lives. We now find joy in worshipping Jesus, a feeling we had never experienced before. My miraculous experience has become a part of my parents' lives and has been instrumental in our spiritual growth. This transformation led me to dedicate my life to serving God.

Prophecy is generally understood to be a verbal message given to people by the Holy Spirit. The message can be about anything, but often, it is about God's plan for people's lives, with Josymol, the prophetic encounter and deliverance from evil spirits, led from the nominal Christian faith to the Pentecostal faith. After a prophetic encounter, the entire family had a transformative experience. It created

a new expectation and hope in life. Prophecies can also come through dreams, visions or other means. Iyadurai (2015:27) notes that 'the messages may vary' in prophetic encounters. These messages may include feeling convicted of sin, being forgiven by Jesus, receiving help from Jesus in difficult times, recognising the need to change a previous lifestyle, or feeling a personal need to accept Jesus. Converts are adamant that they saw the need for personal change and have been given God's message through prophecy. Through prophecy, the Holy Spirit sends divine messages which both guide people to Christ and fortify their spiritual devotion. Some individuals oppose Pentecostal beliefs about prophecy because they do not accept it as a means through which God communicates with people.

The researcher noticed in the empirical studies that two additional participants shared their experiences with prophetic encounters. One of the pastors mentioned that they carried out the prophetic ministry in the church and noted that this influences and changes the individual's life, leading them to a deep and personal relationship with God. The pastor emphasised that the prophetic ministry is not just a part, but a significant part, of the entire Pentecostal ministry, underscoring its importance and relevance in the research context.

According to Abraham (2021:242), 'Indian Pentecostals firmly believe that this is the age of the Holy Spirit and that the presence and activities of the triune God are experienced through the immediate presence and work of the Holy Spirit.' The widespread use of Miraculous elements in Pentecostal churches in India attracts many converts to their circle. Such manifestations of the Spirit are primarily found in the testimonies of essential events in conversion. Therefore, Pentecostals consider it *MC*. Now, we will discuss the theology of *MC* in Indian Pentecostal churches.

3.4. The work of the Holy Spirit in miraculous conversions

The history of Indian Pentecostalism, although not yet documented, is closely linked to the belief in *MC*, a phenomenon attributed to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. Pneumatology plays a crucial role in understanding *MCs*. As the power behind *MCs*, the Holy Spirit plays a significant role in convicting sin (John 16:8), instigating justice and judgment in a person who is sinful. Pentecostals believe that the Holy Spirit can work in extraordinary ways to bring people to faith

in Christ (Abraham 2021: 273). In India, the manifestation of the miraculous power of the Spirit becomes an essential element in attracting people to Christ and revealing His active presence in healing and deliverance (John 2021:3). The recognition of the supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit and the acceptance of miraculous encounters in conversion often define Pentecostal spirituality (Asamoah-Gyadu 2014:48).

According to Bosworth (2008:184), God provides evidence for divine healing that is as clear and convincing as the evidence for regeneration. Therefore, *MC* is understood as a direct result of the Spirit's profound transformation in a person's heart, mind and spirit. As noted in empirical studies, individual converts' experiences may vary from person to person, yet the Holy Spirit works in the lives of sinners. The Pentecostal belief in healing is typically based on first-hand accounts of individuals who have experienced healing, which they interpret as a direct manifestation of divine intervention enabled by the Holy Spirit and involving a direct relationship with God (Anderson 2002:523).

Empirical research shows that the censuses of conversion remind us of ordinary people's inability to rely solely on their cognitive skills and understanding to accept Christ. About 85% of conversions in India Pentecostalism are attributed to physical or mental healing, which shows that we are constantly dependent on God's intervention. The researcher observes that approximately 15% of Pentecostals may experience a divine encounter or come to know Christ through intellectual understanding and faith.

Pentecostals emphasise that followers of Jesus receive their supernatural strength from the Holy Spirit. Believers, a unifying force empowered by the same Spirit, can unite the community. Despite the inherent nature of sin, the Holy Spirit's influence is not limited. It is the Holy Spirit who convinces humanity of its sins. The works of the Holy Spirit are the cornerstone of Indian Pentecostalism, shaping its theological understanding, practices and lived experiences of *MCs*.

According to Pentecostal core beliefs, Jesus should be elevated above all else. They agree that one way of serving God and evangelising is through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts, which they utilise by praising and worshipping Jesus, speaking in tongues, and performing healing miracles, are different manifestations of the Spirit's power. The powers and grace of the Spirit enable these fantastic occurrences. Ruthven has written eloquently about continuing the work of Jesus

and performing his miracles, particularly in healing, by the power of the Holy Spirit. He also emphasises the importance of actively engaging with the spiritual gifts, following Jesus' example under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as an integral part of discipleship (Ruthven 2013:289–98).

Pentecostals fully comprehend the impact of the cross and the work of Christ. They profoundly comprehend and value the gift of the Holy Spirit, as well as Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. They recognise that Jesus Christ's ongoing work is revealed through the miraculous work of the Spirit, which empowers the fulfilment of His mission and the great commission today. People are persuaded by the Holy Spirit that sin has been defeated, and the obedient Christ has addressed all of its effects on humanity on the cross. These include illness, demonic spirits, pain, and other misfortunes. Jesus' complete provision on the cross has overcome all these sufferings, offering consolation and assurance.

3.4.1. The Holy Spirit as the Divine Agency

According to Pentecostals, the Holy Spirit is the divine agent who starts the conversion process. Through various manifestations, the Spirit transforms lives into new believers by healing people, driving out demons, or providing visions and prophets with divine insights into a new faith. People who share their conversion stories demonstrate a deep personal relationship with the Holy Spirit, as He guided them through spiritual miracles that shaped their lives. The above study of the conversion narrative analysis reveals why the Holy Spirit's miraculous act is essential in each convert's conversion process in the Indian context.

Similarly, in the focus group discussions, participants recount that emphasising the work of the Holy Spirit in ministry is vital in the Indian context. In addition to their culture's trust in the supernatural, Pentecostals in India find resonance in the miraculous. Miracles, such as healings and visions, align with local frameworks and offer hope amidst poverty and hardship. People seeking a more experienced faith are drawn to Pentecostalism because of its emphasis on firsthand experiences of close interactions with the divine and its theology of ongoing spiritual gifts. To create a feeling of involvement and connection, they have witnessed the Spirit's manifestation in the healing of terminal illnesses and the deliverance of ordinary people. It impacts their conversion experience.

The salvation provided by Christ has a profound impact on our physical health and has far-reaching consequences. It is only through the Holy Spirit that we can be saved and kept in the same condition. Jesus is the one who performs the acts of healing, anointing, and baptism with the Holy Spirit (Murray 2016:54). Abraham (2021:242) states that 'Indian Pentecostals firmly believe that this is the age of the Spirit and that the presence and work of God is experienced through the immediate presence and work of the Spirit.' Representatives of *MC* and Pentecostals believe that people can only be truly converted to Christ by manifesting the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the agent of regeneration, creating a new spiritual life in the individual during the *MC*. This new birth is not just a change of faith but a fundamental transformation of one's being (Jn. 3:3-8, Tit. 3:5).

Pentecostal theology holds that individuals can have personal experiences with the divine presence of the Spirit. There is a significant difference between traditional theologies and Pentecostalism, particularly the experiential aspects of divine healing and conversion (Menzies 2017:199). However, Reformed theologies and Pentecostalism also affirm the need for new birth or regeneration, a work of the Holy Spirit that brings about spiritual life and conversion (Foxgrover 2001:191–92). Likewise, Pentecostals tend to emphasise the experiential aspects of the Holy Spirit's role in conversion rather than intellectual understanding. Meanwhile, Reformed Christians tend to prioritise the philosophical aspect and attribute it to the convicting work of the Spirit (Foxgrover 2001:191-92). Pentecostals disagree with the traditional theological teaching that miracles no longer exist (Warfield 1918). Instead, they emphasise its importance as a transformative experience that leads the individual to conversion in the present.

Pentecostals are known for their proactive approach to spirituality. They advocate the pneumatic aspect, which involves a divine encounter with the Holy Spirit. This theology is in line with the significant role that spirituality attributes to the mind (Vondey 2017b:20). According to Yong's (2020:121) perspective, Pentecostal pneumatological views inspire us to seek actively, listen attentively and accurately perceive the presence and miraculous deeds of the Spirit of God, even within the language and advancements of scientific disciplines, contemporary technology, and scientific studies rooted in humanism. Pentecostals see nature and the supernatural as integral parts of a single, tangible reality. This stands in

contrast to other perspectives, such as Hindus, who consider nature to be fundamentally an illusion, Reformed theologians, who regard the supernatural as irrelevant to conversion, and secularists, who believe it to be non-existent.

In the theological understanding of *MC*, Pentecostalism holds its experiential nature and the transformative influence of Christ through the divine manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals believe that profound and awe-inspiring encounters with the divine Spirit in challenging life circumstances enable converts to develop a deep faith in Jesus' supreme authority (Abraham 2021: 202).

Cartledge (2016) states that Pentecostals recognise the 'Spirit's involvement in society by convincing individuals of sinfulness, righteousness and divine judgment' (cf. Jn. 16:8-11). Pentecostals rarely acknowledge the existence of transformative experiences with the Holy Spirit in non-Christian religions, or, as Menzies (2017:199) puts it, 'salvation outside the church.' Abraham (2021:246) notes that Indian Pentecostals recognise the extraordinary interaction with the Holy Spirit in the context of an individual's conversion, guiding, comforting and leading him to Christ.

3.4.2. The Holy Spirit as a liberator

In Pentecostal theology, pneumatology plays a central role in liberation as a catalyst for *MC* and an ongoing experience of freedom and empowerment. This is evident in the descriptive narratives of the participants' conversion stories presented in the earlier part of this study. Indian Pentecostals, according to Abraham (2014:5), have experienced 'the never-ending, ever empowering, liberating power and visible manifestation of the works of the Holy Spirit.' The *MC* narratives showed that the Holy Spirit frees the individual from bondage, granting them forgiveness, reconciliation with God and the promise of eternal life (Jn. 10:7-9, Rom. 6:23, 2 Cor. 5:17). The Pentecostal belief and practices in miraculous healings have been highly appealing as they have resulted in the healing of numerous people from illnesses, deliverance from demonic possessions, fears and curses that had feared them in their previous lives and led them to Christ (Abraham 2021: x). Readers may find solace and hope in the emphasis on healing via the work of the Holy Spirit. According to Pentecostalism, the Holy Spirit can free people from a number of bonds, including addictions, bad habits, illnesses, demonic forces, oppression, and evil influences. The Pentecostals' emphasis on

the Spirit's work can trigger dramatic changes in people, and the growth of Pentecostals in Indian society can be attributed to this transformative aspect of the movement.

MC can be a powerful release from these burdens and bring inner healing, peace, and a new sense of wholeness (Acts 10:38, Mark 16:17). This can be the starting point of this ongoing journey of freedom that empowers individuals to live victoriously in Christ (Gal. 5:1, Rom. 8:2). The Holy Spirit convicts people of their sin and encourages them to repent, thereby making them willing to repent (Acts 2:38; Jn. 16:8-11). *MC* is not a one-time event but the beginning of a lifelong transformation journey. The Holy Spirit continues to free believers from inner struggles and empower them to become Christlike, experiencing a more profound freedom (Phil. 1:6). In Pentecostal theology, it is believed that the Holy Spirit is a transformative power that leads to *MC*, enabling believers to achieve everlasting freedom.

3.4.3. The Holy Spirit as an agent of regeneration.

The Holy Spirit is the primary agent of regeneration, acting in accordance with God's sovereign grace and love. Pneumatology engages a comprehensive theological framework and examines the role of the Holy Spirit in transforming people through *MC* (Jn. 3:5-8; Tit. 3:5). Conversion is not simply a change in behaviour or belief but a radical transformation of the inner man. Abraham (2021:272) states that 'this experience is a sudden change in their fate from eternal hell to blessed heaven and from death to eternal life.' Regeneration is an ongoing process, not a one-time event, as the new nature grows and matures through faith and obedience (Green 2015:134).

A renewed mind characterises a new life in Christ, a transformed heart and a strong will to follow God and live according to His principles. The Holy Spirit is believed to create a new spiritual nature in the converted individual actively. This new nature manifests in the desire for holiness, love of God and others, and obedience to God's will. The regeneration analogy emphasises the Holy Spirit's miraculous and life-giving power in conversion. Humans are entirely passive during regeneration (Abraham 2019:184). According to Macchia (2023:298), 'regeneration is a miraculous event of spiritual awakening' because the Holy Spirit draws us 'to that climatic moment of yielding.' Since men are 'dead in trespasses and sins' (Eph.

2:1 NKJV), man has nothing to do with regeneration. It is entirely the work of the Spirit.

Similarly, Protestant theologian Allison (2018) argues that 'regeneration is entirely a divine work to which man contributes nothing.' The Holy Spirit is the divine person responsible for the new birth. The Reformed tradition also assumes that God works in regeneration by the Spirit, independent of human cooperation (Barrett 2013). However, it rejects the Pentecostal idea of miraculous works of the Spirit in regeneration. By exploring the pneumatology of *MC* as regeneration, we depict a profound theological mystery – the transformative power of the Holy Spirit renews human lives in a relationship with God.

Pentecostals believe in the supernatural transformation of hearts, minds and lives through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, by the grace of the Spirit, *MC* influences intellectual, emotional, moral and social areas of life (Yong 2020:55). The miraculous encounter and union of the Spirit with Christ transforms and Christomorphises the converted and converting life (Vondey 2017: 49). Despite the existence of alternative conversion processes, Pentecostals maintain the belief that conversion is not possible without the pneumatological constitutive measures. From a Pentecostal perspective, conversion is a personal interaction with the divine through the Spirit (Vondey 2017: 49). It is a life-changing experience considered essential for every believer. Furthermore, according to Studebaker (2012:203), the encounter with the heavenly presence provides a theological basis for constructing Pentecostal theology on *MC*.

3.5. Miraculous conversions and growth of Indian Pentecostalism

The subject of *MCs'* contribution to the extraordinary expansion of Indian Pentecostalism is intricate and intriguing. It is miraculous when someone's physical health and freedom from evil forces are restored wholly and instantly. The change results in a substantial modification of one's spiritual perspective. Spiritual leadership establishes itself as a vital element for attracting and keeping followers, aside from other factors. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend the relationship between these two components. Abraham (2021:97) rightly states that the most commonly used method of pastoral care in the Indian context, particularly among the poor and suffering people, is miraculous healing and conversion. Recent research among Pentecostals reveals that miraculous healings are the primary

element attracting people to Pentecostalism. Numerous miraculous testimonies, even from sociologists and observers, demonstrate that the miraculous healing method significantly contributes to their growth and brings about a transformation in the lives of ordinary people (Bauman 2015:94ff., Sahoo 2018:19; Bergunder 2001:101-102; Abraham 2021:98).

Bauman (2015:95) and Abraham (2021:98) noted in their recent studies how the Pentecostal evangelistic method, with miraculous healings, exorcism of demon spirits, power encounters, and other miraculous events, attracts people and contributes to the spread of Pentecostal churches in India. Abraham (2021:98) and James (2010:195) quote from Bauman's (2015:97) study, which found that eighty percent of Pentecostal pastors reported that evangelism focused on healing and encounters with demonic forces was the main reason for the growth of Pentecostal Christianity in the areas where they worked. A similar trend was observed in this research, where converts recounted experiences of joining Pentecostal churches due to miraculous healings, deliverance from demonic possession or witchcraft, encounters with the spirit of Jesus, prophetic encounters, and visions or solutions to familial or individual problems. Likewise, Bergunder pointed out that the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit's work in Indian Pentecostalism enables ordinary people to free themselves from their struggles and join Pentecostal churches (Bergunder 2008:146–47).

This study shows that *MC* belief and practice became a mandate for the growth and development of Indian Pentecostalism. The experiential practice of miracles has contributed to the development and growth of Pentecostal churches in India from their inception to the present day. Their hermeneutic approach to Scripture provides immediate access to apostolic authority, apostolic mission, and apostolic power (Courey 2016:89). The ontological immediacy of a particular Pentecostal worldview required a supernaturally driven practice driven by a hermeneutics of Pentecostal pragmatism (Courey 2016:89). Traditional Catholic and conciliar ecumenical churches have seen a sharp decline in their enthusiasm for the mission (Kanjamala & Arles 2014:309).

Pentecostalism is a revival of the missionary method depicted in the Acts of the Apostles. It gained prominence in the early 1900s. Pentecostals emphasise miracles and have a sound scriptural basis. Practices such as healing and exorcism typify their vigorous evangelising. These unique characteristics have led

to notable *MCs*. In empirical studies, pastors reported that their churches experienced growth as a result of the healing ministry. The Pentecostal affirmation of the role of miracles in the lives of ordinary people led to an increasing number of Christians in Indian churches (Mallampalli 2023:241). The most important tenet of Pentecostal theology and practice is the need to promote the spread of the kingdom of God by demonstrating miraculous deeds.

Indian culture, characterised by its many spiritual traditions and reliance on personal testimonies, creates fertile ground for *MC* narratives. The converts' stories connect deeply with people seeking solutions to social, economic, physical and spiritual problems. Powerful *MC* testimonies can be deeply compelling, evoking a sense of awe and wonder. These narratives often serve as practical tools for evangelisation and promoting community cohesion. The healings and exorcisms are the reasons for most conversions in Pentecostal churches in India. This is also evident in the studies of Pentecostal growth by many Indian scholars, particularly in the works of Bauman (2008, 2015), Bergunder (2011), Sahoo (2018), and Abraham (2021).

The empirical study participants' conversion narratives highlight the Pentecostal practice of supernatural acts that connect people with physical and spiritual challenges, offering them hope and facilitating profound personal transformation. Pentecostal churches in India have skilfully adapted their message and practices to the local Indian environment, including indigenous customs and languages. Their expansion was facilitated by their adaptability, often through the use of creative methods of worship and service. Pentecostalism can give marginalised population groups a sense of inclusion, help and the chance for social advancement. These factors, along with the emphasis on individual agency and spiritual empowerment, appeal to a broader audience drawn to Indian Pentecostalism. Pentecostal beliefs and practices have contributed to making them one of the fastest-growing movements in India and beyond.

3.6. Theology of miraculous conversions in Pentecostalism

Pentecostal conversion theology emphasises the miraculous and transformative power of the Holy Spirit (Sharpe 2013:169). The conversion arises from a sudden or gradual encounter with the Holy Spirit (James 2009:172). The miracle often occurs during an encounter and manifests itself abruptly, quickly and

with certainty (Kittel & Bromiley 1995: 206). Pentecostal theology, with its concepts of election and grace, suggests that the Spirit of God is with us in these significant moments in a miraculous way, unlike at any other point in our lives. It is believed that at this point, a whole new essence inhabits converts, and they become participants in the true nature of the divine (James 2009: 178).

This study highlights the range of gifts believers receive within Pentecostal theology and spirituality, underscoring the profound nature of the spiritual experience. Does Pentecostal spirituality depend on the Holy Spirit's miraculous acts during conversion? These presents mould the perception of salvation, the role of the Holy Spirit, and a believer's life in eternity in Pentecostalism. These competencies shape the concept of salvation in a Pentecostal Christian's understanding of the Holy Spirit and the believer's life after death. The apostles received the gift of languages and the ability to treat the sick when the Spirit descended upon them at Pentecost (Acts 2). Paul describes how charismatic skills are vital to the congregation's existence in 1 Corinthians 12–14. Among these are known as prophecy, healing, and glossolalia. These gifts are regarded as ceaseless acts of the Spirit, enhancing the spiritual lives of the believers. Mark 16:17-18 records how disciples taught believers with two distinctive miracles, which included healed sicknesses and speaking in tongues as signs of faith. The church maintains its continuous support of believers through gestures that emphasise their duties according to Pentecostal belief.

Pentecostal theologian Studebaker (2012) argues: 'It is counterproductive to downplay these experiences – without this experience, one *cannot* know God.' The essence of God and the Holy Spirit remains constant. If the Spirit performed miracles in the early church, that power is accessible today. The miraculous gifts were signs and tools for spreading the Gospel and building the church. Pentecostals believe that these gifts are still necessary for effective ministry. Present-day Pentecostals use personal experiences of healing, speaking in tongues, and witnessing miracles to demonstrate the activity of the Holy Spirit. Some Christian groups termed Cessationists read the Bible differently to claim all miraculous gifts ended when the New Testament completed its revelation. Pentecostals believe in the supernatural role of the Holy Spirit, which relates directly to their theological principles because they both utilise Biblically supported texts and first-hand testimonies.

The healing becomes a turning point in the life of the person being healed (cf. Matt. 20:34; Mark 5:18-20; 10:52; Luke 18:43). Anyone who experiences a miracle of Jesus is led onto the path of discipleship, just as miracles are related to faith. Only faith, that is, the trust in the power of Jesus, which exceeds all human possibilities, can receive miracles (Mk 2.5:5,34; 7.29; 9.23–24) (Verbrugge 2004:524). This rich and dynamic theological concept is examined to gain a clear understanding of *MC*.

3.6.1. Supernatural Intervention

MC theology in Indian Pentecostalism is deeply rooted in a belief in the supernatural intervention and transforming power of the Holy Spirit. For example, several supernatural manifestations are found in Paul's conversion experience in Acts 9. The radiant light suddenly appears (ἐξαίφνης). The sudden appearance of this phenomenon suggests that it is a supernatural intervention, as mentioned in Luke 2:13. Light, known in Greek as φῶς, is a consistent attribute of divine manifestations (Warnken 2018:229). The conversion of Cornelius, as depicted in Acts 10:1-11:18, is a significant event marked by divine intervention, as evident through two visions and four entities in the narrative: an angel of God, the Holy Spirit, a voice from Heaven, and God Himself (Warnken 2018:258).

The miracles agree with the sermon; they serve as supplementary indicators through which Christ confirms the testimony of the witnesses (Acts 14:3; Rom 15:18-19). The act of proclamation is accompanied by extraordinary events and phenomena that serve as evidence of the supernatural power of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4; cf. 1 Thess. 1:5). The Spirit reveals supernatural powers to those who listen to the gospel (Gal. 3:5). The gifts of healing and the ability to perform miracles, along with the gift of proclamation, are living gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church (1 Cor. 12:8-11, 28). Furthermore, the author of Hebrews claims that God affirms the proclamation of salvation by manifesting extraordinary events and phenomena (Heb. 2:3-4). These signs and wonders are called 'the powers of the coming age' (Hebrews 6:5 NLT) and herald final salvation (Verbrugge 2004:524). The relationship between supernatural intervention and conversion has been a long-standing point of discussion among theologians and laypersons in Indian Pentecostal churches. It should be noted that no scientific evidence can definitively prove or disprove the existence of the supernatural. However, when viewed and

analysed variously, theological discussions and biblical quotations provide a range of perspectives on this intricate issue.

Miraculous intervention includes:

3.6.1.1. Supernatural experiences

The study reveals, as recorded in the various conversion narratives, that visions, dreams, deliverance, prophetic encounters, physical healings or encounters with the Spirit refer to the miraculous experience. The critical context for the unprecedented spread of Pentecostalism in India and around the world is the movement's promise of miraculous healing and spiritual liberation. This appeals very well to the poor and marginalised sections of society, including Dalit castes. Theologically, Pentecostals believe that miraculous interventions often create a pivotal moment of 'mystical turning point' toward accepting Christ.

Many people characterise the Pentecostal experience as potent, transforming, and taking place over a brief period, sometimes even during a particular event or encounter. It is a profound shift from the person's prior belief or lack thereof. The individual experiences God's love, forgiveness, or presence for the first time, leading to emotional and spiritual highs and a dramatic shift in perspective and sense of purpose. Witnessing the Spirit's miraculous intervention is a surprising and life-altering requirement of being in Christ.

However, to maintain an uninterrupted connection with the mind, one must first ensure that the inner pathways of receptivity are clear and free from any tendency to misbehaviour and resistance and, therefore, cause distress to the mind. This refers to the process of sanctification, achieved through both self-denial and spiritual renewal, which involves relinquishing the sinful nature and adopting a new identity in Christ (Eph. 4:22) (Land 2003).

3.6.1.2. Powerful conviction and repentance

The miraculous experience, as we have seen, converts share, frequently sparks a strong belief in sin and a desire for change. People might feel pressured to turn from their sins, confess their transgressions, and follow Christ. Thus, repentance is pervasive and constructive, affecting the space within a believer, leading to a deep and intimate acquaintance with God (Leon, 2018). But just like the man born blind, our eyes are opened to the truth of who we are and who God

is by the working of the Holy Spirit, who transforms our nature to both want God and be able to seek Him (Jn. 3: 3–8). The conversion story illustrates that transformation is the only way to reconnect with the divine.

Another frequently emerging aspect is a deep emotional response to realising one's need for God's grace. This often leads to drastic and emotional changes. The converts felt a compelling urge to repent, confess their sins, and follow Christ. This ongoing, constructive, and transformative dynamic of repentance in a believer's life fosters a deep and intimate connection with God (Leon 2018). The Holy Spirit's miraculous transformation of a person's nature creates a new desire and capacity for God (Jn. 3:3-8), serving as the only way to restore a connection with the divine.

Miraculous experiences through the Holy Spirit prompt converts to reevaluate their past lives and more actively seek God's work in their present lives through a process of cognitive restructuring. The transformative aspect of Christianity among converts primarily refers to the abandonment of a sinful life (Col. 3:5), former beliefs, and other lifestyle changes, as well as the adoption of cleanliness and manners, and the acceptance of biblical teachings and morals (Mallampalli 2023: 2016–17). Although man responds to this change through conversion, regeneration is initiated and sustained entirely by God's grace. Conversion can affect behaviour and character, often leading to miraculous or dramatic changes (Cartledge 2016). Undoubtedly, these changes increase their social well-being and promote the emergence of a new type of social collective. Converts will experience a new Christian identity, a renewed life in the Holy Spirit, and the blessing of God.

3.6.1.3. Immediate Personal transformation

Conversion is not just about theological understanding. This leads to a noticeable change in behaviour, values and priorities. Pentecostals believe that God leads people to conversion through the miraculous act of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 4:4-6), the ultimate act of turning to Him, whether it occurs suddenly or gradually. It refers to the conscious turning away from sin and toward God, abandoning former vices, cultivating virtues and pursuing a life according to new moral principles. Converts often say that we were once spiritually dead (Eph. 2:7);

we have been made alive to God and born again (Jn. 3: 3,7; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13). It is mysterious.

Transformation occurs through a radical conversion of the heart, mind, and lifestyle—often referred to as rebirth. It is similar to St. Paul's experience of seeing a blinding light and hearing Jesus' voice on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). After pondering Romans 13: 13-14, St Augustine converted to Christianity (Burgess 2011:57; Blackaby & Blackaby 2002:95). However, it is crucial to remember that not every Christian conversion is a miracle. Some perceive faith as a slow process, a developing consciousness of God. Neither abrupt nor gradual conversion is 'better' than the other; both are legitimate routes to following Christ. The hallmark of a Pentecostal conversion experience is an encounter with God that profoundly changes a life.

However, we must be careful that the role of supernatural manifestations and how these play into hasty decisions and conversions is still being debated and analysed in the faith world. Some have found the theological arguments unconvincing, while others have challenged the scientific evidence, the probability of alternative explanations, and the possibility of bias or misinterpretation. Ultimately, it is a matter of how people perceive and interpret the evidence before drawing a conclusion about whether a miraculous intervention occurred. Critical and unbiased thinking is vital in science.

3.6.2. Theological arguments for Supernatural Intervention

3.6.2.1. Argument from Religious Experiences

In the empirical study, various individuals report profound personal encounters attributed to the Holy Spirit's divine work, which led to conversion and faith in Christ, also known as *MC*. These experiences are associated with feelings of peace and an overwhelming sense of love for visions, healings, deliverances, encounters, prophecies, or answered prayers. While psychological or sociological explanations may be offered for such experiences, converts interpret them as evidence of the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit. Although Bauman (2015:114) and Abraham (2021:99) do not describe it as the *MC*, they rightly see the connection between miraculous healing and conversion.

Most Indian Pentecostal converts claim that the experience of miraculous healings and exorcisms leads them to recognise Jesus as the faithful Saviour and Lord. However, other Christian traditions disagree with the concept of an *MC* experience. O'Connell (2006) states: 'The core beliefs of evangelicals and Pentecostals are very similar, except that evangelicals tend to believe that speaking in tongues, healing, and other first-century manifestations of the Holy Spirit only occurred in the early Christian church were to be found and are no longer appropriate elements of Christian practice.' Likewise, Reformed traditions that espouse cessationism never believe in supernaturalism or claims of Pentecostal conversion experiences. For them, tradition, scripture, repentance, and faith in Christ are essential components of their practices.

Pentecostalism is a branch of Protestant Christianity that emphasises the gifts of the Holy Spirit—typically through speaking in tongues, or what is known as glossolalia, alongside supernatural healings and other phenomena of the Holy Spirit's work for conversion (O'Connell 2006). They relate to faith and practices such as faith healing and exorcism, which are said to be expressions of the Holy Spirit. Abraham (2021: 99) states, 'Divine physical healing is a special provision of God for humanity, leading people to salvation and improvement of life.' While Pentecostalism offers a spiritual explanation for miraculous healing experiences and conversions (*MC*), it is essential to consider all possible factors and approach such claims with a critical and open-minded perspective. Hindus claim to have a religious experience, and their belief in supernaturalism often criticises Pentecostals against over-emphasising spiritual experience.

3.6.2.2. Argument from miracles

Supernatural accounts, including healings, deliverances, spiritual encounters, and other spiritual manifestations, have been a hallmark of Pentecostalism's history. Sceptics have alternative explanations, but Pentecostal believers see such occurrences as confirmations of God's power and willingness to intervene. Miraculous events are at the heart of Pentecostal conversion theology. Extraordinary occurrences frequently awaken individuals and guide them from ignorance to understanding. In Acts 26:17-18 (NLT), Jesus spoke to the apostle Paul, 'I am sending you...to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then, they will receive

forgiveness for their sins and a place distinguished by faith in me among God's people.' According to Green (2015: 101), conversion, 'understood as a movement from darkness to light, is therefore easily seen as a movement from one less desirable to a more desirable life situation.' Light always goes hand in hand with redemption, forgiveness and peace (Luke 1:77-79). Therefore, *MC* leads from darkness (Satan's power) to the light of God (Acts 26:18).

Charismatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, witnessing miracles, and prophesying were not limited to the early church. They can be found throughout church history up to the present day. The experiences with the work of the Holy Spirit are also documented after the time of the apostles. The emphasis on experiencing healing and deliverance from demonic expressions is the central teaching of Indian Pentecostal Christians. The Pentecostal conversion narratives are living proof that the work of the Holy Spirit did not stop at this point. The church began to strengthen its beliefs and practices by recording miraculous events in the everyday lives of the church and converts.

3.7. Conclusion

The current understanding of *MCs* within Indian Pentecostal churches is complex and requires careful consideration of diverse perspectives. This era is regarded as the Age of the Holy Spirit, characterised by radical transformations through miraculous manifestations. Pentecostal practices and beliefs in these acts have significantly impacted numerous lives in India, particularly those experiencing poverty. While conversion methods face criticism and controversy, Pentecostalism remains the fastest-growing religious movement in India, primarily due to the practice of *MC*. The Pentecostal assertion that criticism cannot hinder supernatural intervention resonates strongly.

This research highlights that *MC* arises from diverse factors, such as healing, deliverance, visions, encounters, rationales, experiences, and prophetic interpretations. The focus is on the miraculous physical healing experience and the resulting shift in converts' beliefs and perspectives. Because Pentecostals believe *MC* is Spirit-driven, a pneumatological understanding illuminates how the Holy Spirit guides individuals to comprehend and experience the authority and joy of Jesus Christ's Lordship.

Traditional churches, along with sceptics, actively debate the worth and essence of miraculous events. The Pentecostal faith asserts that the Spirit imparts transformative power to Indian society, as it both empowers marginalised communities and challenges traditional clerical structures while expanding Christianity across India. The analysis requires further investigation into the long-term effects of these religious events on individuals and communities, as well as research on the relationship between Indian spiritual traditions and Pentecostal miraculous practices. Additionally, it highlights current religious and social patterns. We will move forward with a better understanding and application of *MC* among Indian Pentecostal churches.

This study employed a phenomenological approach to investigate the pneumatological work of *MC*, as measured by subjective interpretation, thereby contributing to an understanding of its theology. While objectively analysing such experiences presents challenges, this research has explored the complex beliefs and behaviours linked to transformative miracle experiences within this dynamic context. Finally, the theological understanding of *MC* in Indian Pentecostal churches is discussed, drawing upon believers' conversion stories and theological explanations.

Pentecostals in India place the supernatural workings of the Holy Spirit at the heart of conversion, as these actions align with their interpretation of biblical passages and provide effective means for spreading Christian influence throughout the multicultural Indian population. The depth of belief in supernatural conversion experiences receives scientific backing through numerous conversion stories that document life-changing events attributed to the Holy Spirit.

Empirical evidence reveals a compelling narrative of *MC* across India's diverse socio-cultural traditions, demonstrating that these events offer physical comfort and inner transformation. Scholarly theological exploration of *MC* remains limited. Social science research on the narrative features of conversion related to miracles also requires further development and consolidation. Conversion stories illustrate God's grace, manifested in love and power, which strengthens faith, fosters a connection with Christ, and leads to profound personal change. Pentecostals perceive in *MC* a genuine commitment to God within the convert, facilitating a connection with divine will and belief in Christ. This perspective

reinforces the belief in the Holy Spirit's ongoing, biblically supported miraculous works.

Beyond forgiveness, miraculous experiences bring empowerment, emancipation, and a sense of divine purpose. So, how do Pentecostal theologians justify their theory of miraculous conversion? Theologically, such encounters are emotionally and psychologically empowering, demonstrating through Christ and the cross that we are loved, and through the Spirit as our helper, that our lives can be transformed. Healing miracles can increase social standing and support. At the same time, inner transformations empower individuals to challenge social norms and build communities—the Pentecostal theology of *MC* centres on human experience grounded in Scripture.

Pentecostals consider miracles as signs of God's presence, irrespective of scientific explanation. Personal interpretation validates these experiences, thereby strengthening faith and deepening the connection with God. While Hinduism views reality as a unified divine entity, and Pentecostalism posits a distinct God and a real devil, Indian Pentecostals bridge these perspectives. They understand nature to be imbued with God's power, inseparable from Him. The natural world becomes the stage for God's miracles of healing. This force is said to manifest in healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues.

The next chapter further analyses this, including the advantages and disadvantages of these practices and the challenges of applying them in India.

Chapter - Four

Significance of miraculous conversions in Indian Pentecostalism

4.1. Introduction

For Indian Pentecostals, conversion is not just a change of faith but a life-transforming event, a profound spiritual awakening marked by a close encounter with the Holy Spirit. This encounter, rather than a mere intellectual acceptance of Christian doctrine, is the central and defining aspect of their faith journey.

The mighty Spirit baptism, a common life-changing experience in Pentecostalism, is characterised by church-wide revivals that feature miraculous signs. These signs, such as instant recovery from illness or the manifestation of divine inspiration through glossolalia, are not just incidental but essential to the unique Pentecostal experience of being born again.

This chapter addresses a key question: Why do Indian Pentecostals view the miraculous works of the Spirit as constitutive or definitive elements of conversion? Focusing on the Holy Spirit and its implications for understanding conversion guides our critical engagement with the theological underpinnings of the Pentecostal movement. The converts' experience will also be a subject of exploration. Through the lens of their narratives, we will examine the significance of extraordinary encounters in the conversion experience.

This research aims to fill a gap in existing scholarship that frequently overlooks the unique perspective of Indian Pentecostals. This chapter examines Pentecostals' notion and experience of conversion as a miraculous act of the Holy Spirit, through the lens of their theological underpinnings and the actual experiences of converts.

First, this chapter analyses what the Spirit's extraordinary work within Pentecostal theology reveals about Pentecost and its place in the conversion process. This article will examine the encounters of individual Indian Pentecostal converts and how their narratives describe miraculous activity in their conversion.

Next, we analyse the significance of specific supernatural events, such as healings, speaking in tongues, or prophetic revelations, in the conversion process from the perspective of the Indian Pentecostal Church.

Lastly, we will examine the significance and effects of supernatural occurrences in the ministry of Indian Pentecostals. We will conclude by discussing the challenges to *MC* practice in India, including cultural resistance, theological debates, and the need for contextualisation.

Unlike the existing literature on conversion, this study will demonstrate how Indian Pentecostals interpret and implement conversion as a continuous and ongoing process. Their faith is not a one-time event, but an ongoing journey significantly shaped by the power of the Holy Spirit.

4.2. The Holy Spirit and miraculous conversions in Pentecostal Theology

In Indian Pentecostal theology, the Spirit is a central, dynamic force that shapes the understanding of *MC* and its associated experiences. Pentecostal theologian Warrington (2008: 255) argues,

Theology without the presence of the dynamic Spirit can become rationalistic and not expectant of the miraculous; it can also be blind to the supernatural, be it good or evil. Pentecostals who combine a theological framework with an appreciation of the role of the Spirit can provide a more appropriate context for discerning and analysing extant supernatural phenomena while also anticipating divinely inspired manifestations of the Spirit.

Regarding the relationship between nature and the supernatural, Indian Pentecostals adopt a distinctive stance. Unlike traditional Pentecostals, Indian Pentecostals believe that the supernatural can influence the natural world. The Hindu perspective better accepts how the divine force enters the natural world. To demonstrate His work in the world, the Holy Spirit manifests through healing and speaking in tongues. This is consistent with the way Indians perceive supernatural events.³

According to an analysis of *MC* stories, converts often encounter the abrupt and dramatic character of spiritual transformation, frequently accompanied by remarkable occurrences. In this situation, the Holy Spirit is the main force behind spiritual transformation, inspiring awe and reverence. People are profoundly aware of their sins and yearn for Christ's salvation. In the focused group discussion, a participant reported the conversion experience of a brother, Jacob (2022) (anonymous name), whose son was suffering from a serious illness. God does the healing here—through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can perform

³ For further understanding, refer to the previous chapters.

miraculous healing in people's lives and convert them. The whole family was radically transformed after the Holy Spirit miraculously healed his son. They suddenly turned to Christ and left behind their old Christian ways of life. They became an active participant in their local Pentecostal church, demonstrating the radical nature of *MC*. A person's life, heart, and mind undergo drastic changes during the *MC*. In contrast, the story of Jacob's conversion illustrates the possibility of *MC* and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, attesting to the power and grace of God and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the contemporary world.

Pentecostals emphasise that the Holy Spirit convicts sinners of their sins, leading them into repentance and longing for transformation (Jn. 8:24; 16:8; Rom. 1:18-32; 2:4-5; Heb. 3:7-13; Jude 5). Although conversion stories are often motivating, they can also spark debate and criticism. Some contend that cultural or social influences may have shaped these stories, while others doubt the veracity of the reported paranormal experiences. Despite these criticisms, conversion stories remain important in spiritual experiences, emphasising God's power through manifestations like healings, encounters, visions, and prophecies. These stories include first-hand stories of transformation through faith in Christ. Notably, individuals who experience these conversions typically report a profound change in their lives, accompanied by emotions of happiness, joy, and liberation from evil, which inspires and motivates others on their spiritual path.

A diverse tapestry of elements from local cultures and religions, Indian Pentecostalism takes many forms, each of which is a unique manifestation of the Holy Spirit's influence on conversion experiences (Bergunder 2001:103–4). The study of the selective incorporation of specific elements of religious culture is intriguing (Samuel 1999:258). Pentecost services, for instance, may feature energetic music and dance forms from various Indian cultures, reflecting the cultural emphasis on rhythmic chants (*bhajans*) and devotional dances (*Bharatanatyam*) characteristic of Hinduism (Grimes, Mittal, & Thursby, 2018:25).

The sharing of personal stories of conversion and the Holy Spirit, a vital part of the Pentecostal service, resonates with the Indian tradition of oral storytelling, as seen in epics such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (Dash & Sahu 2023: 99; Hildebeitel 1999:44). The adoption of fasting and self-denial practices from Hinduism and Jainism by Pentecostals in India is another intriguing aspect of this cultural integration, a practice rooted in Jesus Christ's teachings to his disciples.

Visions and dreams are significant in Hinduism (Bulkeley 2008:20) and the Pentecostal experiences of the divine. Indian Pentecostals may also emphasise these visions, understanding them to represent divine action in their conversion. Faith healing is a practice and a deeply rooted belief across all religions in India. Pentecostal pastors may pray for the sick and connect their practices with traditional Indian healing methods such as Ayurveda (Ninivaggi 2008). This had an impact across India. Samuel (1999: 254) states: 'A strong pragmatic dimension, coupled with an openness to spiritual experiences, makes Pentecostal churches inclusive and draws on ideas, models and strategies from everywhere.'

Analysing the conversion narrative underscores that God can intervene in human affairs through miraculous healings, visions, or other extraordinary events, leading people to conversion. Conversion is not merely an intellectual assent to a set of beliefs, but a commitment to Jesus Christ, following Him even in the face of opposition, as seen in the cases of some converts who are sent out of their hometowns and houses, such as Sam Enosh and his mother, Santhi Bai (2022). The individual's perseverance in the face of opposition and trials is a testament to the strength that comes from faith in God. Various components can combine, like a spark igniting dry tinder, to produce a strong, unexpected religious experience. These components combine to create a life-changing moment of connection, encompassing thoughts, circumstances, unforeseen events, and even intense emotions.

Similar to this, underlying religious traditions place a strong emphasis on down-to-earth experiences. Here, healing and blessings are manifestations of God's favour. Through the reflective component, people can customise their religious experience (Samuel 1999:258). Just as important is the theme of deliverance from demonic activity and spiritual oppression, and the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in this process as the deliverer, providing assurance and protection.

Analysing the data in each conversion narrative underscores the reality of the Holy Spirit's extraordinary continuous works in healing illnesses and exorcisms. By analysing these accounts, we can develop a deep understanding of the Holy Spirit's transformational power and the truth of *MC*. Speaking in tongues is one of the central experiences of Pentecost. It denotes an intimate experience of the Holy Spirit and is sometimes cited as evidence of *MC*.

Pentecostal conversion theology emphasises pneumatology, or the study of the Holy Spirit, which is evident in the insight of Pentecostal theologians. Some academics, like Jalal (2023:11), contend, 'The Spirit and spiritual engagements are the significant ways in which God appears in our time.' Pentecostals who believe that God speaks through the Holy Spirit via miraculous experiences are influenced by their academic work, which is often grounded in Scripture. Due to these encounters, people can recognise the divine presence (Jalal 2023:12).

Indian Pentecostals believe that people can undergo profound personal transformation when they experience the Spirit during spiritual encounters. When the role of the Holy Spirit in *MC* is examined theologically, people can connect more deeply. Western Christian theologian Moltmann (1993:110) states, 'If the Spirit is a modality of our own experience, then the human experience of God is the basis of human theology.'

Various theologians, particularly Kim (2008:178), have contributed to strengthening 'the supernatural role of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal beliefs' regarding conversion in India. A distinctive feature of Pentecostal theology is the emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in missions and methods that emulate Jesus' ministry of exorcism. Furthermore, traditional theology often overlooks the distinctive approach of Pentecostal healing techniques, which address the fear of evil forces (Kim 2008:186).

Pandippedi Chenchiah conceptualises the Holy Spirit as a 'cosmic creative energy' (Chenchiah 2013:165) and offers a pneumatological interpretation within the cultural framework of India. S.J. Samartha, an Indian theologian, acknowledges the Spirit's possible presence outside the walls of the institutional church while relating the Spirit's activities to the internal spiritual process (Samartha 1990:251). In their motivational writings, these theologians highlight the Holy Spirit's miraculous role in conversion theology.

From a Pentecostal perspective, *MC* requires careful examination of the work of the Holy Spirit in human life. Theology revolves around conversion, explaining how people encounter Christ, with the role of the Holy Spirit being undeniable. Conversion is a miraculous experience through the intervention of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:63), transforming individuals into new creations and children of God (Jalal 2023:13). As Warrington (2008:255) suggests, 'the message of the gospel and demonstrations of the power of the Spirit' are revealed through

miracles, healings, and other supernatural events that lead to conversions. Conversion and significant changes may result from such occurrences (Mallampalli 2023:240–245). The experience of the Spirit's presence and transformative power has become central to the spirituality of modern Indian Pentecostals. They argue that Pentecostal theology is grounded in the internal dynamics of this shared experience.

4.2.1. The Holy Spirit's transformative power in Pentecostal Theology.

Pentecostalism emphasises the importance of the Holy Spirit and has made it the central authority in its doctrine and practices. Through the dynamism of the Spirit, individuals come to meet God in life-changing ways profoundly. While Pentecostal theology has strong beliefs and organisational structures, its defining characteristic is the deep sense of encountering God through a transformative experience made possible by the Holy Spirit (Albrecht & Howard 2014:235). Theology focuses on understanding God, while Pentecostal spirituality emphasises a broader encounter.

A potent illustration of the Holy Spirit's intimate and personal role in radical transformation can be found in each person's *MC* story. These are not just stories but unique and deeply personal experiences that are valued and recognised. They include healing from various physical ailments, encountering him through prophetic words, and being delivered from a life of sin. Spiritual experiences that bring people closer to God, mainly and individually, include seeing Jesus Christ, being freed from demonic possession, and recovering from the effects of witchcraft. In addition to being transformative, the work of the Holy Spirit is intensely personal, convincing people of their sinfulness and the necessity of repentance. As a stimulant, the Holy Spirit energises the heart, mind and life of the individual and their family. Even in the face of adversity and bad luck, personal accounts show God's omnipotence in every circumstance.

Pentecostal spirituality is characterised by a collective experience of the transformative power of the Holy Spirit (Albrecht & Howard, 2014:235). Pentecostals emphasise the experiential aspect of faith, guided by Scripture. It is a journey of fundamental conversion to Jesus, a pivotal moment that marks the beginning of a new life and an encounter with the regenerating work of the Holy

Spirit (Albrecht & Howard 2014: 238). Putting one's faith in Jesus and beginning a new life with Him results in a Christ-like character, a transformation made possible through the Holy Spirit (Jalal 2023:14).

Pentecostal theology is primarily concerned with the essential truths and practices associated with Christ's redemptive work and the supernatural acts of the Holy Spirit. Many testified in the empirical studies that the Holy Spirit delivered them from disease, spiritual oppression, sin strongholds and unnecessary suffering. According to Albrecht and Howard (2014:235), Pentecostal spirituality refers to the 'lived experience of faith.' Each Christian tradition perceives the presence of God in a distinct manner, influenced by its historical and cultural context. In particular, Pentecostal spirituality revolves around a direct experience with God and emphasises the significant influence of the Holy Spirit in facilitating individual development and change. Pentecostals believe that the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit transforms the individual into a new state of being, characterised by Christlike character (Jalal 2023:14).

Pentecostal theology strongly connects with the message of healing and spiritual liberation, bringing about significant changes in the experiences of the poor and marginalised. Since their inception, Pentecostals have advocated for a Spirit-centred theology, believing that the transformative power of the Spirit can change lives (Abraham 2021:64-65). They witness the extraordinary manifestations of the Holy Spirit as signs of the restoration of individuals in his kingdom with preeminent authority, representing the complete message of the gospel. According to Indian Christian theologian Chenchiah (2013:175), 'When the Holy Spirit transforms man into a son of God, he completely reshapes his life.' The transformation is visible in the converts' behaviour and approach towards others. In the new life in Christ, human faith and behaviour change based on internal impulses rather than external discipline (Jalal 2023:14).

The transforming power of the Holy Spirit is demonstrably at work in the conversion experience, characterised by accepting Jesus as Saviour and beginning a new life with him. Moltmann (2001:2–3) expands on this concept: 'The Spirit brings men and women to the beginning of a new life and makes them the determining subjects of this new life in the community of Christ.' Not only does it transform them into a perfect person, but it also makes them a new creation.

The gift of healing is vital because through miracles, many people's lives are touched, and people turn to God (Vondey 2023:19–20). Pentecostal doctrine regarding the work of the Holy Spirit emphasises that emotion, rather than rationality, should guide most of our actions and our relationship with God. This approach offers a valuable correction to reformed tendencies that focus heavily on biblical word and doctrinal truth, potentially leading to a rationalism that fears or denigrates religious inclinations. Nevertheless, what is unique about Pentecostals is not their theology or church structure but their sense of the experience of God (Pauw 2021:256). The divine presence works differently at different times, so Christian revivals do not follow a consistent pattern. We ought to engage with the work of the Spirit with an open mindset, as noted by Jonathan Edwards in his *Faithful Narrative* (McClymond 2021:167).

Pentecostalism is a branch of Christianity that underlines the role of the Holy Spirit. For followers, spirituality is primarily about listening to the Spirit and following its guidance in daily life. We will recognise how the Spirit reveals itself in individuals, cultures and communities. The church is reminded that openness to the divine presence and prayer for divine intervention is fundamental to genuinely experiencing the Spirit and becoming aware of God's presence in everyday life (Murphy 2018: 307).

The power of the Holy Spirit, manifesting itself in various signs, especially conversion (Owens 2005:47; Synan 2001), brings about a profound personal transformation. It transcends all boundaries, transforming lives from diverse religious backgrounds (Lepden Ao 2023:35–7), leading them from a predetermined path of eternal hell to a blessed existence in heaven, from death to eternal life (Abraham 2021:272). Pentecostalism, a global phenomenon, transcends denominations, organisations, and theological advances. It highlights the profound impact of the Holy Spirit on transforming people's lives. Since the inception of the movement, this emphasis has been a consistent feature of Pentecostal practices and reflections worldwide.

4.2.2. Miraculous role of the Spirit in conversion

Theological beliefs and daily activities of Indian Pentecostals are shaped by the need for miracle encounters and the Holy Spirit's transformative work, which is vital to the conversion experience (Mathew 2022:234). As this emphasis on the

deep intrusion of God into human life takes place, a profound transformation of the heart, mind, and life of the individual and their family also occurs, with its roots in Indian Pentecostalism. This belief, which frequently emerges in dreams, visions, healings, and other supernatural events, is reflected in Joshua Raj's (2022) (pseudonym) miraculous experience with the Holy Spirit. His experience — a vivid and real event — led to immediate remorse and a changed life. Pentecostals believe that this great work of the Holy Spirit is one of the first works that leads a person to repentance and ultimately causes them to confess their sin. Countless conversion stories from the collected data of biblical times demonstrate the wonders of the Spirit of God in our lives.

One of the many great stories that illustrate God's grace and the transforming power of an authentic encounter with the Holy Spirit is the life of George Joseph (2022) (pseudonym). Joseph's story provides perhaps the most potent example of a life transformed from sin and resistance to the Saviour of all men, illustrating God's immense power to confront sin and iniquity. By the Holy Spirit, we are freed from living lives of sin and bondage. In both accounts, the Holy Spirit entices a person towards the Lord. It increases their awareness of their condition of Spirit—giving evidence of the power of God amid sin and rebellion. According to both accounts, the Holy Spirit draws men closer to God and makes them more aware of their standing and condition in beautiful ways. The person is liberated from a life of sin and addiction through the work of the Holy Spirit. According to both stories, the Holy Spirit helps people become more aware of their spiritual state and draws them nearer to God.

The Spirit enables individuals to respond to the altar call and confess their sins. For this reason, Pentecostals view the Spirit as a missionary force that acts supernaturally (Warrington 2008: 250). The expectation of miracles stems from the belief that mystical powers are a direct result of the Holy Spirit's presence in the life and ministry of the Church.

Converts experience manifestations of the Holy Spirit, such as deliverance from demonic spirits and healing from physical ailments. Shivani Manhar (2022) (anonymous name) suffers from a devastatingly severe mental and physical illness, which is likely a combination of mental disorders and may be influenced by Hindu cultural beliefs. Being from a strong Hindu background, her family sought traditional healing practices through rituals, idol worship, mantra chanting, temple

visits and consultations with Hindu priests and Muslim imams. Despite intense efforts, Shivani's condition worsened due to the evil spirits' repercussions on her relationships, education and general well-being. Her severe suffering and the failure of traditional methods created a feeling of openness to alternative solutions. In desperation, Shivani's mother sought help from the true God, although unknown to her, and questioned the power of the gods and goddesses she kept at home when she felt helpless. Miraculously, her mother saw the name Jesus Christ projected on the wall in a dark room. The mother prayed to Jesus for the healing of her daughter. The woman felt freed from the evil power and regained her regular physical and mental state. It was confirmed in a Pentecostal church where the pastor's prayers further exorcised the demon, and Shivani gained complete freedom from evil spirits and suffering. When the entire family witnessed total deliverance, they made a profound decision to repent and accept Jesus as their Saviour. This serves as the subjective nature of miraculous experiences.

Each convert's experience may vary. These miraculous occurrences often serve as pivotal moments that lead to a change in belief or a religious conversion (Packer 2021), as seen in other conversion narratives. One of the participants in the focus group shared an unusual, miraculous story of a Hindu family and their experiences of a string of unfortunate events, including the unexplained and unexpected death of their primary source of income—their livestock. This implies that a spiritual force offsets their prosperity. Nevertheless, a Pentecostal pastor's visit that marks a turning point in the family and a decisive movement of prayer in the Holy Spirit brought the immediate recovery of a cow from the brink of death.

The sick cow's rapid recovery was attributed to a supernatural occurrence that defied natural scientific explanations. The Holy Spirit is credited with performing this miraculous healing. As a result, the family had a great transition from hopelessness to optimism, from disillusionment with their previous faith to a renewed faith in Jesus Christ. They went through a journey from hopelessness to hope. This inner change is evident in their decision to accept Jesus Christ, confess their sins as a family, and participate in church activities.

In contrast to Hinduism and Pentecostalism, the story highlights the limitations of inadequate traditional religious practices in challenging situations and the Holy Spirit's unparalleled ability to overcome adversity and perform healing miracles. In addition to changing lives through miracles, the Holy Spirit offers

happiness, joy and meaning. Such extraordinary experiences can significantly alter a person's beliefs and way of life. Nevertheless, not every experience of the unusual is regarded as supernatural or associated with conversion. Understanding paranormal encounters requires discernment because, despite their power, some mystical experiences might not be directly associated with conversion. Physical healing, a vision, or a dramatic moment of revelation are not necessary for every conversion.

In contrast to Pentecostalism, Hinduism should understand that miracle healings are not to manipulate ordinary people. Instead, they have life-transforming impacts on people. Cessationists should understand the ground reality of the converts and the continuity of the Holy Spirit's miraculous acts today.

4.2.3. The transformative nature of the miraculous encounter

Miraculous encounters in Pentecostalism serve as transformative experiences for ordinary people in India rather than just demonstrations of power. Incredible moments can be viewed as divine communication that promotes a deeper connection with God. The transformative power of miracles can lead ordinary people to live more ethically and dedicate themselves to Jesus. Participants of the empirical study report that this religious experience influences every aspect of their existence. The consequences of the transformative experience can be classified into spiritual, psychological, cognitive, behavioural, social and economic impacts.

Chestnut (2011: 169) explains that a 'positive transformation of [a person's] nature and values' can result from the miraculous experience of the Holy Spirit. According to Aghamkar (2019:5), these experiences foster openness to 'religious teachings.' He points to a growing openness to Christianity, mainly among high-caste and emerging middle-class Hindus, attributing this to the transformative power of the Pentecostal experience. This power, marked by a welcoming and open-minded attitude, has led many to convert to Pentecostalism, with churches now established in several areas of India. Pentecostals were notable for their continued emphasis on 'the possibility of dramatic change,' according to Williams (2008:197), highlighting the significant impact of Pentecostalism on every area of a convert's life. We will examine the impact of this life-changing conversion experience on an individual's life in more detail.

4.2.3.1. Spiritual effects

MCs in Pentecostalism are underlined as evidence of the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. A person experiences radical change when the Holy Spirit's work is at play in their life. Conversions in Pentecostalism often come with deliverance from sin, healing, addiction, or spiritual oppression. This can involve breaking spiritual strongholds, casting out demons, and freedom from the power of sin.

Litha (2022) (pseudonymous name), as a family, experienced deliverance from spiritual bondage and significant relief from the oppressive influence of demonic forces that plagued their grandson. This deliverance brought a sense of freedom, peace and harmony previously absent in their lives and improved their family relationships. Litha claims that a powerful miracle experience in the family fostered a strong faith in Jesus Christ, depending on His ability to help, heal and supply their needs. The family, thus, developed a Christian nature, for example, attending church services, reading the bible and praying regularly. Such contributed to the growth of the Christian faith and the understanding of Jesus Christ and what He did for believers.

While the Spirit can influence people outwardly through natural events, divine affections are considered to originate from the Spirit's miraculous work within a person (Courey 2021:74). This is because the *MC* is seen as the Holy Spirit entering, restoring and reordering the soul (Henderson 2021:129).

In the Pentecostal tradition, the experience of *MCs* has a profound impact on the believer's life. For example, it leads to an understanding that one is now more intimately connected with and closer to God than was previously the case, which in turn leads to a shifting of certain beliefs and values. This involves a greater focus on and increased participation in following the teachings and faith of Pentecostalism. Pentecostals believe that orienting feelings of new objectives and new senses, and that people must enjoy life more fit to face according to faith, come with the divine meeting.

Conversion enables individuals to stop harmful actions while developing better personality traits, such as love, compassion and forgiveness. George (2022), Joshua (2022), and Aleyamma (2022) found spiritual freedom from their sins while their life worries vanished through their daily experiences. They began to notice God's presence more clearly, and a strong inner desire grew to find Him through daily prayers and meditations. Most converts, the study found, experience

a dramatic shift in their life direction as they discover newfound meaning and purpose. They feel a call to serve God through ministry, evangelism, or service to others.

However, a dynamic and ongoing process makes it challenging to say that all converts can undergo a total transformation, even after a miraculous encounter. In the initial observation, the *MC*'s impact on moral and spiritual dimensions may not be noticeable. Regardless, as the Holy Spirit helps reconfigure converts, the psychological dimension also unfolds.

4.2.3.2. Psychological effects

When examining conversion narratives, converts who have undergone a significant transition report specific common psychological benefits. These include a considerable reduction in fear and anxiety related to their past struggles, be they spiritual, emotional, or physical. Their previous issues no longer dominate their thoughts, leading to greater peace. Many converts also report feeling more valued and self-assured when they overcome significant challenges. The healing process, often facilitated by faith, likely contributes to improved mental health, including enhanced focus, concentration, and cognitive function. Faith is a source of comfort and restoration of dignity for those who face social stigma or personal shame. Miraculous experiences often strengthen faith and deepen spiritual connections. Converts may also transform their moral and ethical values, leading to a more virtuous life.

These encounters have the power to inspire optimism and hope despite hardship. They improve Relationships Between People. Shared healing and religious experiences can reinforce family ties. A renewed sense of purpose and faith may inspire healthier lifestyle choices. These psychological advantages have the potential to significantly enhance the general well-being of those who have experienced *MCs*. The conversion experience can evoke a sense of rebirth or a new beginning. It can also clarify one's purpose and membership in a religious community.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that *MCs* can also present psychological challenges. Various significant life changes and shifts in religious mindset may cause harm to external social bonds within the newly adopted faith group. Religious social pressures force people to conform, so they develop

feelings of anxiety and a sense of inadequacy. These expected effects should be regarded as speculative, as personal situations can yield diverse results.

The psychological effects of conversion are a self-perceived increase in subjective well-being, feelings of reassurance in the presence of the divine, and a positive self-image (Iyadurai 2011:512). It is believed that the Holy Spirit's work can have a profound impact on the psychological and cognitive aspects.

4.2.3.3. Cognitive effects

Although spiritual and emotional changes are often the primary focus of individuals' extraordinary experiences, notable cognitive effects can also occur. Although complex, these effects can have a significant impact on how people think, perceive, and understand the world.

Chandran's (2022) conversion narrative shows how the *MC* experience can improve focus and concentration. *MC* experience provides an individual's capability to overcome addiction and significant life changes in better problem-solving and decision-making abilities. The conversion brings a spiritual awakening and an enhanced understanding of the world. After the conversion, individuals become more self-aware and can improve their ability to control their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.

Besides spiritual and emotional changes, the cognitive effects significantly affect one's life. George Joseph's (2022) story is another example of the cognitive effects of a supernatural encounter in the Pentecostal context. George could improve his life by eliminating bad habits and making better decisions, such as enhancing his decision-making skills. Self-awareness, thus enabling him to recognise unproductive and harmful behaviours, enhances his new level of faith in Christ. The conversion made the individual feel like they had to look within themselves and ponder.

Listening to the participants' narratives, the researcher observes vivid descriptions of improved memory and cognitive function following a miraculous recovery. However, religious conversion can create strain and anxiety because of leaving their previous faith and community and entering a new society, which may negatively impact their cognition. Regardless, it is believed that supernatural healing may enhance focus and concentration, enabling people to work or perform

various activities more efficiently. People might frame a brighter perspective, leading them to meet challenges with increased resolve.

