



Dialogue of Life among Indian Muslim Converts in Malaysia through Participation in Ethnic Community Festivals

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ABSTRACT

Dialogue of life refers to the process of social interaction through engagement, sharing of experiences, and daily relationships between individuals or groups of different religious backgrounds in order to foster mutual understanding, reduce misconceptions, and strengthen social harmony. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the experiences of dialogue of life among Indian Muslim converts after embracing Islam, particularly their involvement with their original families through participation in ethnic community festivals. This study employs a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with seven Indian Muslim converts. The findings reveal that most Indian Muslim converts were introduced to Islam through their early experiences of dialogue of life, which developed through friendships and interactions with Muslim peers. After embracing Islam, their experiences of dialogue of life with non-Muslim family members through participation in ethnic community festivals were carried out within the boundaries prescribed by Islamic law and Islamic creed. Their involvement in these festivals was found to play a role in correcting misconceptions held by their original families towards Islam, strengthening family relationships, and introducing Islamic values, teachings, and the way of life of Muslim communities, which had previously been less understood by non-Muslim communities. This article suggests that religious institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in managing Muslim convert communities in Malaysia should further strengthen the dialogue of life approach as a mechanism for social integration and societal harmony, particularly in relationships among members of the same ethnic group with different religious beliefs.

Keywords: Indian Muslim converts, dialogue of life, introduction to Islam, family relationships, ethnic community festivals.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a country characterised by diverse ethnicities and religions. The Indian community is the third-largest ethnic group in Malaysia, with the majority practising Hinduism, followed by Christianity and Islam. Based on the Malaysian Population Census data, approximately 86% of the Indian community in Malaysia are Hindus, while the remaining population comprises Christians (6%), Muslims (4.1%), and other religious groups. This situation demonstrates that religion among the Indian community is closely associated with ethnic identity and cultural heritage inherited from their migration from South India during the British colonial period (https://ms.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orang_India_Malaysia).

The Indian community represents the third-largest ethnic group in Malaysia, accounting for approximately 6.5% of the total population in 2024. The majority of them reside in states such as Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Penang, and Kedah. The Indian community possesses a strong cultural identity enriched by traditions inherited from the Indian subcontinent (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024). Therefore, the presence of this community has contributed to the formation of Malaysia's multicultural society through the practice of diverse traditions, cultures, and festivals that have become part of the nation's heritage.

A caring attitude, positive treatment, and respectful interactions from Muslim neighbours, colleagues, or friends have become the starting point for many Indian individuals in gaining a closer understanding of Islam. Some members of this community subsequently embraced Islam as their new religion (Seo, 2023). However, when individuals from this community convert to Islam, they often encounter challenges in adapting to the teachings of their new religion. These challenges commonly arise when dealing with family festivals, religious rituals, and daily interactions with non-Muslim family members. Some Indian Muslim converts experience dilemmas whereby, on one hand, they seek to practise Islamic teachings faithfully, while on the other hand, they wish to preserve family relationships and demonstrate respect for their original cultural heritage (Mohd Zulfikaar & Zaifuddin, 2024). Therefore, this article examines the experiences of Indian Muslim converts in managing cultural and religious tensions, particularly in relation to their participation in ethnic community festivals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture and Indian Community Festivals

Culture refers to the overall way of life practised by a particular society, encompassing values, beliefs, customs, language, and social practices that are inherited from one generation to another. Culture functions to shape the identity of a society and serves as a guideline in organising social life. Furthermore, culture is continuously evolving and experiencing changes in accordance with time and environmental influences (Gregory & Noria, 2020). The culture of the Indian community in Malaysia encompasses various elements such as language, customs, beliefs, social practices, and traditions that have been inherited across generations within the Indian diaspora community. These cultural elements shape ethnic identity and are practised in daily life, including within family, religious, and festival contexts (Punitha & Kumaran, 2014).

Festivals are considered an important medium for preserving cultural continuity and strengthening social harmony through practices such as visiting relatives and community members. Through festival celebrations, cultural heritage can be preserved and transmitted to future generations while strengthening social relationships within the community (Johan et al., 2022). For the Indian community, festivals such as Deepavali, Thaipusam, and Pongal represent cultural expressions that function to preserve ethnic identity, traditional values, and cultural heritage inherited across generations (Velmurugan & Rajalakshmi, 2025). For the Indian community, these festivals not only strengthen family and community relationships but also serve as important platforms for maintaining the continuity of Indian cultural identity in Malaysia.