Miraculous experiences can spark creativity and innovation, and converts may become more open to new ideas and experiences. Nonetheless, the specific cognitive effects of the *MC* can vary widely depending on the individual and the nature of the experience. The most significant result could be a complete restructuring of the individual's worldview. This new perspective is informed by the principles of the newly discovered faith. Concepts of good and evil, morality and the afterlife could be reinterpreted through the lens of the miraculous experience.

Richardson (2024:410) notes that the conversion experience 'included a special moment that marked a significant emotional, intellectual, and cognitive breakthrough.' It is essential to recognise that these effects are hypothetical and that the cognitive consequences will vary depending on the individual and the conversion experience.

4.2.3.4. Behavioural effects

Conversion experiences alter how people perceive morality after they adopt new faith beliefs, which in turn shape their ethical standards. The discovery of spiritual awareness and a more profound connection with a spiritual force typically occurs for people following their amazing conversion experiences. Personal sinfulness is profoundly realised due to this connection, and repentance is desired. People can accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour at this time. Joy, peace and relief are among the intense emotions that the converts are experiencing. They undergo a lifestyle and character transformation, committing to prayer, Bible study, and regular church attendance. After experiencing Christ's transformational power, they depart from all addictions and destructive habits with a sharpened moral compass and a strong desire to spread their faith.

According to Indu Rani's (2022) conversion story, which was discussed in the focus group, she had a supernatural encounter with the Holy Spirit that profoundly altered her behaviour. She did not believe in God until then, but now she was a faithful believer in Jesus Christ. Her life changed when she and her brother attended a Pentecostal church. She had a deep comprehension of Jesus through supernatural revelation. Jesus revealed himself to her through personal communion, allowing her redemption from wickedness and directing her toward a

clean, holy lifestyle. She made church attendance a habit, even though the congregation had previously shown enmity toward Christianity. She started praying and reading the Bible regularly. Indu Rani had a dramatic change in her morals. After participating in several immoral actions, including demonic possession, the individual was released from these constraints. Indu Rani overcame the urge to hurt (suicide) herself, stopped acting destructively, and gained greater control over her thoughts and actions. She demonstrated patience and forgiveness and learned to endure persecution from family members without taking revenge.

In the empirical study, Gangaram (2022) and Suresh (2022) vividly depict a significant behavioural shift accompanied by a profound spiritual transformation. Both underwent a dramatic and intense spiritual awakening and realised they needed to confess their sins. When they accepted that God exists and they needed to be redeemed, they repented of their iniquities. This was proof of their faith's strength and unwavering commitment to a new life in Jesus Christ. They also developed a deeper level of contentment and happiness, particularly in challenging circumstances, and a stronger, more wholesome bond with friends, family, and others.

The specific behavioural changes depend on the individual's life before conversion, the nature of the incredible experience and the particular tenets of their newfound faith. After experiencing a miraculous conversion, converts often give up harmful conduct and adopt positive behaviours. Even though miraculous conversions frequently lead to notable changes in behaviour and attitude after conversion experiences, this is not always the case. Just as the severity and duration of their effects can vary from person to person, so too do experiences. For many people, a miraculous metamorphosis is a life-changing event that leads to a more fulfilling and happier existence.

4.2.3.5. Social effects

MC can profoundly impact a convert's social life, bringing about positive and negative changes. However, it is essential to highlight the potential for fostering improved relationships and a strong sense of community within the faith. Social reform is a possible outcome, with converts abandoning negative habits and experiencing improved socioeconomic conditions (Abraham 2021:283; Miller & Yamamori 2007:33; Sahoo 2018:94). Additionally, personality and behavioural

changes can impact family dynamics. Leesha (2022), a nominal Christian who converted to Pentecostalism, describes how a remarkable event led to healing, improved relationships, and a strong community within her faith.

A religious conversion has a significant impact on both the individual and their community socially. Conversion may change relationships with family, friends, and neighbours. While some people might embrace the change, others might object or feel alienated. It is crucial to recognise that conversion can also lead to social isolation. Sahani Mrudu (2022) reported experiencing rejection from family and friends after her conversion. While challenging, Leesha's and Sahani's experiences remind us of the diverse and complex individual experiences that can result from religious conversion.

Similarly, Sam Enosh's (2022) conversion narrative reveals that after miraculous healing and conversion along with his mother, he faced social isolation, especially when he adopted new beliefs that conflicted with the norms and values of his previous social group. Alternatively, they could integrate into a new religious community. Since their conversion to another religion led to stigmatisation and discrimination of their previous faith, Sam and his mother were sent out of their village and house. However, following Sam's miraculous recovery from his paralysed state, their faith in Christ did not cause them to return to Hinduism.

Religious conversions can lead to social tensions and conflicts, particularly those involving divisions within or between religions. Nevertheless, by attracting new members and reactivating old ones, conversion can strengthen religious communities. It can also lead to social change as individuals become more active in the new communities of faith.

The social impact of conversion can vary significantly depending on cultural, religious, and societal factors. The *MC*'s social impact ultimately depends on several variables, including the person's own experiences, the opinions of their social circle, and the larger social setting.

4.2.3.6. Economic effects

While *MC*s frequently have spiritual and personal impacts, they can also have a significant influence on people and society. The following conversations with Indigenous women, who have experienced remarkable transformations, are powerful testimonies of how spiritual conversion can lead to significant economic

empowerment. Their stories inspire hope and demonstrate the potential for positive change.

In the study, participant Sarada Chandal (2022) shared how their life was previously filled with hardship, poverty, and torment. Before conversion, they believed malevolent spirits controlled their lives. Meeting basic needs was a constant struggle. However, Sarada reported notable enhancements in their economic, spiritual and social welfare after their conversion. The conversion or rebirth in Christ brought about significant underlying changes. They stopped gambling, stopped drinking, halted Hindu pujas and stopped making offerings to priests. This resulted in increased commitment and a resolute attitude, eventually leading to a new way of life. Regardless of their daily income, people may increase their savings and make prudent spending decisions with the grace and wisdom of God. Their economic progress, guided by faith, was attributed to the renewed hope and motivation that followed their miraculous deliverance by the Holy Spirit. Family peace, unity and positive behavioural transformations opened doors to better work prospects.

MCs are important for Indian Pentecostal Christians, a community deeply rooted in the Christian faith and known for its fervent spiritual practices, which profoundly impact every aspect of their lives.

4.3. Significance of miracles in Indian Pentecostal conversions

Miracles that transform people's lives and successfully demonstrate God's presence and influence in believers' lives are a feature of Pentecostalism. Pentecostals highly value the continual miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. Believers are reassured, encouraged, and have their beliefs validated by these experiences. In India, where a strong belief in spiritual and supernatural activities exists among various religions, the emphasis on the miraculous and its crucial role in conversion is significant.

Despite the dangers, syncretism also has its advantages. Syncretism deepens understanding of philosophy or spirituality by facilitating the exchange of meaningful ideas and rituals. In essence, this is the primary subject of human history. In their work, Leopold and Jensen (2016: x) emphasise that 'syncretism provides a platform to discuss numerous other important questions related to the human construction and reconstruction of religion, culture, and identity.' Although

traditions are important, they can also become stagnant. It allows them to evolve and adapt to new environments and cultural contexts, ensuring continued relevance. People encourage in-depth discussions about the gospel when sharing their beliefs and practices. This enables the Spirit to work and eventually convert people (Warrington 2008:255).

Miraculous events serve as a personal affirmation of the Pentecostal faith, providing a powerful counterpoint to India's diverse religious landscape. For the many Indian Pentecostals who come from environments characterised by poverty, social exclusion and struggles with illness or demons, miraculous experiences, especially healings, are a direct response to urgent needs and demonstrate God's love and intervention in their everyday lives. Indian culture is often steeped in wonder and the supernatural (Frawley 2018; Dutt 1988:247). 'Hinduism is often associated with belief in something invisible, miraculous and supernatural; it requires faith and despises reason and rational logic,' explains Frawley (2018).

Hinduism is a vast and diverse faith with numerous philosophical traditions. Similarly, Pentecostalism stands out within Christianity as a distinct branch, characterised by its unique practices. Faith, reason and the divine are common themes that both religions explore. In another way of expressing it, their strategies and deep-rooted beliefs may vary, notably in the context of conversion, the attributes of the divine and the process leading to spiritual enlightenment. Like numerous other Christian religions, Pentecostal Christianity emphasises that salvation is exclusively attainable by those who recognise Jesus Christ as their redeemer. In Hinduism, however, there are various ways to establish a relationship with the divine, providing the individual with more freedom and options (Barua 2015:130). Indian Pentecostals recognise this context and attribute a crucial aspect of the conversion process to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. The concept of faith healing practice has contributed immensely to the rapid growth of Pentecostals in India (Sahoo 2018:159).

The Pentecostal Church integrates Indian cultural and religious beliefs to effectively evangelise the gospel and demonstrate the power of the Spirit through miraculous signs such as healing. Indian Pentecostal Christianity adopts the Hindu concepts of *Dharma* and *Adharma* (good and evil) as familiar terms because they want to attract Hindu followers into their religion. The religious practices of Pentecostal churches incorporate elements from Indian culture. Yet, the

fundamental Pentecostal beliefs about the Holy Trinity and salvation through Jesus Christ remain distinct from these cultural traditions. The genuine biblical foundation of Pentecostal theology sometimes diverges from conventional Indian Christian beliefs when cultural transformations occur. To increase its integration and reach the Pentecostal church in India, it must strike a careful balance between upholding its fundamental beliefs and incorporating aspects of Indian culture. This balance does not result in a complete fusion of the two belief systems but a complex and nuanced partial fusion.

Miracle Encounters connect to established belief systems within Indian Culture and provide a structure for understanding the transformation of ordinary people through familiar ideas. Miraculous healings, exorcisms, and prophecies serve as a bridge between their cultural roots and their newfound Pentecostal faith.

4.3.1. Indian religious and cultural context

In India's spiritual and traditional context, people often attribute supernatural significance to everyday experiences (Raj 2008:162). In times of illness and the search for healing from evil spirits, Indians usually resort to traditional practices in temples, mosques, and other religious centres as part of their sociocultural activities and rituals. Midha and Singh (2023:287) state that 'a large portion of the Indian population believes that good health and well-being are linked to spirituality and religious belief.' Spiritual healing is viewed as a system based on the presence of a supernatural force that can restore the natural order, a belief that underscores the strength of faith in India's health practices.

The significance of miraculous experiences in conversions can be viewed more broadly when one knows how common they are in religious settings. This study, conducted with an intentionally open mind, respects the diversity of spiritual experiences. Although comparable incidents can be found in other religions, it aimed to explain why Indian Pentecostals emphasise miraculous acts of God as significant to their conversion experiences. Religious people often speak of miracles in their cultural and spiritual experiences. Miracles can vary in frequency, definition, and credibility depending on religion and belief system. Miraculous events and stories have played a fundamental role in shaping the religious beliefs of various cultures throughout history (Dempsey 2008:1).

Although India is renowned for its rich religious and cultural diversity, its various religions often share standard practices and beliefs. Within this broad framework, numerous small ethnic and tribal communities have different customs and traditions. Miracle stories in various cultural contexts consistently express fears about illness, mortality, birth and livelihood. Having lived side by side for generations, India's minority groups often engage in practices or hold beliefs that are more closely linked to Hindu traditions than their own (Weddle 2010:27). Although commonalities can be seen across all religions, Pentecostals retain their own distinct identity. This next section analyses how Pentecostal beliefs and activities, particularly their manifestations of the Spirit, persuade individuals to embrace Christ and Pentecostalism.

4.3.1.1. Evil and suffering

Hinduism, the dominant religion in India (Bloch, Keppens & Hegde 2010: 172), views suffering as a consequence of one's actions in this or previous lives (karma) and as a necessary experience for spiritual growth within the cycle of reincarnation (Pinto 2011:208). According to the belief in karma, physical or mental suffering is considered a natural consequence of one's actions. In Hinduism, suffering is viewed as a burden, and there is no concept of deriving any redemptive meaning from it. It is an inevitable part of life's path, a perspective unique to Hinduism (Pinto 2011:208-09).

Muslims, on the other hand, perceive evil and suffering through a religio-cultural lens and typically associate it with concepts such as the evil eye, jinn possession or black magic. Many Muslims believe that jinn can cause psychological disorders in people through suffering or possession (Rassool 2021: 513). The potential impact of jinn and witch possession on mental health is a matter of concern and empathy. They are considered a possible cause of mental health problems, psychiatric illnesses, and even some non-psychiatric ailments. They can also occur without a prior history of disease (Rassool 2021:514).

Pentecostal Christians interpret suffering through two interconnected perspectives: first, as the outcome of sin, and second, as the work of female religious beliefs. Pentecostals believe in Holy Spirit manifestations, through which believers receive both physical and spiritual healing, which requires faith to be effective. They acknowledge that believing in God's plan cannot consistently

achieve healing. To cope with suffering, Indian religious people use rituals, prayers, spiritual guidance, astrology, and magical amulets to protect themselves from evil spirits, witchcraft, curses, and disease-causing spirits (Gnanakan 2006: 41).

Karma is a core concept in Indian traditions that emphasises the principle of cause and effect, with suffering resulting from past actions. According to Hindu philosophy, one can attain *moksa* or *mukti* (salvation or liberation) through various paths, including yoga, meditation, and devotion to specific deities (Gale et al., 2020). While these principles are seen as a means of overcoming suffering, Pentecostals stress the importance of faith in Jesus and the divine manifestation of the Spirit. They believe the Holy Spirit miraculously frees people from these negative influences through prayer and faith, leading to healing and deliverance (Abraham 2021:272-76). However, the concept of evil and suffering in the Indian context must be considered from various perspectives.

Bauman (2015:99) examines the widespread belief in India, both rural and urban, that 'suffering caused by demons and other malevolent spiritual forces' causes illness and misfortune. Witches are considered malevolent agents who use dark magic to harm others and influence life events (Gnanakan 2006:xvi). Participants in empirical studies described vivid experiences of physical suffering caused by 'malevolent spiritual forces' and 'evil spirits.'

In the empirical research, many of the participants' conversion narratives describe having experiences with what they perceive as evil forces that cause them mental and physical distress. In the conversion narrative, Sahani Mrudu (2022) reveals that she had undergone several mental (anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts), physical distress (facial expressions of anger or fear, body pain and poor sleep), relational problems (constant arguments with her husband), sensory hallucinations (felt like someone was touching her inappropriately) and financial strain (due to Hindu puja and rituals) before her MC experience. Her life is dominated by suffering and a sense of being under the evil attack of everyday life. Although, as a Hindu, all traditional practices failed to provide a solution in crucial situations. This underscores the perceived inadequacy of the previous religious framework in addressing her evil suffering. It creates a sense of hopelessness in a miserable situation and opens the door for a fresh spiritual solution amid challenges.

A Pentecostal pastor's prayer and the Holy Spirit's encounter became a turning point in her life, which is depicted as a direct supernatural intervention. It presented a dramatic deliverance from the evil forces and resulted in an immediate transformation. The results of the supernatural encounter showed better sleep, good health, and normal functioning. The divine healing experience leads her family to Jesus and conversion. Confession of sins and acceptance of Jesus Christ are standard practices in Pentecostalism during the conversion process. The context of the conversion narrative is situated within the framework of spiritual warfare, a battle between forces of good and evil. This is central to Pentecostal interpretation, especially in diverse cultures where belief in spirits and demons is widespread. The comprehensive evaluation confirms the Holy Spirit's miraculous work as essential for conversion, while also demonstrating how Pentecostalism offers a method for understanding and combating suffering through spiritual warfare practices. This passage illustrates how believers encounter God directly and also shares a personal account of conversion within the Pentecostal religious tradition. The story of Sahani illustrates how Pentecostalism can offer people hope and liberation, replacing other religions when they fail to provide relief from suffering and salvation.

The stimulating conversion narrative of Niya (2022), like Sahani Mrudu, reveals the family's struggle against evil forces and their suffering before their conversion to Christianity. The family underwent a great deal of hardship, including family issues along with the demonic possession of their son. They did not find solace from suffering and evil fighting, even though they adhered to traditional Hindu religious practices. On the other hand, the family met a Pentecostal believer who took them to a church where the son was delivered miraculously from demonic possession following a mighty prayer in the Holy Spirit. This resulted in a profound transformation, during which they experienced peace and joy, and observed improvements in their family relationships. This miraculous experience catalyses the family's conversion and persuades them to accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Sahani and Niya's conversion stories stress the inadequacy of traditional religious practices in the face of suffering caused by demonic force. They realised the need for an immediate solution to be free from evil and suffering. Through their

miraculous survival, God demonstrated both love and power, so that their conversion shines all the brighter.

A narrative from Hembai Devi (2022) explains that powerful demonic spirits created both physical and psychological distress that triggered her irregular emotional responses and mental difficulties. As a result, she was isolated within the family and felt lonely and rejected in the surrounding community. However, the family sought her deliverance, performing rituals and practices of Hindu tradition, but the issues persisted. The critical event of her life occurred when the Pentecostal pastor conducted a prayer that brought a supernatural connection to the Holy Spirit, leading to her freedom from demonic influence. Jesus Christ receives two types of deliverance through the miraculous power of the Spirit as he obtains recovery from physical torments and escapes from spiritual oppression. The experience prompts her to confess her sins while also accepting Jesus as her saviour and joining a Pentecostal congregation. However, she faces social tensions and resistance from her family and community due to *MC*. The dramatic transformation and nature of her deliverance strengthened her faith in the power of Jesus Christ. However, the profound transformation in life eventually silenced her critics.

Evil human practices like witchcraft, black magic, or sorcery frequently cause disease and suffering. It has a demonic influence. These activities are not isolated occurrences. Instead, they are common throughout India, where there are many reports of people being possessed by evil spirits via witchcraft or black magic. The result is tragic deaths, illnesses, and many other consequences within the family. It is essential to recognise that black magic frequently entails the exploitation of supernatural powers for malevolent and selfish purposes. This fact has led to frequent murders of the accused in Indian communities (Chood 2015). According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data cited by Chaube (2015), 'In 2013, 54 women were murdered in the state of Jharkhand alone, the highest number in the country, with the witch-hunting heavily driven by Pentecostals.' Pentecostals believe that black magic alters a person's perception of illness and life problems and exacerbates suffering and anxiety in people with mental disorders (Gnanakan 2006:41).

Pentecostals believe that demonic spirits are the cause of many illnesses. A traditional Christian woman, Leesha (2022), the narrative of healing within a

Pentecostal context underlines the limitations of conventional medicine and Christian beliefs. Her physical and emotional suffering is the cause of a mysterious disease. The lack of diagnosis of her sickness highlights the limitations of traditional medical treatment in addressing specific types of suffering. The physical suffering in breathing and weight gain led to her and her family's significant emotional distress. Although she had undergone different medical treatments, her condition remained the same. This reinforces the thought that some diseases require a spiritual deliverance. Even though not explicitly stated in the narrative passage, Leesha's illness is considered a spiritual force behind her physical suffering. It suggests that the community attributes her illness to something beyond the physical realm. It is a common practice in India, within many religious communities, to explain aspects of science that it cannot explain.

The turning point in Leesha's life was a miraculous healing, brought about through the power of the Holy Spirit, which occurred after a Pentecostal pastor's prayer during a conference. Miraculous healing leads her and her family's conversion to Pentecostalism. The story describes Leesha's suffering as caused by evil forces. The movement offers an approach to treating medical conditions that exceed medical diagnosis, while affirming faith in divine healing practices.

Leesha exemplifies how Pentecostals support total healing through their religion by treating both spiritual wellness needs and physical well-being requirements. As miraculous occurrences that can result in religious conversion, it demonstrates the strength of faith, prayer, and group support in overcoming adversity. This illustrates why the conversion process depends on the Spirit's miraculous work. This decision caused conflict with friends and family who continued to attend their previous church.

Pentecostals united in their belief in deliverance from disease and malevolent beings, recognise the suffering caused by evil spirits. In their faith in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, a belief that can lift and transform, they draw strength and support from one another. During the ministry, Jesus cast out demonic forces from those who were sick, mentally and physically, by the power of the Holy Spirit. He liberated them from evil powers and darkness. Illness is seen as oppression and captivity to demonic forces (Ebenezer 2021:93). Pentecostals think that the same power of Jesus' healing is revealed today through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In another section of the empirical study, Poornima (2022), the narrator stated that she was the victim of the effects of witchcraft, causing her severe speech impediment. The person has lost the capacity to communicate or engage in social interaction. Her condition probably led to feelings of isolation, frustration and despair. The family underwent financial and emotional distress as they sought to find a cure for their daughter. A malevolent force is an evil entity that can harm people both mentally and physically. The story accentuates how Jesus Christ healed and delivered Poornima from evil. The narrative affirms that Jesus Christ healed Poornima from evil oppression. The family turned to traditional religious rituals and medical treatments, searching for a solution, but their efforts were fruitless. However, when a Pentecostal pastor, joined by the church community, prayed for her with absolute conviction in the power of the Holy Spirit, she received a miraculous healing. The woman spoke fluently with others once she recovered from five years of extreme speech difficulties. A transformation in personal life can occur through receiving both deliverance and complete recovery. Poornima's miraculous recovery directly led to the *MC* experience for her and her family. The remarkable nature of her recovery reinforced her family's faith in Jesus Christ's power, making their faith even more substantial.

After analysing the conversion narratives and observing the participants, these cases illustrate why the Indian Pentecostal belief and practice of the need for a miraculous touch through divine intervention is essential for conversion. Most Pentecostals belong to various social strata, although numerous members primarily come from lower-income backgrounds and seek spiritual comfort through their church community. Seeking professional medical care remains essential, even though faith-based self-care is also an acceptable option. However, this commonality in suffering and hopelessness propels the pursuit of answers, leading some to turn to alternative beliefs and practices. The majority of people who join Pentecostalism in India are vulnerable and marginalised, especially the Dalits. Nevertheless, in this study, the researcher has found that even highly educated and high-status individuals, including Brahmins, doctors, engineers, and lawyers, have come to faith through firsthand experiences of miraculous healings, highlighting the inclusive and open-minded nature of the Pentecostal community.

The present study provides valuable insights into India's Pentecostal perspective on evil and suffering. Conversely, a more thorough examination would

necessitate considering the complexity of the causes of suffering and investigating alternative religious viewpoints.

4.3.1.2. Suffering and desperation for healing

Indian culture is steeped in the pursuit of religious remedies for a variety of ills and socioeconomic issues. Along with taking medications, people visit shrines and temples, seek blessings from spiritual leaders, and participate in rituals. India's cultural views on suffering and recovery are reflected in the beliefs and practices of all religions. The family embarks on a frantic quest for forgiveness and meaning in the face of their challenging circumstances. In addition to highlighting the human need for purpose and hope in the face of hardship, they invoke various religious traditions. On such an occasion, Pentecostals add a new dimension to this aspect by introducing the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit amid all suffering and giving a new twist to human-spirit interactions in the world (Jeremiah 2013:98). Pentecostal churches offer prayer, faith healing services and deliverance services aimed at expelling demons and spirits and attracting people seeking these specific miraculous interventions of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, other religious communities in India deal with suffering and provide comfort to their followers through various rituals and prayers.

The narrator, Sam Enosh (2022), and his mother suffered physical, emotional and spiritual suffering. The narrator's three-year coma and paralysis brought enormous physical suffering to him and his mother. The family experienced deep emotional distress, fear and despair as they watched the narrator's health deteriorate. Although it was somewhat consoling, the family's traditional Hindu faith was unable to heal the son she so desperately needed. It resulted in a sense of frustration and mental emptiness. The miracle sparked the narrator and his mother's conversion, but other elements also played a role. For instance, (1) the narrator's mother was encouraged and strengthened in her faith by the pastor's conviction and personal experience and sought help in the desperate movement. (2) The consistent prayer of both the narrator's mother and the pastor demonstrated the power of prayer to effect change and healing. (3) An extraordinary encounter with the Holy Spirit, which led to his recovery from the coma stage, deepened the interviewee's devotion to Christ. This supernatural

experience changed his prejudices and convinced him of the saving power of Jesus Christ.

Encountering extraordinary healings strengthened their faith in Christ and led them to turn to Pentecostalism, which claimed to have miraculous conversions. When people suffer, they seek healing through their traditional religious rituals and often get disappointed. In their desperate situation, Pentecostals offer healing and deliverance, promising transformation and a meaningful life. The act of divine healing usually encourages ordinary people to turn to Christ.

Prakash Khande's (2022) narrative highlights the transformative power of faith and the role of divine intervention in times of crisis. The family's most incredible suffering was the life-threatening snakebite incident. Desperation and the urge to seek help through ordinary religious rites are generated when one is afraid of losing a loved one and is helpless because of medical limitations. Meanwhile, a visit from a Pentecostal pastor and prayer, credited with the father's miraculous healing, catalysed the family's conversion. The stunning repudiation of sins and the hopeless case were tangible evidence of the power of faith in Christ.

Likewise, Rita (2022) is a compelling witness to faith and the life-changing power of Jesus Christ. The narrator suffers mysterious symptoms, a loss of conscience and severe psychological and physical symptoms that cause her considerable pain. The emotional struggle caused by no diagnosis or effective treatment left the family frustrated and desperate. Exploring various medical treatments and alternative spiritual healing drained the family's funds. Nevertheless, the power of Pentecostal communities' prayer and the Holy Spirit's intervention meant that the narrator's inexplicable recovery from serious illness became a pivotal moment in the family's *MC*. Believing in Jesus seemed to open her spiritual eyes while lighting the path for confession and devotion to Jesus Christ. Throughout these challenges, the narrator demonstrates strong faith in Christ and strength by dedicating themselves to living a godly life. It brought mental and emotional healing, a deeper walk with God, family restoration, peace, and harmony.

The researcher's observations of participants highlight the individuals' deep desperation for physical and emotional restoration and their willingness to take extraordinary measures to achieve it. Sahoo (2018:100) and Hallum (2003:176) highlight the hopelessness caused by illness and the lack of access to

conventional medicine in impoverished areas, the appreciative embrace of prayer as a means of healing, the experience of being healed, and subsequently, the conversion and change experienced by new Pentecostals.

The research also found that in India, people of all socio-economic backgrounds, regardless of their level of education or place of residence, tend to attribute illnesses, perceived demonic attacks and negative experiences resulting from socio-cultural variables to the influence of malevolent spirits. In particular, tribe members believe that misfortune comes to the individual or community when the spirits are unhappy or angry. To appease the spirits, the tribe members turn to village shamans, who are considered mediators between the physical and spiritual worlds. These shamans practice witchcraft (*matiravadi*) and magic (*jadutona*) and are considered experts in spirit worship (Bergunder 2001:103). Depending on the nature of the illness, the sorcerer might request the sacrifice of a chicken and a goat. It is believed that the evil spirit only rejoices when it drinks the blood of the sacrificed animal. A significant amount of money is required to perform these tantric rituals. Therefore, tribespeople borrow and spend large sums of money on shamanic activities, often without experiencing any healing benefits. Because the individual fails to find comfort, they may ultimately encounter Jesus Christ through the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit and find new meaning in life. As Bauman (2015:96) reports, they believe the problems they faced will no longer exist after coming to Jesus.

Another participant in the study, Rose Jamni's (2022) narrative, is a powerful MC testimony of faith and the transformative power of Jesus Christ. Her mother's severe demonic possession caused significant physical, spiritual, emotional and financial strain on the family as they searched for a cure. The family faced social stigma and isolation due to the mother's severe demonic condition. The powerful prayers of the pastor and the church manifested the intervention of the Holy Spirit, attributed to the mother's dramatic and immediate deliverance from demonic possession, which was a defining MC moment.

The Holy Spirit enables people to encounter Jesus, leading them to follow His path and confess their sins. People establish their Christian bond with God through Scripture and prayer, alongside church participation, so they experience direction, peace, and purpose in life. The growing Indian Pentecostal movement is accompanied by an outgrowth of Pentecostal expression, which enables the

simultaneous growth of gospel spread and the development of spiritual gifts. Traditional denominations have also accused Pentecostalism of being obsessed with healing miracles as a part of the gospel and being prone to take advantage of the vulnerable members of society. Pentecostals emphasise miraculous healings that can transform lives. It is essential to understand that Pentecostalism includes supernatural beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, some Pentecostal churches may have charismatic and influential leaders who could misuse their influence for personal gain.

Further investigation is needed to understand how religious practices can be effectively integrated into contemporary medicine, offering a more comprehensive approach to healing. We also need to investigate how the power of faith and hope contributes to healing experiences regardless of religious affiliation, which can help religious societies promote tolerance.

4.3.1.3. Internal conflict and moral struggles

Pentecostal Christianity emphasises spiritual growth in adversity, supported by the Holy Spirit. Park (2005:309) states, 'Through suffering, people develop character, coping skills, and a base of life experience that can enable them to cope more successfully with future struggles.' Those who experience internal conflicts and moral dilemmas often seek religious and social support to find meaning in their circumstances (Park 2005:309). In the Indian context, individuals who fail in their spiritual or social environments may suffer increasing psychological distress and ethical challenges, leading them to seek divine assistance. This could be a time of grappling with issues related to their idea or their perceived connection to a Higher Power. They may feel detached from God and their religious community because they seek divine assistance and harbour negative feelings (Pargament & Exline 2021:15).

When individuals respond positively to the spirit during miraculous encounters, it empowers them for self-improvement and positive outcomes (Jalal 2023:12). Many in stressful situations who experience such an encounter with the Holy Spirit report an increased sense of closeness to God, certainty in their faith, and an inclination toward religious practices. They often describe resorting to religious coping mechanisms more frequently and showing more significant commitment to their faith and spiritual community.

Josymol's (2022) conversion narrative explains that her upbringing in a Christian tradition conflicted with the dark spiritual forces that seemed to plague her. This led to inner turmoil and confusion. She faced constant physical attacks and psychological distress (fear, anxiety and a sense of helplessness) from evil spirits. The moral struggle the narrator waged against these malevolent forces was fierce. Even though the narrator's family was traditional Christian, they were also caught up in the battle and felt divided between the urgent need to put an end to demonic oppression and their traditional values. Josymol waged a spiritual battle against evil forces and emphasised the moral implications of choosing between light and darkness.

Meanwhile, a Pentecostal pastor and his wife visited their house and prophesied that Josymol and the family were fighting with evil forces caused as a result of witchcraft. When Pastor and his wife prayed for Josymol, she experienced a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit. The relief and joy she felt after being delivered from the power of evil spirits is palpable. Furthermore, this divine encounter led her family to transform their faith into Pentecostalism due to its ethical perspective, which opposed traditional beliefs and practices within the Marthoma Church. Their conversion involved a complete shift, extending beyond religious practices and doctrines, towards a profound transformation. Faith-based transformation can be seen through the religious conversion experience of the family, which altered their religious doctrines and spiritual practices.

Another narrator, Radhamani (2022), describes her miraculous conversion as being mainly due to her firsthand encounter with the Holy Spirit, which occurred during a vision of Jesus Christ. This experience led to her realisation of the inner repression of sinfulness and a deep personal relationship with Jesus. The experience brought her both repentance from sins and a request for salvation from Jesus as her saviour and Lord, which created deep peace alongside satisfaction in her spirituality. Nevertheless, the narrator struggles to reconcile their former beliefs with contemporary Christian perspectives. Becoming Christian challenged entrenched cultural and religious norms and resulted in social ostracism and familial conflict. Fear of social rejection and uncertainty about the future made her path even more difficult. Nevertheless, her determination to persevere despite this uncertainty and her willingness to try another lifestyle, despite these challenges, are truly inspiring.

Moral problems, such as disputes arising from life circumstances, are often linked to religiosity. They can lead to feelings of despair and fear (Pargament & Exline 2021:23). One of the focus group participants states that *MC* significantly impact a person's moral struggles and inner conflicts. A person's purpose and direction in life can become apparent, and a profound spiritual awakening can result from *MC*. Internal disputes and uncertainties may subside as a result of this clarity. *MCs* can free people from sin, addiction, or destructive habits and lead to a new sense of freedom and self-esteem, liberating and empowering individuals. It can catalyse personal transformation and reduce internal conflict and moral struggles because *MCs* offer new beginnings, insights, and a revitalised sense of direction. The individual can break free from the bonds of their past and start a new life, solely based on faith and hope, by encountering God's transformative power.

As the researcher observes, one of the primary reasons Indian Pentecostal Christians attract people to conversion is the testimony of the miracles performed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Converts comprehend these miracles as potent divine confirmations of their Christian faith. In times of distress and inner struggle, pastoral visitation, engagement with spiritual phenomena, and prayer can direct divine intervention. This reassuring and secure process leads to miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit. This transformative power of Pentecostal practices creates an impression that they offer a more substantial and impactful way to connect with God, ultimately inspiring people to convert.

4.3.1.4. Religious beliefs and practices for liberation

The Pentecostal interpretation of suffering and illness, combined with India's unique socio-cultural environment, creates a fascinating interplay of faith-based beliefs and practices. In India, physical ailments, psychological disorders, and even immoral behaviour are often attributed to demonic influences, sometimes in the form of traditional spirits (Sahoo 2018:103). People who experience suffering, illness, or demonic attacks seek solutions based on their faith (Bauman 2015:99). Rituals are considered crucial to freeing oneself from demonic influence and past transgressions. Tribal communities believe modern medicine is ineffective against such malevolent entities.

A participant in the focus group shared a Hindu family narrative that highlighted the strength of faith and the life-transforming impact of encountering

Jesus Christ personally through the Holy Spirit. The story reveals that the family had done all sorts of rituals and sacrifices to be free from their daughter's demonic possession, to appease their gods and goddesses and to seek blessings. They approached different Hindu pujaris and exorcists to drive away evil spirits. No matter what rituals and sacrifices were performed, the family could not find relief. However, through the grace of God in prayer and the working of the Holy Spirit in the Pentecost pastor, Divine healing and deliverance from twelve years of oppression from the evil spirits took place.

The narratives elucidate the transformative nature of the miraculous experience and demonstrate the limitations of traditional Hindu rituals and beliefs in managing cases of demonic possession effectively. This experience led them to turn to Christ and accept Him as their Saviour and Lord. In contrast, the Pentecostals' success in bringing about spiritual healing and deliverance is evident. A clear manifestation of the divine Holy Spirit's involvement in human life occurred when the pastor freed the demon-possessed young woman. The transformative experience led the family to leave Hinduism behind, embracing Jesus as their new faith. Jesus Christ, along with Pentecostal pastoral intercession, led to the paramount recovery of the family.

Ordinary people seek religious solutions to illnesses, and demon possession is a common practice in India. The research indicates that all diverse population groups prioritise faith-based practices as their top concern when encountering trouble.

The witness account of a Hindu family unveiled Hindu-Christian variations regarding their approaches to liberation from a specific problem affecting their primary income source, which involved their dead cows. The household from which the family came followed worship of more than one deity and goddess. The family engaged in multiple rituals together, offering sacrifices to their gods and goddesses to find solutions to their difficulties. Despite various religious ceremonies which the family performed, the problem of death could not be solved. These traditional practices, both individually and in combination, proved unable to resolve specific matters. During their circumstances, the family sought help from a Pentecostal pastor. The pastor healed the diseased cow by offering a prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit and trusting in Jesus. Through this miracle, it became clear that Hindu religious practices were ineffective because Jesus demonstrated His ability

to change human circumstances directly. The story emphasises how faith in Jesus Christ can change lives. The family's direct experience of the miraculous power of Jesus Christ and profound spiritual transformation led them to conversion to Christianity, and they received a new hope, peace and purpose.

The above narratives clearly state why the Holy Spirit's miraculous work is essential to the conversion process. Pentecostals hold that amazing, miraculous events often lead people to convert and join the Pentecostal Church. People usually undergo a significant transformation, finding peace and joy. Ultimately, converts conclude that life without Jesus is incomplete. The study reveals that conversion to Christianity is not merely intellectual assent to Christian doctrine and Scripture, but also the result of the Holy Spirit's miraculous intervention.

In India's diverse religious landscape, people from all walks of life, regardless of their social class or ethnic background, practice healing and protection rituals. Sahoo (2018), in his writings on Pentecostalism in India, focuses on how marginalised communities, including Dalits and tribals, often turn to village shamans for healing through witchcraft or magic. Yet, these practices are usually expensive, ineffective, exploitative, and unsuccessful in their traditional forms.

Healing is approached differently in Pentecostal churches because they draw on the transformational and supernatural abilities of the Holy Spirit. This method is based on a strong belief in the Holy Spirit's ability to lessen the psychological and physical suffering brought on by Satan, and members of tribal communities particularly cherish it. Modern healthcare systems' high cost and narrow reach also pose problems, especially for the underprivileged and disenfranchised (Sahoo 2018:104–05).

The Pentecostal movement provides liberation rituals and divine healing methods. They seek to heal those vulnerable to these techniques and ward off evil spirits by praying in the name of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. This approach is believed to help individuals recognise Jesus as their true healer and saviour, acknowledge their wrongdoing, repent, and embrace faith in Christ (Sahoo 2018: 105; Robbins 2004:122). Miracle healings confirm the authenticity of the Holy Spirit's power and the Pentecostal faith. Pentecostals believe the Holy Spirit can directly heal those seeking solutions beyond traditional medicine. Through exorcism rituals, Pentecostals use the power of the Holy Spirit to confront and

overcome demonic forces (Bauman 2015b:106). Conversion itself is viewed as a form of spiritual healing and deliverance from demonic influences.

Academic research could help us fully grasp and appreciate the contrasting perspectives on healing in other Indian religions by comparing Pentecostal experiences. In the empirical studies, the researcher observed that individuals repeatedly shared stories of their perilous lives before conversion and attributed their deliverance from negative influences to the prayers of Pentecostal pastors. Future studies must examine how other Indian religious communities respond to illness and disease and provide a more balanced analysis. This involves acknowledging the limitations of Pentecostalism and incorporating alternative perspectives on health and well-being, ensuring objectivity and fairness in our research.

4.3.1.5. Seeking solace in religious practices

Ordinary people in India may find it frustrating when conventional religious activities, such as temple visits, prayers, offerings, sacrifices and ceremonies, fail to bring relief despite their fervent efforts.

In Shivani Manhar's (2022) conversion narrative, which transitions from pain to comfort through faith, like dozens of others, the protagonist initially sought solace in Hindu religious rituals, such as temple visits, pujas, and consultations with astrologers. However, these traditional methods were ineffective in addressing her underlying physical and mental problems, which left her in a deep state of despair. Her frantic quest for some measure of meaning and purpose started when a severe health crisis pushed her to the edge of despair. When this crisis began, she started a deep search into spirituality that made her doubt everything she had believed before.

A remarkable healing experience shaped her life when Jesus Christ exhibited His power through her recovery. This extraordinary event led to her becoming a committed follower of Christ. The conversion brought about substantial personal changes, encompassing physical and mental restoration, as well as spiritual rebirth. However, she faced the challenges of her newfound faith in Christ, which led to rejection from neighbours and family.

Another participant, Victor (2022), was a devoted Hindu who first turned to traditional Hindu religious rituals for comfort and relief from suffering. Despite their

strict adherence, his family continued to experience increasing hardship and distress. His encounter with Pentecostal Christians, facilitated by two friends, marked a significant shift. Victor re-examined his family's beliefs due to their influence, the family's developing problems, and his story of a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. When the family was ready to give up and considered ending their suffering by suicide, a turning point was reached. Victor turned to Christ during this pivotal time. A string of miraculous deliverances and healings is then highlighted in the story. Prayers resulted in the miraculous healing of Victor's sister, who had been subjected to severe demonic torture. The entire family experienced a newfound sense of peace and spiritual freedom. The narrative emphasises the power of faith and how a close encounter with Jesus Christ can transform someone. It implies that a deeper spiritual connection with God, as experienced in Pentecostal Christianity, can offer hope, healing, and eternal life, and that conventional religious practices might not always provide sufficient consolation or answers to life's problems.

The story highlights how a healing and transformative faith can profoundly change a person. Through this statement, humans learn about their limited capacity to address existential and spiritual matters and realise how divine grace helps them overcome challenges for ultimate fulfilment. Through a conversion story, people can see how profound faith shapes an individual's existence. It highlights how people seek meaning and purpose, and how faith can lead to spiritual transformation.

Shamanistic figures across India use intricate rituals, mantras and amulets to promote healing, maintain health and ward off misfortune. Likewise, various religious and cultural rituals are essential in Indian traditions (Bauman 2015: 100). For Pentecostals, however, these practices may not always provide the answers those seeking a solution are looking for. According to Pentecostals, the divine power of the Holy Spirit delivers hopeful security and divine direction when people suffer. Pentecostal faith depends on supernatural spiritual events, including the Holy Spirit deliverance from demonic possession, for cases when standard religious actions prove fruitless. This experience serves as a strong confirmation of their faith and the superiority of Pentecostal practices.

4.3.1.6. Encountering the ‘other’ and initial resistance

Although worshipping a higher power is a universal ideal, different religions demonstrate this devotion in various ways (Saraswati and Fitzgerald 2008: 7–8). Christianity is frequently viewed in India as a Western religion that is a product of Western imperialism. This idea may lead to mistrust of converts, raising questions about their commitment to the nation and their sense of patriotism (Sahoo 2018: 9). Nevertheless, hope from the Spirit's transformative work can be potent. An introductory meeting with someone from a different religious background is being invited to the Pentecostal Church. Some would hesitate even to attend church or might find it challenging to absorb the lessons found in the Christian scriptures. Some people may follow Jesus because of their experiences with healing or because they believe their old ways are ineffective. Pentecostals promise that the Spirit's transformative power will bring hope in the face of adversity.

In the empirical study, Siddhant's (2022) testimony, a Hindu convert, reveals a significant family conflict and emotional upheaval stemming from the narrator's initial resistance to his brother's faith. The narrator and his brother's divergent religious views and customs divide the family. His brother faced the challenges of sharing the gospel in a non-Christian community was evident. The narrator's newfound faith initially faced opposition from other family members. However, the narrator has a turning point when a paralysed woman in a nearby house is healed through his brother's prayer, convincing the narrator of the power of faith and the divine. After seeing that miracle, the narrator suddenly accepted Jesus as his Saviour and Lord. The narrator's younger brother's simple yet profound prayer further illustrated the strength of sincere faith. His family's successful farming endeavour and resolving a land dispute were concrete manifestations of God's blessing and providence. The narrator's encounter with Christ profoundly impacted his life, illustrating the transformational potential of faith. The narrator's transformation from scepticism and doubt to unwavering faith highlights the power of prayer and the enduring quality of hope.

Iyadurai (2011: 516) states, ‘In a multi-religious society, people are aware of beliefs and practices of other religions through their daily interactions.’ People often refuse to cross their religious boundaries and initially resist other practices.

Sahani Mrudu (2022), a professor at the National Institute of Information Technology with a strong Hindu heritage, turned to religious rituals to ease her

suffering. Since the narrator questioned whether she needed to change her faith, she initially resisted the suggestion to visit a Pentecostal church. The narrator was hesitant to leave her comfort zone and attend church because of her limitations, deeply held beliefs, and fear of the unknown. When a Pentecostal friend says, 'If you cannot find a solution, go to a Pentecostal church,' the narrator begins to doubt himself. The reluctant narrator consents to the church out of desperation and a wish to end her suffering, indicating a readiness to consider other options.

As she enters the church, the narrator encounters strange customs and beliefs, but she also notices amazing things that catch her attention. The narrator seeks to overcome her initial doubts and concerns, but ultimately finds solace in the church. The experience leaves her feeling relieved and at peace, as she comes to embrace the power of Jesus Christ. The limitations of her prior faith and the transformative power of her newfound belief were acknowledged by the narrator. The narrator's newly discovered faith gave her the courage and comfort to face her fears and obstacles. Her faith in God's providence was strengthened when she attributed her academic and professional achievements to divine intervention. A total conversion and a revitalised sense of purpose resulted from the spiritual transformation and miraculous experiences. Her husband remains a non-believer, causing internal strife in the family, even though the narrator's parents and son eventually convert.

Miraculous healing, a cornerstone of the Pentecostal faith, offers hope to the hopeless and a hopeful, meaningful future. It manifests God's care, strength and existence at our side. This form of healing is physical but also spiritual and emotional, often leading to a profound transformation in the individual's life. Even if people refuse to attend Pentecostal churches, according to Macchia (1999:20), turning to Christ movements is important because they 'influence directly or indirectly.' Others may come to Christ for different reasons and with a distinct cognitive understanding. Pentecostal practices, such as divine healing, are a method of winning people over, as divine healing, according to Macchia (1999:22), is a means of achieving more profound solidarity with the oppressed and suffering creation, and with the spirit of redemption. Pentecostals believe that God's power is active in people's lives, enabling them to perform miracles, meet their needs, and bring blessings (Robinson 2021:16).

4.3.1.7. Encountering the ‘other’ and religious crossroads

The subcontinent of India can be seen as a crossroads of many cultural and religious traditions (Gnanakan 2006:xiv). There are many religious intersections in ritualism and its practices. In India, religious rituals are viewed as a practical means of gaining benefits from the gods (Bauman 2015:102). A phenomenological approach helps us appreciate them because it enables experiences of the sacred as a cause, or at least as an element, of the healing encounter (Gnanakan 2006: 18). Continuous encounters between Indian religious culture and ‘others’ (such as Pentecostalism) are always visible. For Pentecostals, illnesses could be due not only to witches but also to sin.

The belief and practice of witchcraft persist in many regions of India, impacting the lives of numerous Indians afflicted by malevolent spirits and diseases. Non-Christian Indian healers often call upon middle-level Indian deities to counteract or remove less powerful spirits (Bauman 2015b:105; O’Flaherty 1988: 50). In contrast, Pentecostals believe that evil spirits are powerless in the face of Christ and vanish at the mention of His name and through the power of the Spirit. Pentecostal exorcism, a unique practice, relies on the power of the Holy Spirit to confront and overcome evil spirits (Bauman 2015:106; Sahoo 2018:37; Abraham 2021: 96). Bergunder (2008: 217) asserts that ‘Pentecostalism is a highly contextualised form of Indian Christianity in the realm of healing and exorcism in India.’

Deliverance and healing are standard practices in all religions in India. Individuals must believe in a powerful and benevolent God even under challenging circumstances, as this belief can bring about healing from illness and alleviate various types of suffering, including psychological, social and economic obstacles. Typically, individuals recognise the superior power of the healing God over other deities and choose to follow him for the rest of their lives. Pentecostals are well-equipped to deal with and benefit from the widespread need for spiritual healing, a key element in the Pentecostalization of Indian Christianity (Bauman 2015:104). Pastors, evangelists and missionaries in mission areas are often faced with calls for healing and relief from suffering. When meeting ordinary people, individuals express their pain and needs this way. Christian workers encourage prayer for the healing of individuals to create connections and spread the message of Christ's love.

In this context, encountering the 'other' is a universal concept transcending religious boundaries. It refers to encountering someone or something that is outside existing religious beliefs and practices. For Hindus or other religious converts to Pentecostal Christianity, the 'other' would be Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and Pentecostal practices. The encounter can challenge what is familiar and prompt a re-evaluation of one's own beliefs.

For example, as mentioned earlier, the story of Rajesh Anu (2022) offers an engrossing illustration of a religious encounter and transformation. Being a strong Hindu, he first experienced severe personal hardships that resulted in a spiritual crisis. His preexisting views and worldview were questioned when Christianity, another religion, was introduced. A fellow Pentecostal Christian intervention was crucial to this interaction. Ragesh was introduced to the transforming potential of Christianity through that Pentecostal man's leadership and encouragement. Ragesh, in dire need of comfort and purpose, resorted to prayer and was miraculously healed, an awe-inspiring moment that strengthened his faith in Jesus. This divine experience led to a profound spiritual conversion (MC), marking a significant religious transformation and creating an atmosphere of humility and awe. The story reveals how miracles shape individual development by transforming another person's life through the power of faith. Due to his faith, Ragesh managed to overcome both societal rejection and his family's opposition, becoming a successful and happy individual. The narrative illustrates how belief, combined with divine assistance and spiritual communal support, facilitates spiritual transformation and provides people with the support they need during life's challenges.

The Holy Spirit remains active in Pentecostalism, producing remarkable spiritual experiences. Ordinary people shift their religion due to such experiences (Iyadurai 2011:510). Anu's description of the overwhelming presence and transformation during the prayer meeting exemplifies this concept. Jesus is revealed to him through a Pentecostal believer who brings out an alternative side to Christianity. Pentecostal prayer meetings can bring about a significant emotional and spiritual shift for some who experience the Holy Spirit's presence, resulting in a dramatic change.

In line with the observations made during the focus group study, Jacob was initially firmly anchored in his traditional Christian faith and was a devoted Jacobite

Christian. However, after a profound experience with Pentecostal friends, he was introduced to a new Christian viewpoint that strongly underlined faith healing and the power of the Holy Spirit. This experience prompted a spiritual investigation and challenged Jacobs's preexisting beliefs, marking a significant religious turning point. Due to the failure of conventional medical treatments, Jacobs's son was suffering from a serious illness that drove him to the verge of despair. Jacob's choice to fast and pray alongside Pentecostal believers stemmed from a deep desire for divine intervention. His son's extraordinary healing strongly affirmed the Holy Spirit's transformative power and the practical principles of Pentecostals. These doctrines regarding divine healing through the Holy Spirit were fundamental to Jacob's spiritual development. Jacobs's spiritual journey reached a turning point with this divine intervention. After adopting Pentecostal doctrine and practices, he underwent a significant metamorphosis. His newfound faith facilitated his spiritual development, leading him to participate in youth ministry and lead worship actively. The story highlights both miracle-based transformative experiences and their effect on spiritual journeys. Through the story, Jacobs demonstrates the importance of embracing fresh outlooks alongside strong faith and the supernatural intervention of God's transformative power to overcome life's challenges.

Throughout religious decision-making, the person meets the 'other', which leads to an intense state of happiness. It is widely believed that this intense emotional experience was a miraculous development. A fresh perspective emerges within them, one that considers the all-powerful and transformative power of Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. Despite the initial resistance from their family members, they eventually prioritise accepting their religious decision. The researcher keenly observes the emotional and psychological journey as they share their newly discovered religious beliefs and *MC* aspects. The central insights of their spiritual journey are the overwhelming despair, the transformative experience, and the newfound sense of peace.

A focus group participant related an engaging account of a Hindu family's experience with Pentecostal Christianity, as was previously mentioned. The family demonstrated their acceptance of different beliefs by being willing to examine the new faith when all other options had failed, although they initially doubted it. Through his role as a Christian representative, the pastor acted as a fundamental link between Christianity and Hinduism. The family faced no significant obstacles

because the pastor showed kindness, faith and a willingness to help. Their traditional Hindu beliefs and practices were seriously questioned as a result of the family crisis, but their resilience shone through. They reached a pivotal turning point in their religious journey when they turned to Christianity for answers. A divine miracle healed their cow, and this powerful event demonstrated to them the life-transforming power of Christianity. The divine intervention led the family to abandon their old beliefs, resulting in their acceptance of Christianity and a profound religious awakening. The preceding conversion of the family demonstrated how faith experiences spread among others. The transformative potential of spiritual experiences and the role miracles play in shaping both individual and collective fates are highlighted in this story. It emphasises how crucial faith, compassion and openness are to promoting spiritual development and transformation.

A phenomenological analysis of these narratives reveals that miraculous events often serve as pivotal moments, influencing religious conversion. Even though people first turn to religious priests in their respective traditions (Hindu and Islamic), when they encounter restrictions and flaws in these systems, it can cause them to become increasingly dissatisfied and seek alternative solutions. The experience of Pentecostalism, which strongly emphasises healing and the power of the Holy Spirit, provides fresh insight and hope. This life-changing event significantly aided their conversion, often regarded as a miracle. People undergo significant spiritual experiences when they encounter someone different to them, especially when they are dealing with personal challenges. Insights into the causes and effects of Pentecostal conversions emerge from recognising the importance of religious interfaces, along with their meaningful encounters.

4.3.1.8. Openness and searching for the ultimate reality

People who experience varying levels of pain often lose faith in their spiritual practices and religious beliefs. The lack of essential life answers, combined with an absence of meaning and a feeling that present thought methods fail to deliver satisfaction, can lead specific individuals to lose their faith. A lack of happiness may prompt individuals to explore other spiritual paths. The researcher concluded from the empirical study that most converts spend their lives seeking meaning and enduring difficulties. The Holy Spirit encounters and healings are extraordinary

experiences that can provide individuals with a profound sense of personal fulfilment. These experiences can also be viewed with suspicion or criticism by the sceptics. Some people doubt their veracity or attribute them to psychological variables.

Pentecostal miraculous encounters can foster receptivity and the pursuit of ultimate reality. Why? Because they can provide answers and evidence of supernatural power and inspire profound personal transformation through faith-based development, these experiences can help individuals pursue a more fulfilling spiritual journey. Individuals often find that the Christian concept of God, as embodied in Jesus, is perceived as the ultimate truth. Through these experiences, a person can develop devotion and faith while being assured of God's presence and work. *MCs* often lead to a significant shift in a person's life. These encounters may create a fresh feeling of purpose, direction and hope. Through religious study, a person can develop a strong bond with God and the spiritual community, resulting in a meaningful spiritual experience.

For example, Shivani Manhar's (2022) conversion narrative recounts her life's testimony as a testament to openness and a search for ultimate reality in the face of despair and exhaustion, despite existing beliefs. The affected person's family, although deeply rooted in Hinduism (daily temple visits, extensive rituals), experienced deep suffering and great despair. Traditional Hindu customs, including religious traditions and worship of idols and mantra chanting together with astrologer consultations, proved insufficient to treat their serious physical and mental illness.

The unsuccessful attempt to solve the problem triggered widespread frustration, as a frantic search for suitable solutions ensued. As a result, the family was desperate and sought the help of a Muslim imam. Their predicament demonstrates an openness to other spiritual and religious practices. The ineffectiveness of traditional Hindu customs prompted her mother to question the effectiveness of idol worship and the identity of God. This was later discovered. This is a question of open inquiry and genuine concern for truth.

His mother's prayer, 'Whoever the Creator is, come to me and save my daughter,' indicates a strong desire for an unknown deity beyond their immediate surroundings. The narrative portrays a family grappling with intense pain and desperately seeking the ultimate truth. It is heartening. Her rejection of traditional

Hindu practices and her openness to questioning and defying established beliefs indicate an unreserved aversion. This openness eventually led them to encounter Christianity and experience a transformative conversion.

Similarly, another participant in the empirical study, Mrudu Sahani (2022), reveals her search for ultimate reality and her eventual conversion to Christianity through a series of events demonstrating her openness to new possibilities. Her suffering despite practising Hinduism (temple visits, pujas, mantras) suggests that she felt that her existing faith offered no solution. Her in-laws take her to various religious sites, which include a Muslim Mosque alongside a Sikh gurudwara, followed by a Jain temple, as they aim to explore religious knowledge outside their own beliefs. Due to rising suicidal thoughts and worsening problems, she found herself ready to try church even though she initially resisted attending because she was Hindu. However, her friend's original suggestion was not readily accepted. The woman experienced inner conflict and questioned the need for a new God.

Meanwhile, she received a miraculous healing at a Pentecostal church, which became her catalyst. Experiencing relief and better sleep after praying in church was a turning point. This seemingly miraculous event was a powerful confirmation of her decision to pursue Christianity. They could convert after prayer, which was believed to bring supernatural protection from evil spirits. They were filled with the plight of Jesus Christ and believed in Him as their Lord and Saviour. A fascinating narrative of exploration, disillusionment with traditional beliefs, and openness to new challenges is how Mrudu Sahani presents his story. The central role of the miraculous experience in solidifying their faith underscores the transformative power of such events for some people seeking ultimate reality.

Another participant, Sam Enosh (2022), narrated his life experience as a testament to openness and the search for ultimate reality. Although the individual's family was deeply rooted in Hindu practices (temple visits, rituals, idol worship), they suffered deep suffering due to Enosh's near-death experience. The ineffectiveness of traditional Hindu practices in saving individual lives from a coma stage led his mother to a sense of disillusionment and growing questioning of the effectiveness of their existing beliefs. The mother's willingness to listen to the Pentecostal evangelist and consider an alternative perspective demonstrates her openness to exploring new possibilities beyond her traditional beliefs. Given the significant influence of the miraculous healing experience, Sam Enosh and his

mother were prepared to accept a new faith despite the social and familial pressures connected with converting to Christianity.

The person's near-death experience and the inability of conventional Hindu rituals to stop or lessen his suffering caused him to recognise the shortcomings of his current faith deeply and to look for a stronger and more efficient source of support. The mother's quest for healing and purpose, as well as the life-changing experience of miraculous healing, stoked their desire to believe in *Isu Masih* (Jesus Christ) and connect with a divine power. The story of the *MC* depicts a journey of spiritual exploration and a slow transition toward a deeper understanding of faith. The early discontent with the constraints of their preexisting beliefs, their receptivity to novel experiences, and the profound effect of the miraculous healing events demonstrate a sincere desire to embrace a different way of thinking and a search for ultimate reality.

The analysis of conversion narratives reveals the dissatisfaction and disillusionment of ordinary people in their search for ultimate reality, due to the limitations of existing traditional practices and the despair caused by suffering. The family or individual actively seeks a source of ultimate reality that can provide healing and redemption. The healing miracle provides the sought-after healing and firmly validates their newly discovered faith, reassuring them and instilling confidence.

A phenomenon such as healing can be interpreted as a sign of a higher power, a tangible manifestation of the divine realm with which they wish to connect. It provides access to an alternative means of encountering the divine. People experience awe due to Pentecostalism's distinctive rituals and its emphasis on miracles, which lead them toward a deeper understanding of previously unknown aspects. When someone experiences a personal healing event, they often develop new life directions. This further supports the notion of a mighty God stepping in to change people's lives. Reality may be reinterpreted as a result of this experience. Through the perspective of Pentecostal faith, their suffering, the world and their place in it can be redefined.

Combining openness, the pursuit of meaning and a miraculous experience can lead to conversion. Openness to new experiences and a search for ultimate reality create fertile ground for *MC*. The experience of a miracle is often seen as a signal from the divine that confirms a new path and offers hope. The individual

feels a new sense of belonging to the Pentecostal community, fostering unity and connection. They also found a connection to the ultimate reality they were searching for in their desperate situation. The concept of ultimate reality and the interpretation of miracles vary depending on the individual's background.

4.3.2. Miracles and conversions

The concept of miracles and their role in religious conversion is thrilling when considering Pentecostal Christianity in India. Religious conversion, as defined by Foster and Holden (2011: 88), citing Rambo (1993), is 'the process of changing the way one identifies with and engages with religious belief systems.' Through miraculous signs, including healing practices, Pentecostalism fosters a spiritual encounter with God as the Holy Spirit reveals His divine presence and love. The conversion healing process comprises four core elements: spiritual healing and inner self transformation, alongside mental restoration and physical recovery.

Numerous factors influence religious conversion. However, incredibly miraculous healings can be highly convincing, leading individuals to recognise their sins and experience God's love deeply. This often results in a sudden, intense decision to change their beliefs and behaviour, leading to faith in Jesus Christ and a transformed life.

Hefner (2013:2) characterises Pentecostalism as 'an effectively expressive, exuberant Christianity that takes the miraculous miracles described in Acts (2: 1–4) of the New Testament and proclaims their availability and importance for believers today.' Analysis reveals that miraculous healings make a significant contribution to the Pentecostal theology of conversion. While there may be various reasons for conversion, miraculous healing is an effective means of encouraging conversion, especially for those facing suffering.

A perceived divine intervention, such as healing within a Pentecostal church, can prompt individuals of other faiths, particularly Hindus, to reevaluate their beliefs, even if they are initially opposed to new Pentecostal practices. Miracles, not actively sought but resulting from people's beliefs, play a vital role in this process (Gnanakan 2006:29). These miraculous experiences act as catalysts for conversion, offering hope and solutions to problems.

Pentecostals focus on spiritual experiences of the Holy Spirit, which often include healing miracles that are currently enjoying broad acceptance in Indian

society. Indian believers find connection through this dynamic religion and its conversion features, which include exorcism, healing, prophecy, and intense worship practices. This surge has understandably caused unease among traditional Christian and Hindu communities. Pentecostalism's more participatory approach challenges established churches, such as the Catholic hierarchy, leading to member attrition. By emphasising one's interaction with God beyond traditional rituals and teachings, Pentecostalism offers an alternative for those seeking a more profound spiritual experience.

The case of Sahani Mrudu (2022) exemplifies this. Despite being Hindu, she converted to Christianity after experiencing deliverance from a troubling situation through prayer in a Pentecostal church. Martin (2002:189) observes that 'Pentecostalism has become India's most influential movement for religious transformation due to its focus on healing prayer, exorcism, and spiritual gifts.' According to Martin (1996:26), Indian Pentecostal Christianity endorses a Christian doctrine specific to developing nations, which he describes as 'Third Person Christianity in the Third World' (Gnanakan 2006:4).

A significant transformation has occurred in global religious distributions over the past few decades. Indigenous followers have developed a distinct Christian expression that diverges from Western theological teachings. This shift often involves a movement towards Pentecostal beliefs in the supernatural abilities bestowed by the Holy Spirit, such as healing, speaking in tongues, exorcism, prophecy and holiness (Gnanakan 2006:4; Martin 1996:26).

Miracles in Pentecostalism serve as a bridge for conversion, particularly for those seeking solutions to suffering. Poornima Devi (2022), another Hindu convert, recounts a dramatic healing experience during a Pentecostal prayer meeting. Medical professionals could not identify the cause for her muteness, which she linked to witchcraft. The healing process demonstrates how Jesus caused her victory over demonic forces. At that moment, a personal encounter with unspecified supernatural forces became her spiritual miracle, which led to her religious conversion and profoundly influenced her entire family. People in India understand miracles through personal divine encounters, including healings accompanied by spiritual presence or prayers, where divine answers and fortunate events reinforce faith. Pentecostal church worship rituals typically incorporate expressions of thankfulness for instances of extraordinary healing (Bauman 2015:

118). Experiences of supernatural healing and other miraculous events serve to confirm faith.

Ragesh Anu's story presents an alternative perspective on miracles and religious conversion in India, similar to that of Poornima Devi (2022) and Ragesh Anu (2022), who undergo a dramatic internal transformation that they interpret as a miracle. This personal encounter with the spiritual realm, characterised by overwhelming peace and joy, becomes central to his conversion. Both narratives depict traditional practices failing to provide relief. Here, Ragesh finds solace and purpose through encountering Jesus after contemplating suicide. Conversion results in a positive change in Ragesh's life, overcoming depression and experiencing renewed purpose. While Poornima's miracle was physical, Ragesh's is internal – a shift in emotional state and newfound faith.

Sahani Mrudu's (2022) account provides another perspective. Like the previous narratives, Sahani experiences immense personal suffering – depression, fear, and disturbing dreams. Traditional Hindu practices and visits to various religious places fail to bring relief. This desperation creates an openness to alternative solutions. Sahani's turning point was her experience at the Pentecostal church.

The congregation's prayer and the pastor's intervention are perceived as a miraculous deliverance from evil spirits, resulting in a newfound sense of peace. Similar to the other stories, Sahani's conversion has an impact on her family. Their shared healing experience strengthens their faith in Jesus, even leading to their conversion despite facing social isolation. Sahani attributes her problems to evil spirits, a prevalent concept across many cultures. Her healing is seen as a victory over these malevolent forces.

The *MC* experience holds significant socio-economic implications within the Indian Pentecostal milieu. This experience has a profound impact on every aspect of individuals' lives, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, such as Dalits and tribals (Abraham 2021:275). Miracles can act as a social leveller, offering hope and a sense of belonging to a new community, particularly for marginalised groups. They discover novel pathways and improvements in socioeconomic domains (Abraham 2021:275).

Gnanakan (2006:4) investigates how 'itinerant healing evangelists such as T.L. Osborn and nationals like P.S. Samuel advocated healings as a sign of the

kingdom and tool to witness to God's love and power.' Consequently, the emergence of new Pentecostal congregations through *MCs* led to a rapid increase in individuals with charismatic beliefs within existing churches.

The Holy Spirit's transformational influence on individuals and the community leads them to conversion to Pentecostalism, significantly altering their self-perception (Pulikottil 2022:134). Pulikottil (2022:134) agrees with Sahoo (2018:47), stating, 'Religious conversion and association with the Pentecostal church have provided tribal Christians with confidence and hope and made them optimistic.'

Abraham (2021:442–247), in his studies on the *Missiology and Theology of Indian Pentecostalism*, claims that by emphasising healing as a key component of the Pentecostal church's mission and conversion in India, the movement became a refuge for people who were unhappy with the mainstream evangelical churches' waning focus on healing.

A detailed descriptive analysis of the empirical study leads the researcher to conclude that of the 70 participants chosen for qualitative interviews and focus groups on conversion experiences, a noteworthy 85% attribute their conversions to spiritual or physical healing. The remaining 15% also underwent healing firsthand or by seeing others' lives transformed. Most participants' stories highlight how their decision to follow Christ was influenced by miraculous healing experiences, which kindles interest and curiosity.

Mainline Christian communities disagree with the emphasis on miraculous healing in Indian Pentecostal Christianity today. Surmounting this challenge, the Pentecostal practice of miraculous healing has a significant influence on religious conversions in India.

4.3.2.1. Miracle interpreted

Miracles in the Indian context may be more nuanced in practice than in their Western interpretations. Indian Pentecostals' view of miracles often focuses on personal experiences of divine intervention. What makes matters worse is that such experiences are incredibly diverse, and there are different interpretative positions towards them in India. Some perceive these experiences as genuine acts of a divine being, while others interpret them as symbolic or mere coincidences. This openness allows different experiences to be viewed as miracles. A miracle

holds significant religious importance as the primary result that recognises an extraordinary event as transcending (Weddle 2010:25).

In various religious traditions, *gurus* and saints are revered for their ability to perform miracles in India. The reports of these miracles serve as a powerful rhetorical device, effectively conveying a *swami's* (guru or lord/master's) immense power (Rinehart 2008:36). These figures, more than just miracle workers, are seen as crucial intermediaries between the divine and the human, capable of channelling divine power for healing and blessing. Therefore, the miracles in India are not just unexplained events but are explained by a deep understanding of universal principles, which can be tentatively justified or demonstrated to reveal the abilities of the people to whom they are attributed (Rinehart 2008:36).

India's diverse regional traditions have their interpretations of miracles. Practices such as puja (offerings), rituals, visiting temples and seeking blessings from deities are often viewed as ways to bring about miracles. This perspective suggests that Hinduism may be superior to Christianity and that India can compete on the world stage by offering a unique religious experience (Rinehart 2008:36). Each religion reveals that its practices are modern and functional, harkening back to ancient Indian thought and shows that India was once in far better circumstances than during the colonial period, a time when indigenous religious practices were suppressed and marginalised. However, Pentecostals often find that traditional religious practices are unable to address or alleviate the distress of society or individuals. Pentecostals use this opportunity to heal people suffering from illness, demonic possession, and other forms of suffering. The case studies of Shivani Manhar, Sarada Chandal, and Ragesh Anu are excellent examples.

Hinduism emphasises karma, which refers to actions and their results and attaining freedom through spiritual disciplines. Miracles can be seen as a temporary cure or a sign of divine goodness if a person prays fervently for recovery and dutifully participates in *pujas*. A person begs a deity to cure an incurable illness, and through a miraculous event, he is cured. From a Hindu perspective, this is perceived as a direct manifestation of God's intervention, violating the rules of the natural world (Pinto 2011:217). Subsequently, it is either a triumphant medical intervention or an unplanned regression of their condition. This phenomenon is perceived as a confluence of heavenly goodness (positive consequences from previous requests), the expertise of a skilled physician, and

perhaps even a miraculous procedure facilitated by modern medical practices. In Hinduism, karmic history encompasses all events that have occurred, are occurring, and will happen, regardless of their temporal location. Both mental and physical suffering are believed to be associated with the manifestation of karma (Pinto 2011:217).

Pinto's (2011:217) studies on *Encountering Christ in the suffering humanity* argue, 'In the Christian worldview, suffering can be redemptive in the context of love, as seen in the kenotic life of Jesus.' Jesus displays his love by using divine intervention of the Holy Spirit to heal people and bring relief from their suffering. The religious experience of healing functions as a direct invitation to bring individuals before Christ. People's understanding of miracles varies according to their religious background, geographical location, and individual spiritual beliefs. According to Islamic belief, divine intercessions produce supernatural effects which manifest in human existence through divine miracles. These miracles are typically attributed to the actions of a saint (Netton 2019). Most prominent Indian faiths, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Christianity, recognise miracles as examples of divine intervention or demonstrations of extraordinary power by deities or enlightened individuals (Pinto, 2011:217).

Modern India, with its diverse religious landscape, could view miracles more pragmatically, focusing on the underlying message rather than the supernatural aspect. Nevertheless, the conversion accounts of Pentecostal churches in India affirm the centrality of miracles and their supernatural interpretation in religious conversions. The appeal of miracles in times of distress is particularly reassuring. The affirmation of the power of faith that miracles provide can be particularly appealing in times of distress or illness when people seek divine help. In the areas of illness and social oppression, as Macchia (1999:22-23) states, 'Pentecostals provide a valuable spiritual context that promotes healing and a sense of wholeness,' offering a strong motivation to convert. The ultimate goal of Pentecostal faith healing or spirit encounters is conversion, consistent with their core spiritual beliefs.

4.3.2.2. Conversion: a matter of spirituality

Pentecostalism is characterised by the supernatural experience of the Holy Spirit at conversion. However, some critics view this focus on experience as a

potential weakness of the movement. It is essential to acknowledge that Pentecostals are increasingly recognising the validity and importance of their experiential nature in their religious representation (Neumann 2012:3-4). Conversion is a crucial aspect of understanding Pentecostal spirituality, encompassing issues of belief and practice and leading to profound spiritual transformation (Sahoo 2018:86).

Sheldrake (2012:42) states, 'The term 'spirituality [is often] associated with experience, whether mystical or not.' Indian spirituality can be more comprehensive, with some traditions recognising multiple paths to the divine, such as Hinduism. It is impossible to make a unanimous judgment on Pentecostal spirituality, but it should be considered through the different levels of emphasis on spiritual manifestations and practices. The two perspectives offer a valuable understanding of this matter. A comprehensive understanding necessitates consideration of all perspectives on spiritual experiences, encompassing visions and prophecies. Some spiritual gifts include healing through spirit intervention, glossolalia, and additional spiritual discernment abilities (Satyavrata 2019:287).

Satyavrata (2019:292), in his studies of *Pentecostals and Charismatics*, notes that Pentecostal churches in India 'faced suspicion and even hostility from other churches.' With its unique focus on the undeniable centrality of the personal encounter with the Holy Spirit and conversion, Pentecostalism is seen as a threat to established denominations. This feature, fundamental to Pentecostalism in Central and South Asia, underscores the profound importance of this personal encounter (Satyavrata 2019:292, 294).

Pentecostal converts across the country frequently recount supernatural experiences, such as visions, dreams, and miraculous healings, through a study of their conversion stories. The present chapter examined these encounters in greater detail than the previous chapter. Satyavrata (2019:294) states that Pentecostal spirituality is closely linked to 'experiences of supernatural healing and deliverance from the power of evil forces' in everyday Christian conversion. Pentecostal theology of spirituality and conversion remains strongly mission-oriented.

As a result, Hindus often perceive Christianity, particularly Pentecostalism, as an exclusive religion that is not open to the religious claims and experiences of others and is primarily concerned with strengthening its institutional power and

dominance through conversion (Rambachan 2019:72). Hindus especially condemn Pentecostals because they exploit people's vulnerability in times of crisis or suffering to win converts. Both Christianity and Indian religions have a history of miracles and divine intervention. For some Indians considering Pentecostalism, this could serve as a bridge. Rambachan (2019:72) comments, 'Hindus and Christians [must unite] in dialogue on this diverse issue. Such dialogue will help us discover areas of mutual understanding and clarify our concerns.'

According to Rambachan, it is essential to consider the intricate nature of Pentecostalism and its connection with Hinduism, necessitating a dialogue that includes scholars and religious leaders from both groups who are willing to reach convergent consensus and spaces for sharing and discussing experiences and interpretation regarding miracles, divine interactions, spiritual engagement, and proselytisation. This can promote understanding while also revealing areas of shared interest. It may be necessary to discuss each religion's understanding of conversion openly. What does each religion view conversion to be? Do they consider the act of conversion ethically acceptable or not? These assume that a proper dialogue on conversion needs understanding, active listening, and the ability to refrain from unnecessary debate. Also, inquire into how Hindus and Pentecostals may combine their efforts toward specific social problems, particularly concerning more physical and psychological issues like sickness, demonisation, and spiritual deficiency, which provoke collaborative action.

Through the combined values of compassion and service between Hindu and Pentecostal communities in India, they can defeat the marginalisation and care of the sick and the needy. Their merged projects offering fundamental assistance, including medical care, food services, and housing, enable them to unite religious sectors and deliver substantial help. Hindus can adopt their principle of dharma to implement temple-based programs promoting ahimsa and karuna values, which tackle social inequality. In contrast, Pentecostal churches often focus on providing healing and practical resources to those in need. They should organise community outreach programs. Active efforts to eliminate caste-based discrimination by both groups are essential because they need cultural sensitivity when working with marginalised communities. Through interfaith dialogue and collaborative partnerships, the organisations will expand their reach by developing trust, eliminating prejudices, and creating an inclusive space for sick and

vulnerable populations. Although concerned, the dialogue should primarily focus on defining the ethical limits of such actions' exploitation.

It is essential first to create an environment where participants can express their issues and fears without fear of judgment. Then, experts from various backgrounds in the area should come together to discuss the healing experiences of Pentecostal converts and share their unique perspectives and experiences. The intent is not to outdo one another in faith or establish the dominance of one religion over another, but to work towards building understanding and appreciation. Lastly, there should be a concerted effort to document and disseminate the messages such dialogues have produced towards broader acceptance.

These, and many more, are the fundamental steps that will enable sound and constructive interfaith dialogue on the sensitive issues of conversion and other challenges, facilitating better relations between Hindus and Christians. The main goal of this dissertation is not to investigate possible dialogue between Hindus and Pentecostals. The issue of interreligious dialogue may warrant more research. Unfortunately, this study does not delve further into this issue. Regular interfaith meetings with structured discussions help further Pentecostal spirituality, which not only endures but also has the potential to flourish in the face of profound encounters with indigenous cultures and spiritualities in India.

The region's cultural adaptability, a crucial factor greatly influenced by the Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, and tribal worldviews, which deeply believe in the spirit world and supernatural events, plays a significant role. In the Hindu religious tradition, the majority of India's population holds that a genuine encounter (direct experience or *anubhava*) with the sacred is the ultimate sign of pure spirituality (McDaniel 2019:11). According to Pentecostals, supernatural experiences with God play a crucial role since they may inspire believers to repentance and conversion. The primary focus on the Holy Spirit's supernaturality, along with its holy practices, drives the remarkably wide acceptance of Pentecostal Christianity through various religious backgrounds.

Pentecostal spirituality is characterised by human evangelism, but the ultimate objective is to encounter God in conversion through the Holy Spirit (Milton 2015:102). Although Rambo (1993:87) describes the encounter phase as 'an encounter between a human advocate and a potential convert,' he provides no specific information about it. Nevertheless, the central aspect of Pentecostalism is

the miraculous encounter between people and the Holy Spirit (Neumann 2012: 331). This conversion marks a complete and final departure from the previous social existence, ushering in a reborn and transformed life. According to Austin-Broos (2003:2), in his introductory section on the anthropology of conversion, there can be a 'conscious change with a particular direction' and form, as well as a 'process of integration of knowledge and experience.'

The emphasis on prophecy can lead to enthusiastic worship services, particularly in South India. Pentecostal prophets are sometimes viewed as soothsayers who wield similar power and prestige to traditional Hindu spiritual leaders (Satyavrata 2019:294-95). Pentecostals also underline prophetic encounters to bring people closer to Christ. The analysis of Josymol Joy (2022) and Rani Indu (2022) is a powerful illustration of this. Their comparable prophetic experiences, unique to each individual, brought them to Christ, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Their prior behaviours were abandoned, and they embraced a new faith with repentance and conviction in Christ as the Prophet's ability to disclose their hidden struggles and accurately depict their life circumstances.

The primary advantage of Pentecostalism in terms of *MC* is its ability to provide an authentic and immediate encounter with a God perceived as close and concrete evidence of His existence through extraordinary acts of healing and deliverance (Satyavrata 2019:295). Based on personal experiences and charismatic practices, this spirituality has proven effective in achieving conversions. Overall, Pentecostal *MC* emphasises a specific religious experience and a commitment to Christianity, while Indian spirituality offers a broader range of practices and beliefs. Pentecostalism could find fertile ground for conversion in India because of the existing faith in miracles and the divine. However, it would not view conversion as simply adopting Indian spiritual practices.

4.4. The transformative Power of extraordinary experiences in Pentecostal Christianity

While the emphasis on miraculous experiences may vary among Indian Pentecostals, with some viewing them as a universal sign of conversion and others as personal confirmation, it is essential to remember that these interpretations are deeply personal. One thing remains constant: experiences are central to Pentecostal theology and practice (Petersen 1998:17). Their significance stems

from cultural influences, theological convictions, and the necessity of having a close relationship with God. These encounters accomplish several goals: they strengthen the bond between their cultural heritage and the Pentecostal faith they provide, addressing immediate needs, and validate their faith.

Pentecostals worldwide tend to interpret the Bible based on personal experience rather than a purely literal approach. Their beliefs underscore supernatural interventions in daily life, with extraordinary events affecting ordinary people within the community (Anderson 2014:223). This contrasts with major Protestant denominations, generally more sceptical of miraculous experiences (Bauman 2015:97). Writing a statement of faith specific to Pentecostals can be challenging. Why? Pentecostalism's affirmation should be taken into account as being based on experience rather than faith (Petersen 1998:17). Regardless of theological interpretations and variations, Petersen (1998:17) argues, 'In general, it is fair to say that Pentecostals have a basis for theological thought and action that arises from the transformative spiritual experience and the resulting sense of empowerment that arises from it from an intense transcendent presence of the divine.'

In Protestant Reformed traditions, conversion is often framed as an individual soul applying the objective Word of God to themselves and then reflecting on that journey through the subjective Word of God, guided by the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit in the heart and mind. By interpreting miraculous healings and encounters with the Spirit as evidence of conversion, in contrast, Pentecostals shine a light on the importance of the Holy Spirit in their faith. Pentecostals criticise the Protestants for their refusal to concede supernatural events such as spiritual encounters, healing, and deliverance, which they argue are not related to the natural world. Protestants acknowledge the significance of faith and hold that a firm grasp of Scripture, combined with a dedication to Christian living, is necessary for enduring conversion, rather than merely emotional responses. Jesus' merit and intercession brought about the external conversion. In contrast, internal conversion is attributed to God's free grace (Harrod 2019:91). Consequently, Protestants regard Scripture and preaching as the primary means by which the Holy Spirit facilitates conversion. Despite their groundless self-confidence and cheerfulness, unregenerate people

had to be convinced of their sad and miserable condition by the powerful instrument of the gospel (Harrold 2019:94).

Pentecostals view the Holy Spirit as an active presence vital in daily life, not just critical spiritual encounters. Richie (2020:190) notes that the Holy Spirit can intervene directly in the natural world by performing healings, delivering prophetic messages, and other miraculous acts. According to Williams (2011:141), 'In performing a miracle, God, who verses and governs all things, acts supernaturally; he goes beyond ordinary sequences in nature as He relates to His creation.' Nevertheless, traditional theologians observed the miracle and tried to provide natural explanations for its occurrence. They were among the most influential agents of secularisation in history when applying pneumatology in practical contexts (Tennent 2010:425). Pentecostals, in contrast, emphasised the importance of personal experience with the Holy Spirit, which convinced them that this supernatural power could internally transform the lives of converts. Therefore, they gain strength, peace, and joy through first-hand encounters with the Holy Spirit (Kendall 2014).

Experiences, especially personal ones, greatly influence Pentecostal conversion and faith in Christ. Pentecostalism strongly emphasises the Holy Spirit and miracles, similar to some Indian religions that also hold that the divine is actively manifest. As Heehs (2002:11) observes, the religious tradition of India relies on individual spiritual experiences to teach spiritual lessons, highlighting the personal connection. He elaborates:

The Upanisads never question the supernatural authority of the Veda, but many of them also say that spiritual knowledge is to be achieved experientially. The Isa Upanisad, after acknowledging its debt to the givers of revealed knowledge, declares that Truth is to be attained by illuminated sight and through identity with the all-pervading Spirit (yo'sdvasau purusah so'hamasmī). Theravada texts make it clear that the Buddha's teachings were based on experiential insights.

As this study has previously demonstrated, miraculous experiences can have a profound impact on conversion in cultures with a dominant supernatural belief system. The understanding of nature and the supernatural varies among Pentecostals in India, and variations are to be expected due to regional traditions and backgrounds.

Pentecostals strongly emphasise practicality and see themselves as the restorers of genuine apostolic traditions and the essence of Christianity from the

first century. Their interest in praxis, which transcends formal theology, ensures that their theology remains mission-focused and avoids becoming overly theoretical and rational. This practical approach to theology is a key aspect of Pentecostalism that other traditions must understand and appreciate. It promotes heart-centred practice and fully embraces a supernatural worldview, making the faith experience more engaging and active for its followers (Tennent 2010: 425).

Even within Pentecostalism, there are differences. Some traditions may prioritise social justice or glossolalia. However, Pentecostals hold a belief that can inspire awe- they generally believe that Christians today have access to the same miraculous powers described in the New Testament (Jacobsen 2006:4). Pentecostalism is essentially based on the belief that God intervenes and draws people to Christ through the extraordinary action of the Holy Spirit.

Narratives of extraordinary experiences serve a dual purpose: they influence others and transmit Pentecostal beliefs and practices to future generations (Versteeg 2012:2). They serve as living proof of the validity of the Pentecostal worldview. From a phenomenological perspective, examining these experiences allows us to understand their profound influence on the individual and their significant role in spreading the Pentecostal faith within society. Extraordinary experiences impact and influence ordinary people in India. Why is it essential for conversion?

4.4.1. Impact on ordinary people

The transformational nature of miraculous experiences makes them crucial to Pentecostals' conversion efforts. These experiences reinforce the Holy Spirit's work and the inexplicable reality of existence. Perceived divine interventions, such as healing, deliverance from evil spirits, or prophetic encounters, confirm their faith, promote a closer connection to God, and strengthen them. Pentecostal theologian Sharma (2007:109) compares this to the experiences of early Christians who frequently experienced 'signs and wonders.' For Sharma, conversion is a deep spiritual experience with profound sociological implications (Sharma 2007:110).

A sense of purpose, hope, and control over challenging situations is all provided by such experiences. The aforementioned case studies of the participants' transformation stories illustrate how a shift in one's commitment to Christ and self-perception can occur as a result of miraculous experiences. The

Pentecostal emphasis on miraculous experiences during conversion is a potent force that helps regular people view themselves as chosen or shaped by God's grace, feel profoundly accepted, and discover profound purpose. Within the Pentecostal community, their decisions and behaviour are influenced by their newly found identity (Sharma 2007:110).

Ordinary people, especially those from tribal or Dalit communities, often believe that Pentecostals have unique gifts for healing and exorcism, unlike Catholics or mainstream Protestants (Sahoo 2018:104). Converts frequently recount their pre-conversion struggles with evil spirits, which resulted in significant turmoil in their lives. Nevertheless, their miraculous deliverance from the influence of these malevolent spirits has brought them calm, bliss, and a sense of community and belonging. This sense of unity and connection is a significant sociological implication of their lives. The findings and analysis of this research support Sahoo's (2018:105) observation that the post-conversion period is often characterised by good health, peace, and happiness.

It is essential to recognise that the meaning and impact of a miraculous experience can vary significantly depending on the individual's background, expectations, and Pentecostal tradition. There is no single answer. Abraham (2021:275) underlines that 'the conversion experience has broader socio-economic implications in the Indian Pentecostal context.' For many, especially those from poor backgrounds such as Dalits and tribals, these encounters can be life-changing in all areas. Religious, social or economic (Thomas 2008:349). They are considered strong signs of God's intervention and love. Strengthened by their conversion experiences, they can now worship freely and become active members of their church community. In the socio-economic area, they may find new opportunities and experience improvements.

4.4.1.1. Attraction of lower classes and beyond.

MC has great appeal across all classes, particularly during challenging times. This research has shown that for individuals from the lowest socioeconomic strata, who often experience significant adversity and inequalities, the promise of extraordinary transformation through healing, protection from evil forces, or a better life is incredibly enticing, given their existing belief systems. Pentecostals offer hope by demonstrating the Holy Spirit's ability to bring about positive change

even in the most challenging circumstances. They often motivate those who suffer by sharing individual stories of miraculous healing, conversion, and encounters with Christ (Morgen & Morgan, 2011:174). Pentecostals have a unique way of sharing their experiences and beliefs. Sharma (2007:114) notes that many 'have become Christians after experiencing encounters with spiritual power through the liberation of Pentecostalism.' They have recognised that the Christian spirit is more significant than their 'spirit' or spirit worship.

Being touched by a miracle can make someone feel chosen or special, particularly attractive to those excluded or invisible in society. This research has found that several conversions are due to miraculous healings, a phenomenon documented by numerous Indian scholars (Bauman 2015; Sahoo 2021; Sharma 2007; Abraham 2021).

As we have seen, Christianity has the power to transform lives, offering a way to overcome life's challenges. Mallampalli (2023:145) points out that 'the history of Indian Christianity is a testament to this, with Brahmins and members of the upper castes also finding their way to Christianity.' As we've seen in our study, individuals such as Brahmin, Pentecostal convert, lawyer Shivani Manhar (2022), a member of the High Court, Pastor's Son George Joseph (2022), and Aleyamma Mathew (2022), from a wealthy Christian family, are living examples of this transformative power. Their stories inspire hope, demonstrating that Christianity is a path to personal growth and improvement, regardless of one's social status. Humans possess an innate curiosity for existence. *MC* can address this spiritual longing by connecting to the divine or a higher power. Pentecostals, emphasising the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, offer a reassuring guide to those feeling isolated or struggling with life situations.

The rapid spread of Pentecostalism in India and worldwide can be attributed to its strong focus on healing and spiritual liberation, which resonates with marginalised and impoverished communities, including tribal and Dalit castes (Mallampalli 2023:241; Abraham 2021:276). Although transformative power is frequently perceived as a miracle, it is essential to remember that hope and change do not come only from miracles. Both faith and personal action should be prioritised equally. This emphasis empowers people to take individual responsibility and become engaged participants in their own change. By promoting

hope and transformation, Pentecostalism can inspire connection among individuals of all faiths.

4.4.1.2. Miraculous experiences in the conversion process

Indian Pentecostalism stresses *MC* experiences, often accompanied by physical healings and other miraculous signs (cf Sahoo 2018:37; Bauman 2015:97). Pentecostals believe that miraculous healings can significantly impact conversion. These experiences provide hope, confirm beliefs and advance community understanding by connecting personal needs with the promises of faith. Mallampalli (2023:241) states, 'Pentecost sermons emphasise the supernatural in everyday life.' The ability to speak in tongues and receive healing from evil spirits is among the spiritual gifts believers can access.

Evidence of supernatural acts is a fundamental aspect of Pentecostal theology and practice. Praying during healing instils faith in God's sovereignty and demonstrates Pentecostalism, reassuring and encouraging believers. This personal validation can be a turning point for conversion. The steady growth of Pentecostalism in India suggests that people from diverse social backgrounds are drawn to the promise of tangible and miraculous experiences of the Holy Spirit, which lead to conversions. Markin (2019) comments, 'Many people are leaving the mainline churches and joining Pentecostals in search of supernatural encounters or divine healing.'

Research participants from major churches, such as Josymol Joy (2022), Leesha (2022), and Aleyamma Mathew (2022), all converted to Pentecostalism after experiencing prophetic encounters, deliverance, or encounters with God's transformative power. In the Pentecostal faith, belief in conversion and the transformative power of miraculous experiences extends to all aspects of life, leading to spiritual, social and economic liberation (Abraham 2021:276). Healings offer a sense of hope for an enhanced physical and mental well-being. A new sense of hope can encourage individuals to make life changes and become Pentecostal. The testimony of Pentecostal churches, including miraculous healings and conversion stories, is a powerful tool for sharing. Exposure to such stories can inspire others to have faith and potentially lead to conversion.

Miracles are criticised. The emphasis on miracles is likely exploitative, especially to marginalised groups. The possibility of manipulation in Pentecostal

conversion practices is a topic that is continuously discussed. Some people might be sceptical of these experiences and blame them on social or psychological influences rather than consider them the catalyst for a transformation in their lives.

Despite the criticism, extraordinary encounters remain a powerful means of empowerment, confirmation and conversion. They provide hope, address difficulties and play a significant role in fortifying the Indian Pentecostal movement, instilling a sense of security and confidence among believers. These encounters, as Gnanakan (2006:41) points out, are 'most evident in the Pentecostal faith's miraculous healings and exorcisms.' The effectiveness of Indian Pentecostalism, he suggests, lies in its experiential and charismatic elements, which consistently produce the desired outcomes for believers.

a. Role of the Supernatural

For Pentecostals in a land with rich spiritual traditions, miraculous experiences confirm their faith. Sociologist Rodney Stark (2014:17) explains that various 'miraculous experiences involve escape or rescue from danger' and that religious meaning arises from the human interpretation of such events. Within a spiritual context, a miracle is defined as a supernatural occurrence that people interpret as such according to their personal beliefs (Wilson 2008: 243). According to Pentecostal beliefs, saving miracles occur when people witness the divine power of the Holy Spirit, leading to their religious conversion. Two occurrences exist: authentic miracles recognised by specific individuals and unidentified scientific or coincidental phenomena acknowledged by others.

Building on Wilson's (2008:265) work, which examines the occurrence of religious miracles today, some Christians believe that miracles continue to happen. The fact that Jesus is said to have given his disciples the ability to work miracles (Luke 9:1-2; 10:1-9) demonstrates that God can still heal people miraculously and significantly alter their lives. This phenomenon has been seen in contemporary India and other parts of the world, not just in biblical times.

According to Iyadurai (2017:142), a crucial point in 'the conversion process is often a personal encounter with the divine.' Converts may describe a sudden or gradual realisation, a spark of spiritual insight, or an experience that goes beyond their regular state of consciousness, leading them to believe in the truth and reality of Jesus. This spiritual encounter with the divine becomes central to the

Pentecostal conversion experience, often referred to as the 'rebirth experience' or 'personal experience of Jesus' (Iyadurai 2017:144).

The nature of the miraculous experience can vary, as we have already seen in the various conversion stories of the converts. It could be a vision stung by His presence or a miracle. The existence and message of a higher power are conveyed through experiences that take on various forms, such as sudden, gradual, dramatic, or mild. Each experience is persuasive. The interaction between divine and human encounters is typically positive, leaving converts feeling chosen by God (Iyadurai 2017:144). Profound spiritual experiences of converts in various contexts, such as feelings of peace, acceptance, or a sense of connection to something more significant, can be interpreted as evidence of the religion's truth and motivate conversion. Prayers answered, healings performed, or miracles can all be seen as supernatural occurrences that support religion and promote conversion. These remarkable experiences often prompt people to reevaluate their beliefs and seek a deeper relationship with God.

The converts say that miracles are always an empowering and transformative experience. These tend to convert in the end as they give people a sense of control during difficult times and help them gain renewed hope that they will overcome any obstacle. They are filled with hope and relief while also exhibiting the reality of God's love and involvement in their lives. Pentecostals believe that, unlike religious rituals or philosophical teachings, miraculous experiences are often transformative and deeply personal, shaping their conversion experience.

b. Miraculous experiences

Pentecostal theology emphasises the process of conversion as a dramatic change of faith, often accompanied by supernatural signs, leading the individual to embrace the Pentecostal faith. A person can be drawn into a close and profound relationship with God through the Holy Spirit's divine intervention (Kim 2008:202; Robertson 2010: ix). Miracle healings can significantly influence atheists to accept Jesus via personal experience (Warrington 2008:281). As mentioned before, discovering healing through Jesus, converts frequently looked for it elsewhere. It can be a profoundly transforming experience to undergo a miraculous healing.

The meaning of Pentecostal 'transformational encounter' may be unclear to those unfamiliar with the concept (Neumann 2012:1-9). In Pentecostalism,

conversion is often associated with physical healing or other miraculous events, similar to the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40 (McGee 2010:6). Pentecostal theologian Vondey (2017:20) argues that 'experience goes beyond mere belief; it requires active engagement with the experience itself.' Iyadurai (2015:6) offers insight into 'the transformative nature of the divine-human encounter in conversion.' The analysis of conversion narratives reveals that, initially, hesitant converts experience the divine and often identify it with Jesus. The supernatural encounter leads to a new certainty about the truth of their faith, emphasising the power of personal experience in shaping faith. Converts experience a profound sense of the divine presence and develop an intimate connection that deepens their newfound faith.

Peacore (2008:307) examines conversion in the context of Pentecostal theology and emphasises the importance of experiences based on Scripture and guided by the Holy Spirit. This experiential approach contrasts with the Reformed tradition, highlighting divine sovereignty in regeneration and subsequent sanctification (Kim 2008:202). Iyadurai (2015:7) further explores 'the transformative power of the divine encounter.' He describes how converts in the presence of the Divine can experience a heightened awareness of sin, leading to remorse and a deep sense of forgiveness. Importantly, this transformative encounter is often accompanied by lasting joy, serenity, and bliss, providing a sense of upliftment and comfort. Beyers (2017:61) emphasises, 'Repentance is a spiritual act.'

Meanwhile, Pharo (2018:52) defines 'Remorse expresses sincere regret or remorse for wrongdoing.' The emphasis on spiritual encounters, including miracles, is consistent with this Indian culture's focus on daily well-being and miraculous experiences. This cultural context, which underscores the importance that Pentecostals place on miraculous experiences as the basis of their conversion theology, is a source of enlightenment and cultural awareness for the audience.

c. Miracles and persuasion

According to the empirical study's observations, most pastors believe that their church is growing due to the effectiveness of their evangelism and healing ministries. They describe faith healing and exorcism as essential tools for church growth. A recent survey in India found that 80% of Pentecostal pastors attributed

the development of Christianity in their areas to 'powerful evangelism' during church services (Bauman 2015:97). This type of evangelism focuses on healing and encounters with demonic forces. Interviews with pastors revealed an emphasis on exceptional recoveries, allowing people to experience God's truth and the power of Jesus. In addition to healing, pastors point out that Jesus provides care, protection from evil, and, ultimately, eternal life. The success of pastors and congregations can be significantly influenced by the occurrence of healings and the associated rumours (Bergunder 2011:298). The interviews revealed that when illness or demonic possession occurred, participants sought help from their traditional gods but often found no relief.

Often, miraculous healings were seen when people turned to Pentecostal pastors or experienced the Holy Spirit. Despite not always being miracles, these experiences ultimately led each convert to become Pentecostal. Several healed converts describe their conversion as a miracle. Individual experience is a defining feature of Pentecostal conversions, characterised by powerful affect. One might be drawn to Pentecostalism for various reasons, including intellectual curiosity, a sense of community among believers, or a desire for more intimate relationships with God. Not all miracles; however, these experiences persuade them to follow Jesus Christ and receive the Holy Spirit. Specific individuals may undergo a sudden conversion, while others experience gradual growth in their faith. Why is this? Pentecostals believe in miracles, but they do not expect a miracle with every conversion. A miracle is not a miracle when someone recovers from an illness.

Converts often experience natural healing that accompanies their conversion. As Bauman (2015:97) notes, 'Miracle healings and exorcisms are undoubtedly one of the main attractions of Pentecostalism in contemporary India.' The occurrence of supernatural events and other remarkable happenings frequently prompts individuals to adopt Christianity.

d. Profound transformation

As outlined in the study, *MC* is often viewed as a powerful catalyst for profound change in the lives of those who convert. These God-led transformations represent a profound shift that leads to inner peace, a new sense of purpose, and a connection to a larger spiritual community. Pentecostals believe that miraculous experiences are direct encounters with the Holy Spirit, resulting in a sudden shift

in consciousness and a deeper understanding of Jesus, as previously explained by participants in this study. These experiences strengthen faith, inspire a life dedicated to Jesus, and lead to spiritual transformation. In contrast to gradual transformations, Pentecostal conversions are often characterised as breaks with previous ways of life (Bauman 2015:84). For example, respondents such as George Joseph (2022) and Joshua Raj (2022), who had similar experiences with the Holy Spirit, testified that the Holy Spirit radically changed their lives and brought them peace and contentment after conversion. These encounters are reflected in phenomenological analyses of conversion stories. According to the study, at the time of their conversion, the converts acknowledged the existence of the Holy Spirit and experienced divine manifestations such as deliverance and healing. These mystical experiences brought happiness and peace, profoundly changing the lives of every person. Testimonies of transformative encounters are a common thread in the conversion stories of everyday Pentecostal believers (Abraham 2021: 243).

Similar to Pentecostals worldwide, Indian Pentecostals generally adhere to the concept of complete separation from anything that contradicts Christian teachings. Personal transformation is highly valued and is a prerequisite for every Pentecostal convert, a principle emphasised in the Pentecostal theology of India. Many Pentecostals believe that the best way to deal with their pre-conversion religious past is not to ignore it but to challenge it actively. This often characterises a Pentecostal culture in which spirituality is seen as opposed to mainstream culture (Bauman 2015:84-85). Pentecostals can also consciously dress and present themselves differently from other Indians within the Christian community. The growing importance of faith healing in Christian conversion in India raises questions about scientific assumptions about the causes and strategies of conversion. According to traditional Christian scholars in India, a devotion to Christianity based only on healing through supernatural means may not last long.

However, this research shows that these conversions can lead to significant change and lasting Christian commitment. The *MC* experience significantly impacts various aspects of a convert's life, as the study examined each convert's story, encompassing spiritual, psychological, behavioural, physical, social, and economic factors. This results from direct encounters with the Holy Spirit and a sudden shift in one's consciousness, leading to a more profound

understanding of Jesus and a conversion. These experiences strengthened the convert's faith and inspired him to worship Jesus and live a spiritually fulfilling life.

e. Affiliation of the Pentecostal faith

The supernatural experience with the Spirit is an initiation into a new life. Vondey (2017:44) describes it as 'a regeneration or new birth characterised by radical renewal, change, transformation and a new beginning' that leads to adherence to a new faith. The conversion narratives in the empirical study report that many traditional Christians joined the Pentecostal Church after experiencing miraculous healing and profound spiritual experiences. The practical benefits of these healings, such as relief from illness, are a significant reason why non-Christians in India are beginning to embrace Christianity (Bauman 2015:98). There is evidence that those who remain Christians in the long term may be motivated by more than miraculous experiences. Similar to Bauman's findings (2015), the field study suggests that divine interventions and supernatural experiences are the main reasons for belonging to the Pentecostal faith in contemporary India. Sahoo (2018:159) supports this view, noting that while illness may initially attract people to church, the feeling of healing makes them stay.

Nevertheless, Bauman (2015:96) argues that 'the caste system may influence whether conversions initiated by miraculous healings are lasting.' The growing importance of faith healing in India not only shapes academic and public discussions about Christian conversion motivations but also challenges the argument that the growth of Indian Christianity is driven primarily by material or social benefits (Tarango 2011:112). As Tarango (2011:112) puts it, miraculous transformations can lead sceptics to embrace Pentecostalism.

Pentecostals believe that miraculous healings are crucial for successful missionary work. The healing process is seen as a manifestation of the Spirit, which guides individuals towards embracing their trust in Christ. Despite growing persecution, Pentecostals believe their practices can bring people to faith. They think that those who encounter divine intervention will develop fortitude in the presence of life's challenges.

4.4.2. Impact of miraculous conversions among the Pentecostal community

Pentecostalism has significantly shaped the Indian Christian community in numerous ways. Some of the most significant growth of Pentecostalism has taken place in India, especially among Dalits and Adivasis (tribals)—the marginalised communities (Sahoo 2018: 160-61). The Indian Pentecostal researcher Abraham (2021:4) attributes the rapid growth of the movement not only in India but also to a global phenomenon, particularly pronounced in developing countries. His research shows that Pentecostalism has become the fastest-growing Christian movement, particularly outside Europe, in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, Australia and the Pacific (Anderson 2014:1-2).

This growth is attributed to Pentecostal teachings that underline equality, spiritual gifts such as healing, and a personal connection with God, which resonates with those experiencing social exclusion. Pentecostalism has had a significant impact on the impoverished, exploited and lower social classes in India (Abraham 2021:3; Jones 2009:504–509). Abraham (2021:3) argues, 'Pentecostalism in India is a liberation movement whose spirituality empowers the poor and helpless to overcome challenges they alone might face.' Furthermore, the concept of miraculous healing has significantly contributed to Pentecostals gaining influence in predominantly Indian society (Sahoo 2018:159). Accordingly, a growing need for healing is emerging, encompassing both supernatural and natural phenomena (Bauman 2015:134).

The Pentecostal ministry, which seeks to restore the soul, has a profound impact on its members and followers. The Pentecostal perspective on the challenges of evil, disease, and misfortune widely supported scholarly assumptions about the implications of the spread of Christianity in regions such as India (Bauman 2015:109). Overall, Pentecostalism was a dynamic force in shaping the Indian Christian landscape. It has led to growth, social engagement and theological debates, but it also faces challenges such as caste integration and gender roles. The focus on faith healing in Pentecostalism has generated discussions among the broader Indian Christian community.

4.4.2.1. Fostering a sense of community and solidarity

Pentecostals perceive divine healing as a conduit for deepening solidarity with marginalised communities and those in distress. They emphasise the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in the healing journey (Abraham 2014:39; Macchia 1999: 21). As a result, Indian Pentecostal churches serve as a sanctuary for marginalised communities, such as Dalits, tribals, and others. The Holy Spirit fosters solidarity and all-encompassing worship within Pentecostal communities (Sahoo 2018:158). In conversion narratives, individuals often testify that they experienced a profound sense of comfort, closeness, and solidarity within the present religious community or the church, surpassing their previous religious faith.

As Sahoo (2018:158) underscores, 'For converts, the Pentecostal Church offers an egalitarian space for all, without any form of discrimination.' In the church, converts feel equal in the eyes of the Lord; Here, they sit together as a community of believers.' Converts undergo a shift in perspective when they embrace their faith. By adopting the all-pervading power of the Holy Spirit, they transition from following the spirits of their ancestors to fostering harmony and respect among community members (Abraham 2021:314). As people from all walks of life come together in a shared faith, the community is strengthened by this newfound sense of purpose and belonging. Church members actively support new converts, helping them integrate and develop a sense of belonging, as some converts have testified in their stories. Pentecostals provide guidance and support, promoting community and purpose (Ebenezer 2021:96). By celebrating their shared faith and fostering an accepting atmosphere where everyone is treated with respect, the Indian Pentecostal Church strengthens its bonds with one another.

4.4.2.2. Shaping communal beliefs and practices

Pentecostal *MC* shapes communal beliefs and practices in various ways. First, it highlights the importance of personal spiritual experience (cf. Land 2003:66). Pentecostals believe that people have the opportunity to directly receive and experience the Holy Spirit, which can transform them (Jacobsen 2003:2). This experience is often attributed to Christian belief and practice. Second, the primary characteristics of Pentecostalism emphasise collective beliefs and customs. Pentecostals believe the Holy Spirit is present in both individual believers and the entire community (Lord 2012:67). This leads to an intense passion for corporate

worship, prayer, and sharing. Third, it underscores the spiritual manifestation of the mind (cf Lord 2012:67).

Today, the Holy Spirit is working. 'The Spirit empowers believers to produce miracles.' Glossolalia and healing are among the spiritual gifts in this belief. (Jacobsen 2003:2). This ultimately leads to a healing and deliverance ministry. The Pentecostal faith holds that the Holy Spirit can alleviate both physical and spiritual ailments. This belief strongly emphasises prayer for the sick and deliverance from evil spirits (Abraham 2021: 186 - 87). Early Pentecostalism underscored personal spiritual experience, which led to the formation of communities (Lord 2012: 66).

In contemporary Pentecostalism, the emphasis has shifted to collective worship and rituals expressed in a ministry of healing and liberation. Susai (2021:132) asserts that the ministry of wholeness is essential because Pentecostals recognise that 'illness or physical deformity affects the whole person and the wholeness or fullness of the human person is at stake.' Pentecostals promote well-being in a divided world. Pinnock (2009: 113) discusses 'a diverse range of spiritual encounters that welcome individuals into the community of God's people and bring about transformative change in their lives.' This will be examined in the further part of the study.

4.4.3. Interactions with broader global Pentecostal society

The concept of *MCs*, a cornerstone of Pentecostalism, assumes a unique character in the cultural landscape of India. How does Indian Pentecostal *MC* practice interact with global Pentecostalism? This practice underlines personal encounters with the Divine Spirit as a transformative experience that leads to conversion and a life filled with the Holy Spirit. While worldwide Pentecostalism recognises a range of spiritual experiences, in India, the emphasis is likely on healings and deliverances due to the focus on practicality and immediate needs, especially given the predominance of traditional beliefs regarding spirits and possessions. In the following section, we examine the relationship between Indian Pentecostal activities and global Pentecostals, with a particular emphasis on the distinctive conversion process.

4.4.3.1. Miraculous experiences as the driving force of global Pentecostalism

MCs, miraculous healings and other conversion experiences are cornerstones of Pentecostalism worldwide, and the experiences of Indian Pentecostals add a unique level to this phenomenon. What Pentecostals worldwide have in common is their significant influence within their local cultural context, demonstrating the power to heal, prophesy and deliver people from evil spirits. As a result, miraculous events often accompany their daily lives (Reed 2012:97116). The spread of Pentecostalism is directly related to its message of spiritual restoration and liberation, which broadly appeals to marginalised communities, including Dalits in India (Mallampalli 2023:240). Macchia (1999:20) states, 'Healing is an essential aspect of the gospel...which directly or indirectly influences the rise of Pentecostalism throughout the world.'

Research on Pentecostalism highlights the significance of supernatural experiences in attracting converts. Robinson's (2005:280-289) study of Indonesian Pentecostalism identifies three aspects of Pentecostal spirituality related to supernatural encounters. These spiritual experiences include connection with the supernatural realm, dreams and visions, speaking in tongues, receiving divine guidance, and encountering evil spirits. In addition, Pentecostalism strongly emphasises direct experiences with Christ, culturally relevant worship practices, and a rich music and song tradition. Recognising and incorporating cultural relevance in worship practices acknowledges the diversity of followers and fosters a sense of respect and inclusivity. The movement encompasses various activities focused on worship, teaching, and preaching, including daily meetings, home prayer meetings, and special worship services. Robinson attributes the primary reason for conversions and church growth in Indonesia to supernatural healing (Robinson 2005:280).

Since the emergence of global Pentecostalism, the last century has witnessed a proliferation of various doctrines and practices that are considered characteristic of Pentecostalism. While Reformed traditions rule out miracles, American Pentecostal historian McGee (2010:42) argues in his studies that 'the miraculous is constantly possible.' These arguments offer some understanding, but understanding Pentecostal growth requires recognising that Pentecostal experiences and activities are at the heart of development. In the 20th century,

many Pentecostal congregations practiced healing deliverances, spiritual gifts, visions, dreams, and other miraculous experiences of conversion (Robinson 2005:289). The swift growth of this global phenomenon underscores the significance of supernatural experiences and pursuits.

The exchange of extraordinary experiences promotes unity and strengthens the global Pentecostal identity. *MC* narratives are powerful tools for both internal encouragement and external evangelism. Indian Pentecostals contribute their stories to this worldwide pool, inspiring others. The works of scholars such as Bauman (2015), Sahoo (2018), Bergunder (2008), and Iyadurai (2015) are valuable resources for understanding various conversion histories related to *MC* and contribute to global discussions about the work of the Holy Spirit worldwide. The specific nature of *MCs* in India may vary due to local cultural beliefs and social issues. Indian Pentecostals may emphasise healings related to traditional ailments or miraculous interventions aimed at combating caste discrimination. There may be debates within the broader Pentecostal movement regarding the interpretation of *MCs*. Indian Pentecostal theologians, informed about their socio-religious context, could offer unique perspectives. While it is important to focus on *MCs*, the importance of everyday faith and social justice concerns that certain Indian Pentecostals may prioritise cannot be pushed into the background. Pentecostals can collaborate with global scholars to document and study *MC* narratives in a nuanced manner, taking into account the Indian context. Global Pentecostal networks can collaborate to establish best practices for sharing testimonies of *MCs* to ensure authenticity and ethical storytelling. Pentecostal theologians can engage in dialogue with their global colleagues to explore the theological implications of *MCs* in various contexts. The Indian Pentecostal Church must be aware of and avoid sharing fabricated miracle stories with the global Pentecostal Church. *MCs* can bridge the gap between Indian Pentecostals and the broader global movement. Sharing these experiences promotes unity and evangelism. However, opportunities exist for further collaboration to ensure contextual understanding, ethical storytelling, and deeper exploration of the theological meaning of *MCs* within the global Pentecostal landscape.

4.4.3.2. Commonality with worldwide Pentecostalism

Indian Pentecostalism shares a core identity with global Pentecostal teachings regarding the extraordinary events of the Holy Spirit and conversion, but also adds its unique flavour to this shared belief system. According to Vondey (2017:4), 'the identity of Pentecostalism lies not primarily in its historical, [confessional], geographical or sociological [characteristics], but in the theology of the movement.' Furthermore, he (2017:4) suggests,

Pentecostalism can be identified by the day of Pentecost as a concern for an immediate encounter with God through the Spirit of Christ, manifested in discernible signs and wonders as evidence of God's transforming and redeeming presence, directing all of life towards the kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit is believed to be active among Pentecostals worldwide, who also receive gifts such as healing and the ability to speak in tongues (glossolalia). Spiritual experiences can be either dramatic or miraculous, as per the doctrine of Global Pentecostalism. McClymond (2016:404) reports that 'healing the sick and [expelling demons] are common phenomena... occurring among ordinary people.' Pentecostal missionaries used healing practices and exorcisms to fulfil their mission of spreading their beliefs while travelling globally according to their desires.

The Holy Spirit remains an active presence in daily life for Pentecostalism because the faith emphasises a personal, experiential aspect of religion that extends beyond formal church guidelines. The Pentecostal community is characterised by a conversion-oriented theology that drives the transformation into unified structures, reflecting its unique identity and worldview. Additionally, it provides comprehensive explanatory power for global movements. Nevertheless, if we must focus on conversion in terms of miraculous events, we should examine and evaluate this discussion in the broader context of worldwide Pentecostal customs and traditions, which may involve different understandings (Vondey 2017:91; Yong 2014:81–102; Hollenweger 1996:7).

Pentecostal theology emphasises the transformative power of experiences mediated by the Holy Spirit, and this transformative process extends not only to individuals who convert but also to the entire community and the world (Vondey 2017: 104). Therefore, conversion discussions focus primarily on the importance of manifesting the encounter with the Holy Spirit, particularly emphasising the long-

term sustainability of global Pentecostal customs and traditions. Pentecostals are distinguished from other Christians by a common understanding of conversion, characterised by the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and the witness of divine healing on a global scale. Alexander (2006:121) states, 'Signs, glossolalia, healing and the [proclamation] of the gospel to the poor were held together as [signs] of God's manifestation.' Furthermore, healing miracles in various cultural contexts strongly connect indigenous populations and represent a bridge to their traditional healing rituals. This, in turn, enables Pentecostalism to reflect the global expansion of Christianity (Vondey 2017: 107; Brown 2011: 4–6).

The experiences of Pentecostals from India undeniably improve the global understanding of *MCs* and Pentecostalism. Indian Pentecostals not only consolidate the global Pentecostal identity but also highlight extraordinary experiences and conversions, and the global movement benefits from their diverse experiences and theological viewpoints. Collaboration is crucial for addressing challenges, promoting ethical storytelling, and enhancing understanding of *MCs* within the global Pentecostal community.

4.4.3.3. Conversion praxis of global Pentecostalism

The global growth of Pentecostalism stems from its emphasis on personal engagements with the Holy Spirit, which results in transformative experiences through abnormal means of conversion. Their community engages individuals seeking a deeper connection with God and is transformed through experiences of healing, deliverance, prophecy, speaking in tongues, and rebirth. The transition to theological reflection proceeds from the emphasis on the Spirit of Christ, and in Pentecostal theology, the conversion process always involves a personal experience with Christ through the Holy Spirit (Vondey 2018:26). Within Pentecostalism, *MC* action serves as an embodiment of the work of the Holy Spirit, transforming ordinary life and creating new communities characterised by spiritual behaviour.

As a result, there is a growing interest in studying theological practices and conversions within Pentecostal communities worldwide, leading researchers to expend significant effort in documenting the everyday theology of Pentecostal communities (Vondey 2018:80, 2019:23; Cartledge 2016). Further theological effort is needed to reinterpret conversion practice globally, including Pentecostal

beliefs and rituals. Their belief in *MC* and the participation of the Holy Spirit in extraordinary acts renders it impossible to view theology as a purely intellectual or theoretical pursuit (Vondey 2019:26). The primary framework of Pentecostal conversion theology stems from identifying, preserving, and returning to the fundamental miraculous experience of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostals are seeing a decline in more secular denominations, such as liberal Protestantism and Reformed traditions, while those emphasising the supernatural are rising. This challenges theories of secularisation that predict a decline in supernatural belief (Miller & Yamamori 2007:36). Despite the challenges, Pentecostalism is thriving. While traditional Protestantism is in decline according to secularisation theories, Pentecostal churches are booming. Secular theories predicted that medical science would make supernatural healing obsolete, yet people flock to Pentecostal services in search of alternative medicine and spiritual answers. Secularisation also presupposed an increase in purely personal religious experiences. Interestingly, the fastest-growing Pentecostal churches emphasise a sense of community connected by miraculous events. The emphasis on spirituality and miraculous experiences is one factor contributing to the rise of Pentecostalism, in contrast to Catholicism and Protestantism (Miller & Yamamori 2007:36-37).

Pentecostalism expanded rapidly between 1950 and 2000, spreading worldwide. Fuelled by conferences packed with miracles and conversions, Pentecostal churches have exploded across Africa, Asia, and the Americas (Johnstone 2011:94). A survey in 10 countries found that most people had witnessed faith healings. In Latin America, Africa, and Asia, many first-generation Christians—approximately 80–90%—credited miraculous healings with their conversion (McClymond 2016:406).

Johnstone's (2014:94) study on 'The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends, and Opportunities' shows that Pentecostals are expected to experience a 13 to 15 percent increase in conversion growth by 2050, surpassing other Christian groups worldwide. Conversely, Johnstone argues that Asian countries may experience a slower conversion rate because factors such as persecution, hardship and social pressure create numerous barriers to conversion (Johnstone 2011:128, 138). Furthermore, Johnstone (2011:138) notes that 'many new Christians have testimonies of divine intervention in healings, dreams and visions that confirm their faith' and strengthen their faith journey. This looms over the

continuing expectation of miraculous acts of the Divine Spirit that draw people to Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism holds that the Spirit performs miracles daily, ranging from miraculous healings to divine inspiration for significant life decisions. This interactive approach, which showcases real-world miracles, is a significant draw for many. Pentecostal churches become centres for these experiences and attract new believers eager to connect with God. Nevertheless, critics raise concerns about emotional manipulation and pressure to conform to Pentecostal *MC* practices. However, Indian Pentecostal practices, with their unique interpretation of *MC*, can enrich the global movement. By fostering collaboration and understanding, Pentecostalism can develop a richer range of conversion experiences, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of the miraculous in this dynamic faith.

4.5. Challenges in miraculous conversion praxis

Miraculous spiritual encounters are a driving force within the Indian Pentecostal community, but their impact on society is complex. While they can attract new members and strengthen faith, they also create challenges. To foster positive interactions, Pentecostals can focus on social work and interfaith dialogue, highlighting the close-knit community they offer. In this way, they can go beyond mere miraculous experiences and become a force for positive social change and understanding.

4.5.1. Theological argument on miraculous conversions

4.5.1.1. The enduring appeal of miraculous conversions in Pentecostalism

The immense expansion of Pentecostalism is evident especially in its centralised, coordinated missionary practice, along with the previous Christian belief system and extraordinary works attributed to the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism is grounded in miraculous healing and is focused on the powers and attributes of the Holy Spirit. It entails the transformation of a believer's filling with the Holy Spirit for effective ministry. This transformation involves being a faithful Christian disciple.

Discipleship is often connected with miracles and the directive Jesus gave to evangelise the nations (Milton 2015:5).

Miraculous healings are a central pillar of the Pentecostal faith, serving as a testament to God's power and a significant tool for evangelism (Cartledge 2015:12). Pentecostals believe that God's grace is transformative. Therefore, barriers to faith are overcome by shredding worldviews that will alter the understanding of religion (Thomas 2010:306-07, Macchia 2006:112).

These transformative experiences often reveal God's justice, convict sin, and enable the individual to repent and embrace faith in Christ (MacArthur 2013:7). They are in line with the Pentecostal perspective that the Holy Spirit, being the most active person in the Godhead, overcomes sin, renews the mind, and leads people to the provision of salvation.

The Pentecostal faith is well-equipped to address people's religious needs. A critical figure in Pentecostalism is the Holy Spirit, who answers prayers through encounters with the divine. Such interventions, where the sacred intervenes in everyday life, are a powerful connection point for believers (Anderson 2015:9; Miller & Yamamori 2007:221). The answers, such as restoring health after illness and protecting against malevolent forces, are pivotal in the conversion process and the spread of Pentecostalism.

4.5.1.2. Contrasting views on miraculous conversions

Reformed theologians dispute Pentecostal teachings about *MCs*. They argue that affirming personal experiences, particularly miraculous ones, diminishes the importance of Scripture in the conversion process. For example, Gaffin (1979:22) (cited in Millikan 2019:230) interprets the Pentecost events in Acts 2 as a unique historical moment rather than a normative standard for modern conversions. Likewise, theoretical models of conversion often differ from those of Pentecostalism. These models usually rely on Christian symbolism, particularly Paul's dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. They portray conversion as a sudden and radical change in faith (De Roover & Claerhout 2008:55; Buckser & Glazier 2003:xvi), uncommon in modern conversions. The African scholar Oss (1996:281) reports, 'Signs and wonders do follow preaching today; this is more common in areas being evangelised for the first time.'

Indian Pentecostalism, with its emphasis on divine intervention in conversion experiences, underscores the accessibility of divine grace. The belief that God acts directly on the individual's heart and mind, leading to a profound transformation that natural causes cannot explain, is often countered with the argument that *MC* is attributed to psychological factors such as emotional experiences, social influences, and personal needs. These experiences, while powerful and transformative, are ultimately products of human psychology.

The Pentecostal view is that *MCs* are accurate, objective events that can be confirmed by external evidence or shared experiences. For Pentecostals, these experiences are subjective feelings and actual encounters with the divine, whereas others argue that *MCs* are merely a reflection of the subjective nature of religious experiences. They are primarily personal and internal experiences that cannot be objectively measured or verified.

Indian Pentecostals believe that *MCs* are relatively common in the socio-cultural context and result from supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit that have happened to numerous people throughout history from the beginning. However, traditional Christians argue that *MCs* are extraordinary events reserved for only a few. These exceptional experiences occurred in the time of the apostles and are no longer to be expected today.

Pentecostals underscore that *MCs* are essential to genuine Christian faith. This is because a radical, life-changing encounter with God through the Holy Spirit is required to become a faithful follower of Christ. Nevertheless, traditional Christians comment that while *MCs* may be meaningful experiences for Pentecostals, they are not necessary for salvation or actual faith. Traditional Christians emphasise the importance of gradual spiritual growth and a personal relationship with God.

4.5.1.3. The nature of miraculous conversion: a debate within Christianity

Pentecostal Christianity recognises surprising supernatural encounters when followers undergo a radical transformation in their religious demeanour. Such occurrences are referred to as miraculous conversions. Different understandings of this extraordinary event among Christian groups have led to prolonged disagreement. Pentecostals base their support for divine transformations on Paul's biblical experience when he encountered God on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-

19). Many Pentecostals report how their lives have undergone dramatic and sudden transformations, which empirical research links to divine activities. Pentecostals argue that miraculous conversion serves as proof of God's grace and an authentic spiritual experience that transcends human comprehension.

Some critics criticise miracle conversions as abrupt conversions that psychological variables, such as emotional instability, suggestibility, or the need for acceptance, can explain. Others believe that social pressures, cultural norms, or interpersonal relationships may influence a person's decision to convert. Claims of miraculous conversions are challenging to verify, according to critics, because there is insufficient scientific evidence to support supernatural experiences. Christianity also considers other perspectives. Most evangelical Christians emphasise personal conversion moments and Holy Spirit participation in self-development. The Catholic Church accepts sudden conversions that occur but emphasises the necessity of spiritual growth through the reception of sacraments in an adequate manner. Liberal Protestantism remains unsure about supernatural causes of conversion while prioritising the development of social change and moral ethics.

Christianity's belief in miraculous conversion remains a highly debated and complex topic. Although some people believe it is an authentic spiritual experience, others offer alternative social, cultural, and psychological explanations. The Reformed theologian Washer (2013) underlines, 'Since the call to repentance is an absolute necessity in the proclamation of the Gospel, we [must correctly] understand the nature of repentance and its manifestation is genuine conversion.' Mulder (2001: 43) states, 'Conversion includes three Dimensions: the act of repentance, the experience of grace and a new life in discipleship.'

The history of Reformed theology is marked by debates about conversion (Mulder 2001:23). John Calvin acknowledged the connection between knowledge of God and self-knowledge; later, Calvinism emphasised the sovereignty of God and the limitations of humanity regarding salvation. This debate about human will and free will significantly shaped Reformed attitudes toward evangelicalism and revivalism (Mulder 2001:23). The conversion debate had a profound influence on New England Puritanism and its church doctrine. First, membership requires conversion experience. Later, the Half Covenant permitted the baptism of children of unconverted parents. The central question was whether the church should

include only converted persons or extend fellowship to those without a clear conversion experience (Mulder 2001:23). The various viewpoints within Christianity reflect the range of interpretations and beliefs surrounding this phenomenon.

4.5.2. Religious challenges and violence against Pentecostal conversion

Pentecostalism, a broad Christian movement, views conversion as a specific miraculous event (Cartledge 2017:2). Pentecostal theologian Cartledge (2017:2) argues for 'dramatic [or miraculous] experiences of encountering God' through the Holy Spirit. However, reformers disagree, arguing that conversion does not require an extraordinary event for repentance and faith (Washer 2013). Reformers emphasise cognitive reasoning, repentance, and trust as key components of the conversion process.

The sociologist Ammerman underscores the 'phenomenological reality' of conversion experiences (Ammerman 2007:224). Individuals and communities in India seek a profound spiritual presence and meaning through various religious practices. They integrate spiritual language and experiences into their lives and seek a connection with God beyond everyday rationality (Ammerman 2007: 224). The focus on individual experiences is notably evident in Indian Pentecostalism. The convert determines the locations and timing of Pentecostal conversions, which frequently include encounters with God, healings, and deliverances (e.g., for first-generation Indian Pentecostal followers).

The Bible states that conversion is a complete transformation of perception and understanding. It transcends intellect and affects emotions and motivation. Before conversion, the experiences of an individual are masked, leading to a lack of awareness, hatred of one's God, and disregard for the truth and laws of God. Authentic conversion begins when the Holy Spirit acts with a renewed heart and an enlightened mind, revealing divine truth that exposes falsehoods. The person's perception of God, self, sin, and salvation is significantly impacted by this intervention. Indian Pentecostalism's emphasis on *MCs* attracts followers but also triggers criticism.

Pentecostals believe that these experiences create a strong connection with the Holy Spirit, leading to life-changing faith and goals (Milton Grace 2015: 100). While human evangelism is essential, the primary focus of Pentecostalism is

the experience of an encounter with God (Milton 2015:101). Remarkable healings and conversions prove God's power and strengthen existing beliefs. However, incorporating Reformed viewpoints into some Pentecostal circles has diluted their practices (Vondey 2017:76). Pentecostals find the Reformed perspective attractive because it acknowledges the role of humans in addition to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Some claim that Pentecostal practices, such as faith healing, can exploit vulnerable people. Excessive emphasis on dramatic miracles could overshadow the deeper aspects of faith and social responsibility. Focusing on internal experiences could lead to neglecting broader social issues. The emphasis on faith healing could discourage people from seeking medical treatment. Despite criticism, Indian Pentecostalism has the potential to impact society positively. Pentecostal churches can channel their focus on healing and helping others into social work projects. Open dialogue with other religious groups can promote understanding and cooperation. Through its strong commitment to the community, the Pentecostal church finds opportunities to address social issues in the neighbourhood. Through social responsibility and open discussion, Pentecostalism establishes itself as a significant agent of social change, effectively responding to criticism.

The political landscape in India exhibits considerable influence from religion, as specific political organisations have adopted the concept of Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism. This has increased religious tensions and threats to religious freedom, particularly for Christians (Sahoo 2018:4; Shah & Carpenter 2018:xvii). Religious conversion has been a highly debated topic in India since the early 20th century, sparking discussions in various areas, including the media, courts, and politics. The emergence of the BJP in 2014 coincided with a rise in violence against Christians, particularly Pentecostals, known for their faith-healing practices (Claerhout & De Roover 2005:3048).

Scholars believe that the underlying cause is not religious belief itself but the political struggle for power and social equality (Claerhout & De Roover 2005:3048; De Roover & Claerhout 2008:59). High-caste Hindus fear losing their dominance if lower castes convert to Christianity, which they believe threatens the vision of India as a Hindu nation (Vyas 2002; De Roover & Claerhout 2008:59; Menon 2003:53–55). Pentecostal churches emphasise divine healing, and

confident preaching attracts converts, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Pentecostals view these practices as evidence of their faith (Mallampalli 2023: 240–48). Their methods often clash with those of traditional Hindu exorcists, creating a point of contention (Bergunder 2001:103).

Hindu organisations, particularly those allied with the BJP, strongly oppose Christian conversion efforts, particularly among tribal communities and Dalits, who are constitutionally considered part of the Hindu group (Wilson 2019:181). While miraculous healings are practised in various faiths in India, Hindu fundamentalists accuse Pentecostals of using them to trick people into converting (Kaur Minj 2024). The BJP government has even justified violence against Christians as a form of Hindu self-defence, claiming that Christian evangelism fuels violence (Shah 2018:4). The Kandhamal riots of 2007–2008 are an example of this violence (Bauman 2020:2).

To address these concerns, several states in India have introduced anti-religious conversion laws, and there is increasing support for legislation at the national level. Proponents argue that Christians abuse religious freedom protections to convert vulnerable populations (Shah 2018:4). While conversions of all faiths have been discussed, Christian conversions have become the main target of recent legislation (Shah 2018:5). This rise in anti-conversion efforts coincides with a crackdown on faith-based healing practices. Assam recently passed a law banning 'magical healing practices,' seen as a means of curbing Christian conversions, particularly in the context of Pentecostal healing services (The Hindu Bureau 2024; Kaur 2024). Nevertheless, the legislation aims to promote public health and eliminate exploitative practices (The Hindu 2024).

Christian groups criticise the law as a violation of religious freedom and an unfair characterisation of prayer as magic (Chanda 2024). They point to Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion. Critics argue that such allegations weaken these constitutional guarantees (Chanda 2024). Despite the violence and legal challenges, Christianity continues to grow in India, with many drawn to faith-healing meetings and personal testimonies (Sam 2008: 90). This growth serves as a beacon of hope for the faith's future. However, violence against Christians continues, often perpetrated by Hindu nationalist groups who blame Christians for conversions (Sam 2008:94). The silence of the central and state governments on this violence emboldens these groups (Bauman 2020:4). As

a result, Christians in India are facing increasing levels of religious intolerance and violence in various regions of the country.

4.6. Conclusion

Indian Pentecostalism faces significant challenges in its practices in India's complex religious landscape. All religions in India offer comfort, but when they do not provide an immediate solution, ordinary people look for alternatives. Pentecostals engage in a healing ministry, proclaiming the gospel to attract people to Pentecostalism, a core belief and practice of their faith. Pentecostals convince converts of Jesus as Saviour and Healer through the Holy Spirit, using evidence of biblical miracles. The study investigates 'Why do Indian Pentecostals consider the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit essential to the conversion process?' The religious beliefs and spiritual understanding of ordinary people undergo substantial changes when they experience supernatural events, such as miraculous healings.

An empirical study analysing 70 Pentecostal converts' testimonies in India reveals a complex understanding of conversion. While miraculous experiences such as healings and exorcisms significantly impact 85% of these people, conversion is a multifaceted process. Cultural experiences associated with Pentecostalism illustrate how the Holy Spirit operates through divine power in the lives of individuals. The converts experience the Holy Spirit actively in their conversion journeys because they believe these spiritual aspects are essential to their religious transformation. These experiences also offer tangible solutions to individual challenges and align with pre-existing beliefs within Indian society, particularly among Hindus. Although Hinduism recognises the supernatural, the research found that its traditional practices have proven ineffective in addressing contemporary social and spiritual problems.

Pentecostalism is dedicated to portraying how biblical narrative successfully maps across a range of human experiences, making it ideally suited to show the power of Christianity across varying cultures. The unique cultural expressions of Pentecostalism appeal to numerous individuals because they manifest supernatural works of the Spirit through healing and deliverance. Through such experiences, people develop faith in Christ by the Spirit, which leads to personal transformation. Pentecostalism believes that true conversion is a profoundly personal and supernatural experience, accomplished through the miraculous

power of the Holy Spirit, rather than just a mental acknowledgement of scripture and faith. As documented in the previous chapter and this section, personal narratives of *MCs*, such as sudden healings, deliverance from demonic possessions, visions, prophetic encounters and other extraordinary experiences, support this belief. These accounts, presented as empirical evidence within the Pentecostal framework, highlight the transformative power of this spiritual encounter.

These conversion experiences, in particular, lead to an immediate relationship with and a strong belief that Jesus Christ is the ultimate truth. In this mystical encounter, individuals are liberated from wicked spirits, receive divine healing and purification, experience joy, and come to know that God is at work in their hearts. In India, people commonly engage with their various religions to address life's fundamental questions and find answers; however, Pentecostals emphasise that the Holy Spirit is an exclusive agent for answering these questions and drawing people to Jesus Christ through miraculous acts.

Pentecostalism is a viable alternative for those seeking solutions to their problems, emphasising immediate and concrete outcomes through miracles. This perspective is attractive. Every conversion story portrays a transformative journey with miracle-driven evidence of divine intervention, which validates the Pentecostal faith and strengthens one's conviction. These accounts emphasise the subjective nature of religious experiences and illustrate the profound influence of these encounters on individual worldviews. Pentecostalism in India recognises the importance of cognitive understanding of Scripture and personal decision-making alongside miraculous experiences. Different elements within conversion paths link together during spiritual transformation, whereby certain individuals begin with supernatural explorations but later progress into Bible study and faith development, becoming involved with church activities. Some people doubt the authenticity of these miracles because they claim that genuine faith requires an understanding of Scripture. Although sceptics challenge these findings, researchers suggest that conversion experiences lead participants to develop profound religious conversion that triggers their faith and makes them question their belief system.

According to this research, *MC* is an experience in which faith in Christ is reinforced and strengthened by supernatural phenomena such as healing,

exorcisms, or other divine interventions. The events in question are not coincidental but direct manifestations of God, serving as compelling proof of the Holy Spirit's divine nature and causing a significant shift in the convert's soul. Surveys indicate that 85% of participants attributed their conversion experiences to personal experiences of miraculous healing. In comparison, the remaining 15% reported witnessing similar supernatural events, including deliverance from evil spirits and other physical healings. These findings strongly suggest that *MCs* are present within the Indian Pentecostal movement. Faith-stimulating encounters that demonstrate supernatural influence on people's lives often lead to their conversion to Pentecostalism.

A study of multiple conversion stories and their social context reveals how Pentecostals perceive miracles and how people outside this movement perceive them. This study demonstrates how empirical evidence of miraculous experiences drives conversion yet acknowledges that further research is needed to uncover all the determinants of conversion in Indian Pentecostalism. This conclusion offers a sophisticated perspective on *MCs* in Indian Pentecostalism by integrating multiple viewpoints with empirical study findings.

Chapter - Five

Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

This study's central and motivating theme is conversion, a Christian concept that is widely accepted and hotly debated. Balancing different viewpoints within Christianity makes it challenging to underscore the importance of this dimension. Why is conversion still a controversial aspect of the Christian experience? The answer lies in the history of Christian expansion and development, as well as the various paths taken by theological scholars. Due to their *MC* practice, Pentecostals in India face significant political and religious challenges. Ironically, the very beliefs and powerful practices that have fuelled the rapid growth of the Pentecostal Church in India also cause these challenges. Traditional Christian denominations have criticised these practices, adding to the complexity. Nonetheless, this research aims to explore these challenges and will ultimately benefit all Christian traditions, theological scholars and anyone interested in *MCs*, ensuring everyone's voice is heard and considered.

Although their experiences and understandings vary, conversion has been a central theme throughout the history of Christianity. While Pentecostal traditions underline a miraculous event, Reformed traditions focus on the gradual process of intellectual assent. This study focused on conversion as a miraculous event within Indian Pentecostalism. The study clarifies the supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit and presents a fresh perspective on the broader Christian discussion of conversion. This study's examination of historical and modern perspectives has highlighted the significance of Pentecostal conversion theology in Christian theology.

The outstanding function of the Holy Spirit in the conversion process is of great significance to Pentecostals in India. They draw their inspiration from the Pentecost event described in the Book of Acts, where the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples, enabling them to speak in unknown languages and proclaim the Gospel (Acts 2). This study looked at the central question: Why do Indian Pentecostals consider the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit to be essential to the conversion process?' The apostle's proclamation of the Gospel, healings (see Acts 3:1–20 14:7–10), and conversion to Christ led to the early church's rapid growth.

The New Testament narrative serves as a conversion model for Indian Pentecostals, who believe that present-day supernatural encounters mirror biblical occurrences, thereby strengthening their spiritual convictions. Holding that transformational encounters with God through Holy Spirit miracles represent the primary essence of Pentecostal religious doctrine for salvation.

Most Pentecostals share their conversion experiences characterised by the miraculous act of the Spirit, as various conversion narratives are analysed in the empirical study. Pentecostals undergo a profound life transformation after conversion, as acceptance of faith extends beyond cognitive understanding. We found that the Holy Spirit performs extraordinary work during conversion, producing substantial changes in individuals who overcome sin and begin to follow Christian teachings. This emphasis on supernatural experiences reflects Indian culture, in which religious life is characterised by its liveliness and experiential nature. By highlighting miraculous encounters, Pentecostalism can improve the relevance of Christianity in India. It also offers empowerment and optimism to people affected by poverty, social exclusion or illness. The emphasis on miraculous encounters is a distinctive feature of Pentecostal Christian identity, promoting connections among Christians in India.

Focusing exclusively on the Pentecostal model in the Indian context has enabled a targeted and original contribution. The study's constraints have limited research into conversion experiences in other Christian traditions. Data collection relied primarily on interviews with laypeople, lay leaders, and clergy, taking into account possible limitations due to literacy levels and regional dialects.

A phenomenological approach was used to analyse qualitative data from the narratives of Pentecostal converts to understand their *MC* experiences. The research suggests that Indian Pentecostals view their conversion as a transformative experience with the Holy Spirit, leading to spiritual renewal in Christ. In contrast to other Christian groups, Pentecostalism's unique aspect is its emphasis on the miraculous, which drives its swift growth.

For Pentecostals, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has a practical impact that extends beyond the academic world, as clearly demonstrated in this study through fieldwork that recorded personal testimonies in the converts' own words. They depict personal and community lives transformed by the miraculous power of the Spirit. At the other end of the scale, the study examined the attitudes of traditional

churches that do not believe in the continuation of miraculous gifts in the contemporary world, which Pentecostals view as essential to the practice of authentic biblical spirituality.

The study found that people in India are attracted to Christianity and convert due to miraculous healings and supernatural manifestations of the Spirit. Across social classes, the study suggests why the poor are more attracted to and supported by Pentecostal churches that offer life-changing activities. Theological scholars could delve deeper into Pentecostal pneumatology to gain a better understanding of the transformative influence of the Holy Spirit in conversion. In addition to shedding light on the distinctive experiences of Indian Pentecostal converts, this study encourages a more extensive Christian conversation regarding the part the Holy Spirit plays in conversion.

In the first chapter, the study's essential elements of the research were reviewed. In the second, the centrality of *MCs* in Indian Pentecostalism was examined. In the third section, a contemporary theological understanding of *MCs* in Indian Pentecostalism was described. In the fourth section, the significance of *MCs* in the Indian Pentecostal movement was emphasised. The study's conclusion includes a summary of recommendations for future research and practice implications for the field of knowledge, as well as an assessment of the study's contribution and its limitations.

5.2. Summary and conclusion

This research has conducted an extensive empirical study on *MCs* among Indian Pentecostals from a phenomenological perspective. As the qualitative research highlights, *MCs* among Indian Pentecostals are the focus of the study. This practical theology is based on qualitative research that analyses *MC* narratives of people who joined Pentecostal churches due to experiences such as healing miracles and the casting out of demons. Interviews were conducted with nearly seventy people who converted to Pentecostalism from North and South India.

The researcher acknowledges the limitations that led to analysing a selected subset of *MC* stories. The research used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage thematic analysis framework for data analysis. Researchers employed this analytical technique by conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the dataset,

followed by the creation of initial codes and the exploration and assessment of themes. This was then followed by theme definitions and refinements, and the organisation of discovered themes with their related data for presentation purposes. These six core steps provided an appropriate and helpful framework for this practical theological study. This study's various chapters covered Pentecostalism, Indian Pentecostalism, Conversion and *MC*, contemporary theological understanding of *MCs* in Indian Pentecostalism, the importance of *MCs* in Indian Pentecostalism, and the centrality of *MCs* in Indian Pentecostalism: a biblical and historical inquiry.

Chapter 2 examined the centrality of *MCs* in Indian Pentecostalism, exploring their biblical and historical roots. The religious aspects of *MC* in Pentecostalism derive from the biblical understanding and traditions of the early Christian community. The religious activities of Indian Pentecostals focus on spiritual miracles attributed to the Holy Spirit, as they follow the same church methods established during the early biblical times. The expansion of the Pentecostal church in India and globally can be attributed significantly to its supernatural element, which this research study adequately explains. In contrast, Reformed traditions that reject the mystical aspect of conversion and view it as an essentially cognitive process have also been examined. This research demonstrated the various conversion methods that exist between Indian Pentecostals and Reformed believers, while analysing the role of the Holy Spirit.

The research suggests that Indian Pentecostalism emerged during the nineteenth century or possibly even earlier, due to its extensive historical development. Southern India experienced early evidence of Pentecostal-like charismatic revivals during the 1860s, which predated the arrival of Western cultural influences. The population of the local region initiated these revivals in advance of the widely known Azusa Street Revival, which occurred in Los Angeles. Chapter 2 emphasises the essential role of the Mukti Mission resuscitation during 1905. Academic opinions diverge regarding this understanding, yet they acknowledge Azusa Street as a transformative moment in the growth of Indian Pentecostalism, which had global Pentecostal repercussions. The natural expansion of Pentecostalism in India occurred as a homegrown movement, largely independent of significant Western intervention. At the same time, foreign

missionaries played a supporting role in its evolution throughout the twentieth century. It has a distinct historical background and unique individuality.

This chapter continued with *MCs*, healings and other supernatural gifts in Indian Pentecostalism. The religious beliefs of India shape how people understand divine healing and spiritual entities, making Pentecostalism a more approachable faith option. The acceptance of Pentecostal Christianity occurs because it performs miraculous healings and displays supernatural signs, while Pentecostal groups provide prayer support to sick members, drawing new believers into their faith. Pentecostalism has experienced rapid growth, as it emphasises above-normal occurrences and divine medical intervention, although traditional Christian congregations frequently lack these mystical elements. Conventional church leaders debate whether Pentecostalism improperly applies theology. Members of this group reject using miracles as the sole method for converting individuals. These differing viewpoints on miracles in conversion influence what draws people to Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism recognises miraculous encounters as key signs that someone has undergone a spiritual transformation. Pentecostal theology is currently experiencing global expansion through missionary work that brings about these cultural interventions. Pentecostalism grew rapidly due to the historic Azusa Street Revival, which experts widely acknowledge as a major milestone for this religious movement.

The religious practice, the subject of this analysis, demonstrates its uniqueness when viewed in comparison to mainstream Christianity. Although both groups embrace these phenomena, the missions of Pentecostal Christianity and Hinduism regarding divine miracles and world influence differ. From a Pentecostal perspective, miracles reveal divine blessing; however, these divine events are considered to exist naturally within the world for Hindus. The divergent religious views produce conflict between Pentecostal missionaries and Indian fundamentalist Hindus. Pentecostal Christianity continues to expand in India by focusing on *MCs*, despite facing multiple obstacles.

Chapter 3 examines the current theological perspectives on *MCs* within Indian Pentecostalism. Indian Pentecostals focus on spiritual transformation, resulting in transformative experiences after divine conversion. In contrast, traditional Christians prioritise a gradual conversion process based on intellectual

agreement with Scripture. The study examined the distinction between the 'natural' and the 'supernatural.' It examined how Pentecostals view this relationship, comparing it to the reduced emphasis on the supernatural in Reformed theology and the separation of the two realms in Hinduism. The study identified various categories of miraculous experiences leading to conversion to Indian Pentecostalism. The Pentecostals recognise *MC* as a profound spiritual event that deepens their faith, thereby proving the authenticity of Christianity. Indian beliefs in supernatural forces facilitate conversion through miraculous experiences because such experiences align with Indian cultural perspectives about sacred powers.

This section focused primarily on the data collected from the individual's conversion narratives and the miraculous experiences of the converts. The researcher used the phenomenological method to emphasise the convert's subjective experience and examine their feelings, thoughts and interpretations during the conversion. The process takes into account both cultural background and established beliefs in miracles. The core belief of Pentecostalism in India encompasses both exorcism and miraculous healing. Pentecostalism in India accepts Hindu religious characteristics as it creates its distinct Christian teaching foundation. The research focuses on testimony data from converted Pentecostals, exploring the powerful effect of extraordinary occurrences and delivering important study insights.

In Pentecostal theology, miraculous intervention becomes vital during conversion experiences because of its essential role. Pentecostal theology of conversion demands that believers encounter the Holy Spirit personally, as this direct experience brings essential transformative meaning to their spiritual development. The Holy Spirit reveals meaningful spiritual knowledge to individuals through personal experiences and both healing procedures and control of spiritual entities. The researchers continue their investigation of definitive supernatural encounters, despite science not having validated them, because such experiences profoundly affect the development of religion. The Pentecostal faith reveals sinful actions to people, transforming them through a life-changing experience that leads to their acceptance of Jesus Christ. The research indicates that Minority Christian faith influences the widespread growth of Indian Pentecostalism because it actively appeals to marginalised communities. *MC* attracts people by offering hope,

belonging and alignment with existing spiritual traditions. This section establishes theological backing for supernatural conversion intervention and its central position within Pentecostal theological beliefs.

Chapter 4 examined the significance of *MCs* in Indian Pentecostalism. This research explored how Pentecostal Christians in India perceive miracles and their role in spiritual conversion processes. It identified the Holy Spirit's dominant position and highlighted the deep transformational elements that emerged from the study. Pentecostal theology worldwide underscores the Holy Spirit throughout its theological approach. Pentecostals consider miraculous experiences, particularly spiritual healings, to be direct evidence of the Holy Spirit's supernatural acts. When individuals experience strong evidence, their faith strengthens, and they gain confidence in the Pentecostal faith.

The chapter examined how miracles could help people from diverse religious backgrounds, especially Hindus, transition to Pentecostalism within the framework of religious pluralism. This is particularly true for people seeking alternative pain relief that conventional approaches might not be able to offer. Conversion accounts often underscore miracles as triggers of profound change in one's life. This metamorphosis, driven by miracles, extends beyond physical recovery to encompass a profound communion with God and a new spiritual essence. The emphasis on miracles is consistent with existing Indian belief in the supernatural. Pentecostal practices may incorporate familiar concepts and terminology to appeal to potential converts from Hindu backgrounds.

The transformation brought about by miracles enables marginalised groups, such as Dalits and tribals, to find hope alongside freedom and social acceptance. Throughout the past three decades, the worldwide religious systems have experienced notable evolutionary changes. The following section analyses the developing Christian movement, which adopts different paths from Western theologies. Pentecostals believe that the Holy Spirit bestows unique abilities to achieve spiritual completeness through the power of healing, the gift of tongues, salvation and prophecy. Religious and spiritual encounters function as faith indicators for believers because they lead to convert new believers into their religions. The religious atmosphere in India produces remarkable events that help Pentecostalism expand throughout the country.

The complete analysis of the research study is presented in Chapter 5 through an integrated summary of the crucial findings discovered across all chapters. The study summarises its objectives, presents key research results, proposes implications for knowledge fields, and establishes substantial conclusions and vital research contributions. The limitations necessary to maintain clarity of focus in the current study are also addressed. Recommendations for further research and practice are provided in response, catalysing future exploration and development in the field.

5.3. Restating the aims of the study

The research evaluates the success rates of *MCs* within the Indian Pentecostal movement. The success described in conversion narratives for *MCs* results from their use of 'power evangelism,' which highlights divine supernatural power, including healing and exorcism. This mystical and sacred, demonstration-oriented approach directly addresses the practical and religious needs of Indian believers, whose personal stories confirmed these findings through empirical research. The study examines the profound individual and social impacts of profound encounters with God on religious beliefs, values, and spiritual practices.

The research examines how *MCs* have prolonged impacts on individual lives by affecting spiritual, emotional, and social aspects, and fostering empathy between these individuals. The analysis includes evaluating *MCs'* social transformation effects, their influence on cultural changes, and the relationships between religious groups. The research project aims to achieve two primary objectives: to improve methods for studying miracles in spiritual life and to develop adaptable pastoral care systems for Indian Pentecostals.

The study analysed cultural values through the evaluation of personal experiences and social networks, and their effects on individuals' interpretations of miracles.

5.4. Summarising main research findings

This phenomenological study examined the deeply personal conversion experiences within the Indian Pentecostal Church, revealing that miraculous encounters are a central aspect of the conversion process. People experience

these primary healings and exorcisms, consistently leading to individual interactions with the Christian deity *Yesu or Isu Masih* (Jesus). People search for *Isu Masih* as divine to help them during their distressing circumstances of sickness, financial troubles, social challenges, and spiritual voids, regardless of whether traditional religious ceremonies or medical approaches are ineffective in their situations. While beliefs about karma and rebirth influence the interpretation of suffering, individuals in India's diverse cultural context also seek profound moral transformation. Miraculous healings are perceived as resolutions to these challenges, offering renewed hope and a sense of purpose.

Miraculous experience / Divine intervention

The study has identified that a miracle is a supernatural occurrence that religious groups attribute to divine intervention, thereby defying natural phenomena. In Pentecostal theology, such works from the Holy Spirit function for religious objectives that encompass healing, deliverance, prophecy, and spiritual renewal. People evaluate 'miraculous' incidents differently, yet they generally describe phenomena that defy natural laws and are attributed to divine intervention. Conversion becomes 'miraculous' when perceived as a direct result of divine intervention with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

One of the more significant findings from this study is that the Pentecostal conversion of Indian believers heavily depends on miraculous spiritual experiences. This research demonstrates that Indian cultural beliefs in supernatural occurrences and Pentecostal emphasis on Holy Spirit miracles share a significant relationship. Spiritual experiences play various roles, as they demonstrate supreme divine strength and confirm that Christianity is a legitimate belief system in Indian culture, while strengthening each believer's faith in Christ. Such miraculous events connect people directly with the Holy Spirit, deepening their bond with Jesus Christ. Research on conversion cases reveals that life-changing spiritual experiences are crucial elements for Pentecostals to initiate their faith journey and sustain their religious practices in India.

Cultural Resonance and Spiritual Warfare

This research shows that the miraculous appeal to people is practical because it resonates with the widespread belief in the supernatural in Indian culture, reinforcing the importance of spiritual guidance.

One of the apparent findings from this study is that ordinary people demonstrate a search for ultimate reality, the unchanging, infinite, and transcendent substance of all existence, the source and substance of all supernatural acts, as this serves as a crucial compass to help them navigate their suffering and struggles. Analysing the narrative reveals that many people perceive pursuing ultimate reality as the key to overcoming suffering. Within their historical origins, Indian philosophical and religious traditions establish this practice as a fundamental aspect of their traditions. Indian philosophical systems explore reality through their understanding of suffering and freedom from suffering, which Buddhism labels as nirvana, while Hinduism terms it moksha. Through established traditions, people gain insights into suffering, which exists naturally within human existence. The belief system incorporates karma and reincarnation to understand why suffering exists while providing hope of bettering oneself through future life cycles.

Analysing the various conversion narratives, the study has also shown that during challenging periods, numerous Indians seek support from religious practices, including meditation, prayer, and ritual practices. Both spiritual leaders and gurus strongly support the system. People who are not elites believe that God, along with an all-encompassing force, grants both hope and significance when they encounter challenging circumstances. Philosophical and religious concepts are integral to Indian culture, as they shape how Indians perceive and respond to life's challenges. The spiritual teachings regarding inner peace emphasise detachment, which leads to acceptance and helps build resilience in people who suffer. Most Indians view their quest for ultimate reality as a relevant approach to understanding life and its inevitable challenges.

India's religious diversity provides a fertile ground for Pentecostalism, owing to its deep-rooted religious practices and beliefs in supernatural phenomena. The study has found that Pentecostals generally use actual events, such as healings, deliverance from demons, and spiritual experiences, to validate their beliefs about the Holy Spirit's distinct influence on Indian society. Pentecostal converts

experience spiritual deliverance, which leads to their conversion while utilising language influenced directly by their spiritual experiences, particularly concerning demonic activities. Pentecostals underscore the divine work of the Holy Spirit as a key guiding principle in the Indian conversion process. In this context, a conversion often stems from perceived deliverance from evil forces. Individuals describe these experiences using language heavily influenced by their firsthand encounters, frequently incorporating terms related to spiritual warfare, such as fighting with *dushtathma* (evil spirits).

Miraculous conversion

Christian theology describes conversion as a spiritual journey that leads people to abandon their sins through repentance and a commitment of faith to Jesus Christ. Transferring from sin toward God becomes a divine act, enabled by the Holy Spirit, which brings about spiritual change while establishing a lifelong pursuit of moral and spiritual growth. Christian traditions exhibit varying degrees of importance regarding conversion, as they are viewed through dramatic spiritual experiences or steady growth in faith.

The relevance of the current study is supported by the findings that *MC* consists of profound spiritual change triggered by a direct divine intervention of the Holy Spirit, convicting of sin and leading them to repent and acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. Healings and exorcisms accompany these unique divine encounters so converts can experience firsthand God's power, strengthening their faith while producing life-altering results through an intense bond with God. The Holy Spirit directly intervenes through personal events that people experience within their cultural contexts, leading to spiritual enlightenment.

Impact and Legitimacy

The study has shown that when operating in a multi-religious India, miracles establish Christianity through depictions of Jesus, conveying his power to be compassionate and transformative as a Lord and Saviour to believers. Due to cultural acceptance of supernatural occurrences and this image, Pentecostalism becomes increasingly attractive to ordinary people.

Empirical Evidence and Transformation

One of the more significant findings from this empirical study, which focused on 70 individuals, is that personal supernatural healings led 85% of converts to accept Christ. In contrast, 15% followed Christ after witnessing such experiences heal others. Personal divine experiences demonstrate that they play a crucial role in conversion processes. Miraculous healing is a spiritual transition that affects both mental and physical spheres. It also harmonises spiritual aspects to produce strong positive emotions and freedom. Conversion requires an alteration of understanding about the world, as individuals experience direct encounters with the divine through tangible supernatural experiences, which lead to behavioural modifications.

Pentecostalism as a Solution and Transformation

The study had found that Pentecostalism offers hope through divine intervention, providing personal spiritual encounters with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Tangible manifestations of divine power attract religious seekers. Through these experiences, Pentecostalism demonstrates its claims, producing radical spiritual changes. Converts adopt new moral values and lifestyle practices, integrating their faith with existing cultural understandings. The conversion process, while acknowledging divine intervention, emphasises intentional Christian discipleship.

Long-Term Outcomes and Identity Reformation

The results of this investigation show that *MCs* strengthen faith, foster spiritual development, and enhance resilience. They overcome initial opposition to Christianity and act as a catalyst for deeper exploration. Converts demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges, commit to service, continuously reflect, and experience increased well-being. Conversions lead to profound identity changes, as individuals adopt a new identity as followers of Christ. Values, social interactions, and social circles are reconfigured, and new meaning is given to life.

Broader Impact

The *MCs* confirmed that Pentecostalism experiences rapid growth within the Indian landscape because it addresses spiritual needs and meets the practical

requirements of diverse populations in challenging conditions. The study demonstrates how Pentecostal theology combines indigenous cultural faith concepts. Scholars actively study the myriad aspects of Pentecostalism within the Indian cultural context.

5.5. Implications for the field of knowledge

This study underscores the profound theological understanding of *MC* within Indian Pentecostalism. While the Atonement of Jesus Christ is a powerful cornerstone of the Christian faith, conversion experiences, accompanied by signs and wonders, hold a unique significance for many Indian Pentecostals seeking healing and salvation in a country with diverse religious traditions. While it is acknowledged that not all Pentecostals believe their conversion depended on miraculous events, this study confidently suggests that such experiences often influence conversion in the Indian context, characterised by its diverse belief systems.

In Indian religious culture, mystical experiences are not only meaningful but also transformative, shaping spiritual expectations. Religious individuals pursue divine unification as their ultimate goal, as exemplified by Hindu Brahmins. People who have mystical experiences gain a profound understanding of the core reality, accompanied by overwhelming feelings of unification and boundless awareness. A life-changing encounter provides profound insight into personal existence and its connection to the spiritual realm.

People must maintain openness alongside receptivity to understand diverse mystical experiences, as such events often surpass rational comprehension. Several variations of supernatural experiences exist between different traditions and people, each with unique qualities and effects. These encounters manifest in images, sounds and profound peace and happiness. Although they are highly valued in Indian religions, not everyone actively pursues such experiences. Mystical experiences are integral to Indian religious culture, driving and inspiring individuals on their spiritual journey. The supernatural engagement in the natural world is of great importance in India. Since Hindus view the natural world as an illusion, the world of wonder and spirit is an escape into eternal reality. In contrast, Pentecostals believe that miraculous healing and deliverance are essential tools

for drawing people closer to Christ by transforming the world, where reality is often perceived as natural and supernatural, and facilitating their conversion. This study cited individuals' conversion narratives to support and emphasise the role of miraculous experiences in deepening faith in Christ.

While Bauman (2015) and Sahoo (2018) focused on church growth through miracles and conversions, and Iyadurai (2015) examined the experiences of converts, none have specifically examined the phenomenon of *MC*. This study aims to contribute to the knowledge of conversion studies by bridging this gap and significantly enhancing our understanding of supernatural experiences.

In addition, Indian churches of other denominations are encouraged to engage in conversation and actively participate in ministry, focusing on God's divine work through the Holy Spirit. By examining the supernatural experiences of converts in the context of India's religious culture, this study contributes to the understanding of their significance and role in the growth and conversion of the church.

The study highlights the importance of extraordinary personal experiences in conversion narratives. Indian Pentecostals emphasise direct encounters with the divine through miracles, in contrast to the priority on spiritual discipline in traditional religions. The research clarifies the spiritual dimensions of faith and their effect on people's decisions to convert to a new religion. It enables Pentecostals and Reformed traditions to engage in conversation with each other while expanding knowledge of Pentecostal theology and facilitating worldwide conversion studies, with a specific focus on India.

The investigation also describes how studying supernatural conversion processes should help unite theological positions from Pentecostals and Reformed believers. Through this link, the two theological perspectives experience mutual recognition because this method creates bridges between personal experiences and doctrinal analysis. The definition of how the Holy Spirit functions miraculously provides Pentecostals with insight into their beliefs about the Spirit's active work during conversions, which could shape Reformed teachings in this area. Such a framework facilitates a comparison of salvation perspectives between Reformed and Pentecostal congregants, particularly in terms of how they view miraculous work about predestination and the concept of grace.

The study examines *MC* within the Indian context to illustrate why theology necessitates adaptation to specific situations. It encourages Pentecostals and Reformed theologians to explore how cultural conditions influence the theological interpretation of Scripture. Such research solves false beliefs and prejudicial notions between the two religious traditions. Authentic data presentation coupled with detailed interpretive analysis helps build a better and more respectful understanding of various concepts. Through its analysis, this research enables Pentecostals and Reformed churches to start interfaith discussions from a neutral perspective.

This dialogue contributes to both Pentecostal theology research and global conversion studies in diverse settings, including India, through three key outcomes: (1) developing cultural research methodologies, (2) providing a research example for global conversion studies, and (3) identifying cultural variations. The research promotes interdisciplinary teamwork, blending theologians with anthropologists and sociologists to create comprehensive knowledge of conversion. The research examines the cultural influences on religious expressions, illustrating how cultural beliefs impact the Pentecostal movement and conversion guided by the Holy Spirit.

This research advances the Pentecostal theological understanding of conversion. Experiential grounding of Pentecostal theology necessitates a fundamental shift toward experiential analyses of believing Pentecostals, rather than relying solely on doctrinal inquiries. Research on *MC* narratives enables scholars to gain an authentic understanding of Pentecostal theology, illustrating faith expressions in real-life contexts. This approach challenges traditional theological methods by advocating the study of experiential data to develop a phenomenology-based research method for Pentecostal studies.

A systematic evaluation of *MC* stories yields essential knowledge that facilitates more precise definitions of Pentecostal pneumatology. This research examines how the Spirit directly intervenes during conversion, providing insight into the processes of salvation, spiritual development, and the enduring relationship between believers and the divine. The findings will stimulate further research into the specific methods by which Holy Spirit activities manifest in global Pentecostal congregations.

Research into *MCs* yields a more detailed understanding of Pentecostal theological teachings on salvation. This research analyses life-transforming Pentecostal encounters with God to better understand their immediate experiences of salvation. Through this examination, researchers gain insight into how faith experiences and divine interventions influence salvation, while also investigating the relationship between the sacred and human components of salvation. The study encourages further research on various conversion experiences and their impact on maintaining a comprehensive understanding of Pentecostal salvation.

The research demonstrates why Pentecostal theological doctrine needs proper adaptation to fit various cultural environments. The analysis of conversion stories from India helps researchers avoid making blanket assumptions based on Western perspectives, leading to a refined understanding of worldwide Pentecostal practices. The methodology provides culturally sensitive and detailed knowledge about the Pentecostal movement, as it recognises the ongoing exchange between spiritual beliefs and specific cultural environments, resulting in a unique religious system.

Research suggests that miraculous experiences serve as a form of affirmation for converts, particularly in a polytheistic context such as India. Healing miracles provide a tangible sense of God's power and can bridge existing beliefs in divine intervention and the new Christian faith. It contributes to the understanding of how conversion builds on pre-existing religious concepts. The present research demonstrates the vital role community action plays in advancing conversions and preserving the faith and practices of Indian Pentecostals. Through mutual sharing of testimonies and appreciation for incredible experiences, the new convert community builds a supportive network that connects members emotionally.

The study enhances our understanding of religious communities, as they play a vital role in helping people discover faith and support it over time. This research highlights the social and economic challenges that Indian Pentecostal converts often face. Individuals who believe in divine intervention through miraculous events gain control and hope because traditional methods have usually failed to provide solutions. The investigation presents valuable findings on how Pentecostalism addresses community needs while attracting new members to join

its ranks. Further research should investigate the religious aspects of miraculous experiences, their impact on conversion, and the coexistence of traditional beliefs and manifestations of Christian faith in India.

5.6. The significance of the findings or contribution of the study

This study of *MCs* among Indian Pentecostals offers valuable contributions to diverse areas and enriches our understanding of theology, religious experience, and Pentecostalism in a specific cultural context. The research analyses the Indian Pentecostal Church members' understanding and interpretation of incredible conversion events. It explores an original theological approach to Pentecostalism and demonstrates how Holy Spirit miracles fit into general Pentecostal teachings of contemporary Indian religious traditions. Miracles in Indian spiritual traditions serve as signs of transcendence, centralising supernatural stories to their construction of reality.

This knowledge can help us comprehend Pentecostalism more complexly. Theology often focuses on established and abstract doctrines rather than the concrete and individual 'lived' experiences that accompany them. This study bridges the theoretical and empirical gap by examining how individual Pentecostals experience conversion as a miracle. It voices their narratives and interpretations, promoting a fuller understanding of the Pentecostal faith based on lived experience.

The study delves into 'lived religion' by exploring the personal narratives of converts who experienced miracles.' It provides extensive data on how miraculous experiences shape these people's faith journeys and daily lives, offering practical insights into how faith is practised and experienced in everyday contexts.

The study's results could challenge or refine theological understandings of conversion within the Pentecostal tradition. It offers new perspectives on the role of the Holy Spirit, divine intervention and personal transformation. These will provide information for practical application and inspire, contributing to a more dynamic and evolving theological framework for conversion.

In India, where religious conversions are culturally/socially sensitive, the study helps bridge the often-tense divide between Pentecostals and other faiths.

Explaining the theological foundations of *MC* can facilitate more informed dialogue and understanding. The study particularly highlights the unique interpretation of *MC* in Indian Pentecostalism, a perspective that will intrigue and inspire further exploration.

This information helps us better understand how Pentecostalism succeeds in integrating into various cultural environments. Methodologically, this study has led to the development and modelling of a practical, phenomenological framework for capturing the lived experiences of *MC*, demonstrating how the results of such an exercise add value to the theoretical debate. This approach is essentially a 'repeatable' paradigm, which may be one of the study's legacies.

The study expresses openness by acknowledging diversity through direct communication that strives to understand others using their expressions. Those seeking to foster mutual understanding between Pentecostals and individuals from other faiths, as well as those without a religious background, can utilise this foundation to engage in respectful dialogue about shared faith experiences.

The research contributes to comparative religious studies by examining how the experiences of Pentecostal *MC* may align with or differ from similar concepts in other Indian spiritual traditions. This research provides a wealth of knowledge about the relationship between faith and cultural elements. The study of *MCs* and their societal influences on converts' relations with their families and communities highlights social inclusion or exclusion patterns within the Indian social structure.

The study's empirical results provide a new understanding of *MC* experiences, which can significantly inform Pentecostal missions and church planting strategies in the Indian context, engaging practitioners and scholars alike. It could suggest practical ways to engage with potential converts based on their cultural and religious perspectives, equipping them with valuable insights for their work.

Through this investigation, researchers gain vital information that theologians, scientists and general enthusiasts of religious dynamics find essential. The framework of faith serves Indian Pentecostals in explaining their miraculous experiences, providing crucial insights into their theological perspectives on these phenomena. Research based on this study provides a deeper understanding of the Pentecostal community's struggles with *MC* events.

It lays the groundwork for fundamental knowledge about the dynamics of the Indian Pentecostal movement.

This study contributes to various fields by examining the phenomenon of *MC* among Indian Pentecostals. These insights deepen our understanding of Pentecostal theology, actual religious practices, and the fusion of religion and culture in this particular setting. Research opportunities and interfaith dialogue emerge as consequences of gaining knowledge about spiritual experiences in India.

5.7. The limitations of the current study

The research yields significant findings, yet it requires an understanding of its operational limitations. Scientists face obstacles when objectively analysing *MCs* because there is no agreed-upon definition of what constitutes a 'miracle'. The absence of a clear definition may potentially reduce the reliability of the research. The study exclusively explored Indian Pentecostalism, using a definition of 'miraculous' that may not align with that of other religious groups. The restricted research scope hinders this work from expanding universal knowledge about miracle examinations throughout religious organisations.

Conversion narratives play a crucial role in the study, but they can be subjective and influenced by cultural or religious factors. Subsequent beliefs could shape or reinforce memories of miraculous experiences. Participants sometimes modify their accounts to align with Pentecostal doctrines, as well as to meet the researcher's expectations of their responses. The study concentrated on particular Pentecostal religious groups in North and South India. The researcher must evaluate how Pentecostal beliefs and practices differ throughout the country.

The research needs to expand its participant base to faithfully represent the broad spectrum of the Indian Pentecostal religious community. The study will gain greater validity when more diverse research subjects are included, demonstrating the essential value of including various population groups in research studies. The subjective aspects of *MCs* may need to be considered in theological studies prioritising established doctrines.

While the study's results are valid within their defined scope, caution is needed when generalising them to the entire Indian Pentecostal population. The increasing influence of secularism in India could dampen interest in studying

religious phenomena, limiting future research opportunities. The study is based on statements from Pentecostal believers, which may be subject to a positive bias and overlook negative experiences or doubts. Research relies on objective analysis and thorough examination because of these effects, which underscore their importance in academic work. The research validity faces doubts regarding its ability to generalise beyond the sample group. Indian Pentecostalism employs its unique framework, whereas the Western world generally receives credit for its origins.

By acknowledging these limitations, researchers can build upon the foundation established in this study. Openness and genuine honesty are essential for academic progress through research. The study should employ objective methods to examine Pentecostal theology, analysing Western theological components in Indian cultural settings across various Pentecostal denominations and global contexts.

5.8. Recommendations for further research work

The results of the study offer profound insights for future research, potentially reshaping the field of theology and religious studies:

The study's results provide the following insights for future research: It is valuable to examine the reasons for Reformed theology's emphasis on cognitive aspects of conversion and its departure from supernatural experiences. Further research could explore the differences in *MC* experiences within Indian Pentecostalism compared with other Indian religions. The study examines the interconnection between faith and culture by conducting a thorough investigation in the Indian context.

Research requires further investigation to assess the effectiveness of *MCs* within Indian Pentecostalism, particularly within the multi-religious context of India. It helps confirm the social and cultural impact of *MCs* in Pentecostal churches. How do these experiences impact family dynamics, relationships with other religious communities, and social mobility? Further research should evaluate how conversions influenced by miracles impact lasting religious transformation in Indian Pentecostal communities, while also examining their indirect influence on various Christian groups.

Studies combining methods from psychology and sociology should analyse both psychological and sociological aspects of miraculous encounters as future research. The research approach offers a comprehensive view of phenomena beyond initial observations. A study in this field would support communication between members of Pentecostal and Reformed traditions, regardless of their position on cessationist theology. More detailed work could be done to examine how the emphasis on the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in Indian Pentecostalism challenges traditional Christian views.

Studying these *MCs* allows us to recognise and appreciate the countless ways the Holy Spirit is present and active in the world. However, an urgent and significant need exists to explore Indian Pentecostal conversions further to fill the gap in perspective on miraculous experiences. This research could significantly improve our knowledge of the psychological and emotional aspects of inner transformation and healing among Indian Pentecostals. It may lead to a broader discussion about the definition of ‘miracles’ in Christian theology, challenging and reshaping our current understanding. It also helps determine the similarities or differences between miraculous experiences and conversion narratives in different geographical and cultural settings.

By exploring these areas further, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of *MCs* within Indian Pentecostalism. It will strengthen Pentecostal theology and provide valuable insights into discussions of miracles, religious experiences, and global dynamics of spiritual conversion. Additionally, Pentecostals should consider the role of the Holy Spirit in other religions and shape their theology accordingly. The Pentecostal viewpoint can bring a refreshing and stimulating perspective to broader religious theologies.

5.9. Setting out recommendations for practice

The results of this study have several important implications for future practice. Valuable insights can be gained from this study of *MCs* among Indian Pentecostals that can be incorporated into practice in Pentecostal churches and mission organisations. The focus is on fostering a culture where individuals share their personal experiences with *MCs*. This practice has the potential not only to inspire new believers but also to foster personal growth and strengthen the faith of current members. Exceptional opportunities could be created to share personal

conversion experiences during worship services or small group meetings, inspiring others with the power of personal testimony.

Maintaining a sensible perspective on spiritual encounters is essential for all believers. Their importance remains substantial, but they do not hold the position of being the definitive or only foundation for theological conversion ideas. Every experience exceeds our senses' understanding because the Bible is an absolute religious authority. Any transformational expertise will always remain less profound than what the Bible reveals in completeness.

Training is a necessary step toward building pastors' and leaders' competency in personalised approaches to respond to various conversion experiences. Their role is pivotal, as they can support individuals who claim to have experienced a miracle. Establishing clear guidelines distinguishing genuine miracles from emotional responses can foster faith and confidence. While miraculous encounters can influence conversion, it is essential to stress the significance of consistent spiritual growth and discipleship. Miraculous experiences can spark conversion, propelling individuals towards a deeper connection with the divine.

Church leaders can be trained to converse respectfully with followers of other faiths. Understanding the significance of miraculous experiences for Indian Pentecostals, as the study reveals, can lead to a deeper understanding and help us navigate areas of conflict more effectively and bridge divides. Missionaries in India can gain an advantage by understanding how miraculous experiences attract converts. By applying this knowledge, they can adapt their message and ministry practices to the local context. The potential impact of *MC* on society and culture warrants consideration. Churches can help converts maintain relationships with unbelieving family and friends. Church leadership and its membership should learn how extraordinary experiences must remain uncompromised for personal benefit or self-promotion purposes. People must understand that miracles serve solely as manifestations of divine grace, and therefore, they are not resources for individual wealth gain; thus, we must protect them from misuse.

The research encourages church leaders and pastors to maintain sustained theological investigations around miracles and conversion events. It enables them to respond to inquiries and offer guidance to individuals who have experienced *MC*. Churches need to create spaces where members can experience both

spiritual reverence for the Holy Spirit and encouragement to develop miracles. Openness in a setting makes individuals more confident about sharing their experiences and seeking advice from others. These recommendations can help Pentecostal churches and mission organisations improve their ministry practices and promote a comprehensive understanding of *MCs* in the Indian Pentecostal context. These suggestions aim to empower Indian Pentecostals to engage actively in society and highlight the Holy Spirit's miraculous work in liberating people from their struggles and leading them to Christ.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Research ethics approval sheet



Faculty of Theology and Religion

Research Office
Mrs Daleen Kotzé

31 May 2022

NAME: Mr J Ninan
STUDENT NUMBER: 22959085
COURSE: Doctoral
DATE: 31 May 2022
APPLICATION NUMBER: T024/22

This letter serves as confirmation that the research proposal of this student was evaluated by:

- 1) **The Research committee:** This applies to all research proposals
- 2) **The Research Ethics committee:** This applies only to research that includes people as sources of information

You are hereby notified that your research proposal (including ethical clearance where it is applicable) is approved.



Prof E van Eck
Chairperson: Research committee: Faculty of Theology and Religion



Prof T van Wyk
Chairperson: Research Ethics committee: Faculty of Theology and Religion

Appendix 2

Samples of Interview Permission Letter

"Jesus sinner, heals the sick, baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and is the King of kings coming soon"



THE CHURCH OF GOD

(Independent & Indigenous)

(Founder Late Rev. Dr. P.S. Samuel)

Rajatalab, Raipur 492001 (C.G.) Ph. 0771-2426071

(Regn. No. 9392)

6 August 2022

To,

The Applicant Letter

Sub: Approval to conduct interviews and focus group discussions within the church community

Dear Researcher,

Greetings in Jesus Name!

The church committee of the Church of God, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, has approved your application to interview and conduct focus-group discussions with our church believers. We understand, this is for your PhD dissertation project on "An investigation into the theology of miraculous conversion among Indian Pentecostals, under the supervision of Prof. Jaco Beyers from the University of Pretoria. We comprehend that the project aims to examine and articulate the noteworthy transformational experiences of believers in the Indian Pentecostal context, with the objective of enhancing our comprehension of the theology surrounding miraculous conversions. Hence, we have authorized you to conduct individual interviews and focus group discussions on the specific topic to obtain relevant data. The church will assist you by offering suitable candidates for the interview and focus-group discussion on the date you have chosen. It brings us great joy to be a part of your research project and we extend our best wishes for your success.

Sincerely,

Pr. Thomas Mammen

PR. THOMAS MAMMEN
VICE PRESIDENT
THE CHURCH OF GOD
RAJATALAB, RAIPUR (C.G.)

Appendix 3

Participant Consent Form



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Theology and Religion

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT FROM ADULTS OVER 18 YEARS FOR PARTICIPATION IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Title of the Study:

Theological investigation on miraculous conversion among Indian Pentecostals

Researcher:

Jibu Ninan, University of Pretoria

Contact Address:

Karakattu Peedikayil House,
Nilambur R.S.P.O, Malappuram,
Kerala, India 679 330

You are hereby cordially invited to participate in an academic research study due to your experience and knowledge in the research area, namely 'Theological investigation on miraculous conversion among Indian Pentecostals'. Each participant must receive, read, understand, and sign this document *before* the start of the study.

- **Purpose of the study:** The purpose of the study is to investigate the miraculous action of the Holy Spirit in ordinary people's conversion and its significance in the growth of Pentecostalism. The purpose of the project is to listen to and record the 'miraculous conversion' story or testimony of you (church members), identifying the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit at the point of your conversion and faith in Jesus Christ. This aims to bring clarity and comprehension to an Indian Pentecostal theology of conversion. This study helps to shed some light on the miraculous encounter of the Holy Spirit in conversion. The desired outcome is a practical theology model to represent and explain the Pentecostal theology of conversion. The results of the study may be published in an academic journal. You will be provided with a summary of the study's findings on request. No participants' names will be used in the final publication.
- **Duration of the study:** The study will be conducted over a period of 2 years/24 months and its projected date of completion is May 28, 2025.
- **Research procedures:** The study is based on practical research. Therefore, a qualitative research method aids in understanding the Indian Pentecostal conversion experiences and the miraculous aspects associated with them. Qualitative research will provide people's ideas, feelings, and underlining principles of popular theology on miraculous experiences in conversion. So, the qualitative research method is the best approach to understanding these factors. Although there are different qualitative methods for collecting data, I plan to conduct two of

the most common qualitative approaches, such as interviews and focus groups. Semi-structured interview questions will be used to collect information from a respondent with a particular goal in mind. People have the freedom to speak and enjoy responding to semi-structured questions. This gives the interviewer more freedom, and people will open up to answer the question. Data will collect by recording and later transcribe for the purpose of the study. Following these methods helps to understand ordinary people's miraculous conversion experiences and develop an Indian Pentecostal practical conversion theology.

- **What is expected of you:** The researcher will ask the semi-structured interview questions to the Participants. Each Individual is requested to share their miraculous conversion experiences that include their thoughts, feelings, faith, experiences, reasons for conversion, and life in Christ.
- **Your rights:** Your participation in this study is very important. You may, however, choose not to participate, and you may also stop participating at any time without stating any reasons and without any negative consequences. You, as a participant, may contact the researcher at any time in order to clarify any issues pertaining to this research. The respondent as well as the researcher must each keep a copy of this signed document.
- **Confidentiality:** All information will be treated as confidential. The pastor or any other church leader will not have access to the raw data or any information that you give. Participants' real names will not be associated with any outputs of the research; instead, pseudonyms (false names) will be given to all participants. Participant identity in this interview and focus group will be known only to the researcher. Data will be collected by recording the conversation by the researcher. I want to assure you that every individual participant has the freedom of not being audio recorded. Participants have the freedom to listen to what is recorded and delete the whole or part of the interview. The researcher alone will do the transcription and the analysis of the data. The recordings will be used confidentially and only for this project.

WRITTEN CONSENT FROM ADULTS OVER 18 YEARS

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature of this research.
I understand that I may at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the research. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions.

Respondent: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Contact number of the Researcher:

VERBAL CONSENT FROM ADULTS OVER 18 YEARS *(Only applicable if respondent cannot write)*

I, the researcher, have read and have explained fully to the respondent, named _____ and his/her relatives, the letter of consent from adults over 18 years. The respondent indicated that he/she understands that he/she will be free to withdraw at any time.

Respondent: _____

Researcher: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 4

Individual Consent Form



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Theology and Religion

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT FROM INDIVIDUAL FOR PARTICIPATION IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Title of the Study:

Theological investigation on miraculous conversion among Indian Pentecostals

Researcher:

Jibu Ninan, University of Pretoria

Contact Address:

Karakattu Peedikayil House,
Nilambur R.S.P.O, Malappuram,
Kerala, India 679 330

You are hereby cordially invited to participate in an academic research study due to your experience and knowledge in the research area, namely 'Theological investigation on miraculous conversion among Indian Pentecostals'. Each participant must receive, read, understand, and sign this document *before* the start of the study.

- **Purpose of the study:** The purpose of the study is to investigate the miraculous action of the Holy Spirit in ordinary people's conversion and its significance in the growth of Pentecostalism. The purpose of the project is to listen to and record the 'miraculous conversion' story or testimony of you (church members), identifying the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit at the point of your conversion and faith in Jesus Christ. This aims to bring clarity and comprehension to an Indian Pentecostal theology of conversion. This study helps to shed some light on the miraculous encounter of the Holy Spirit in conversion. The desired outcome is a practical theology model to represent and explain the Pentecostal theology of conversion. The results of the study may be published in an academic journal. You will be provided with a summary of the study's findings on request. No participants' names will be used in the final publication.
- **Duration of the study:** The study will be conducted over a period of 2 years/24 months and its projected date of completion is May 28, 2025.
- **Research procedures:** The study is based on practical research. Therefore, a qualitative research method aids in understanding the Indian Pentecostal conversion experiences and the miraculous aspects associated with them. Qualitative research will provide people's ideas, feelings, and underlining principles of popular theology on miraculous experiences in conversion. So, the qualitative research method is the best approach to understanding these factors. Although there are different qualitative methods for collecting data, I plan to conduct two of

the most common qualitative approaches, such as interviews and focus groups. Semi-structured interview questions will be used to collect information from a respondent with a particular goal in mind. People have the freedom to speak and enjoy responding to semi-structured questions. This gives the interviewer more freedom, and people will open up to answer the question. Data will collect by recording and later transcribe for the purpose of the study. Following these methods helps to understand ordinary people's miraculous conversion experiences and develop an Indian Pentecostal practical conversion theology.

- **What is expected of you:** The researcher will ask the semi-structured interview questions to the Participants. Each Individual is requested to share their miraculous conversion experiences that include their thoughts, feelings, faith, experiences, reasons for conversion, and life in Christ.
- **Your rights:** Your participation in this study is very important. You may, however, choose not to participate, and you may also stop participating at any time without stating any reasons and without any negative consequences. You, as a participant, may contact the researcher at any time in order to clarify any issues pertaining to this research. The respondent as well as the researcher must each keep a copy of this signed document.
- **Confidentiality:** All information will be treated as confidential. The pastor or any other church leader will not have access to the raw data or any information that you give. Participants' real names will not be associated with any outputs of the research; instead, pseudonyms (false names) will be given to all participants. Participant identity in this interview and focus group will be known only to the researcher. Data will be collected by recording the conversation by the researcher. I want to assure you that every individual participant has the freedom of not being audio recorded. Participants have the freedom to listen to what is recorded and delete the whole or part of the interview. The researcher alone will do the transcription and the analysis of the data. The recordings will be used confidentially and only for this project.

WRITTEN CONSENT FROM INDIVIDUAL

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature of this research.
I understand that I may at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the research. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions.

Respondent: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Contact number of the Researcher:

VERBAL CONSENT FROM INDIVIDUAL *(Only applicable if respondent cannot write)*

I, the researcher, have read and have explained fully to the respondent, named _____ and his/her relatives, the letter of consent from individual. The respondent indicated that he/she understands that he/she will be free to withdraw at any time.

Respondent: _____

Researcher: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 5

Semi-structured Interview Questions

The interviews will be conducted with individuals who identify as believers and have varying literacy levels, including those who are primarily literate, illiterate, or semi-literate. The questions will encompass broad topics, prompting individuals to recount their own experiences of religious conversion, the subsequent transformations in their lives, their comprehension of Christ, the supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and how this understanding aids them in confronting their everyday challenges. The focus will be on highlighting their extraordinary conversion experiences to enhance our knowledge of the theology of conversion.

1. What significant problems did you face in personal and family life before coming to Christ? Please share your conversion experience
2. If you had a miraculous experience, such as a healing or deliverance, how did it lead you to convert to Pentecostal faith? What were the feelings after you had a miraculous experience?
3. How could this (miracles/healing/deliverance) experience transform your life? Your experiences can inspire and transform not only your life but also the lives of others. Did you have an identity crisis when you turned to a new faith in Christ?
4. How does the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit help you respond to Jesus and accept him as your saviour?
5. What are the perceived changes, such as in your behaviour, relationships, or daily life, that have occurred in your personal and family life? What difficulties do you face in society after becoming a Pentecostal believer?
6. How do you understand the work of Jesus Christ and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in your personal life?
7. How do you introduce Jesus to your neighbours and others?
8. What are the responses of others when you testify about Jesus and the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit?

Focus Group Questions

This is exploratory research into the popular belief, practice, and consequences of the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in conversion among Pentecostals in India. Therefore, semi-structured interviews and focus groups will be conducted.

The focus groups, each comprising [5-10] participants, will be conducted among believers, lay leaders, evangelists and pastors. The following general questions will be discussed in the focus groups:

1. How is the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit understood in the personal, the community (church), and the social life of the believers? How is conversion understood? Do you see any miraculous work of the Spirit in the conversion process?
2. What is the identity of a believer in a community? What changes have you noticed after becoming a Pentecostal believer, and what is your social status?
3. How does your personal and family life change after experiencing the miraculous role of the Holy Spirit and conversion?
4. How has the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit led people to know Jesus and accept Him as their saviour through repentance and faith? Have you ever had a similar experience in your conversion?
5. How does understanding the Holy Spirit's work change after becoming a Pentecostal?
6. In the context of the Indian church, is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit relevant to its mission?
7. What is the reason for Pentecostals' emphasis on the Holy Spirit's work? Should miracles be included in the gospel to attract people to Christ?
8. Do you believe in the Holy Spirit's miraculous work in the church's present context and her mission?