Indian Muslim Converts and Cultural Conflicts

The conversion of Indian ethnic groups to Islam contributes approximately 16% to 22% of the annual number of Muslim conversions between 2018 and 2024. Although fluctuations occurred during this period, this group remained among the major contributors to the statistics of Muslim converts in Malaysia. Based on Table 1, in 2018, the number of Indian Muslim converts was 346 individuals and increased significantly to 1,243 individuals in 2019. The number subsequently declined slightly but remained high in 2020 (1,042) and 2021 (1,025). This trend indicates a stable phase at a relatively high level, followed by a slight decrease in 2022 (934), and a subsequent increase in 2023 (1,187), reflecting a recovery in conversion activities. However, in 2024, the number declined significantly to 406 individuals, representing one of the lowest figures within the study period. The details are presented in the following table:

Table 1: Statistics of Muslim Convert Registration by Year and Ethnic Background in Malaysia

Ethnic Background	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Chinese	452	1,605	1,360	1,017	854	1,100	514
Indian	346	1,243	1,042	1,025	934	1,187	406



Sabah Ethnics	72	565	466	337	248	336	262
Sarawakian Ethnics	413	1,413	845	432	299	565	290
Orang Asli (Peninsular)	324	694	416	1,395	893	1,304	536
Others	305	1,262	1,520	761	997	1,487	541
No Information	193	40	5	24	40	21	18

Source: JAKIM (2024)

A study conducted by Azarudin and Azman (2025) found that Muslim converts experience identity dilemmas when they struggle to balance Islamic beliefs with their ethnic community cultural traditions, particularly in relation to non-Islamic festivals. Religious conversion does not merely involve a change in belief systems but also affects an individual's lifestyle, family relationships, cultural identity, emotions, and social position. In many situations, Muslim converts find themselves positioned "between two worlds", negotiating between their previous identity that has been deeply rooted since childhood and their new identity as Muslim converts. A Muslim convert refers to an individual who has recently embraced Islam and is still undergoing a process of learning, strengthening faith, understanding, and practising Islamic teachings in daily life. Generally, the term Muslim convert refers to the transitional phase after embracing Islam, which is often accompanied by continuous guidance from religious institutions or the wider community until the individual is able to practise Islam with greater stability and confidence (Azman et al., 2020).

These conflicts commonly occur when Muslim converts attempt to adapt to the requirements of Islam while simultaneously maintaining emotional and cultural attachments to their original families and communities. Some converts experience pressure from family members who find it difficult to accept their decision to embrace Islam. Such circumstances may lead to feelings of isolation, rejection, or even the loss of support from family members and friends. In certain situations, Muslim converts may conceal their Islamic identity to avoid greater conflicts. In relation to this issue, Mohd Faqih and Zuliza (2020) highlight that Indian Muslim converts often face dilemmas in maintaining family relationships with non-Muslim relatives, particularly during gatherings or festivals that contain religious elements. This situation requires them to establish a balanced adjustment between the demands of their new religion and their existing social relationships. Furthermore, some Muslim converts perceive that they must completely abandon their original cultural practices in order to be accepted as "good Muslims", although Islam does not reject cultural practices of particular ethnic groups as long as they do not contradict Islamic principles.

General Perspectives on Participation in Non-Islamic Festivals

Participation in multi-ethnic festival celebrations has the potential to strengthen harmony and mutual understanding within a plural society. However, such participation requires careful consideration to ensure that it does not involve practices that contradict Islamic principles of faith (Mohd Faqih & Zuliza, 2020). Therefore, Islam establishes certain boundaries in social relations with followers of other religions, including avoiding involvement in rituals or religious symbols that may lead to imitation of other religious practices.

Generally, Islamic scholars distinguish between participation that is social in nature and participation that implies recognition or endorsement of the beliefs of other religions. Islam permits Muslims to attend open houses, offer greetings, visit non-Muslim neighbours or family members, and maintain social relationships, as long as such involvement does not include religious rituals that contradict Islamic principles. This permissibility aims to preserve social harmony and portray Islam as a religion that promotes tolerance and noble moral values (Basri, 2010).

Nevertheless, Islam prohibits Muslims from participating in non-Islamic religious ceremonies that may involve elements of *shirk* (associating partners with God), glorification of other religions, or imitation (*al-tasyabbuh*) of religious rituals. Among the prohibited practices are participating in acts of worship, wearing



religious symbols with the intention of glorifying them, reciting religious prayers of other faiths, or accepting beliefs that contradict the concept of *tawhid*. These restrictions aim to preserve the religious identity and faith commitment of Muslims and prevent the mixing of religious beliefs (Mohd Anuar et al., 2017).

In the context of Malaysia's plural society, participation in non-Islamic festivals is often discussed in relation to the concept of *al-tasyabbuh*, referring to imitation of the practices of other religions. According to some Islamic scholars, not all forms of resemblance or participation are considered prohibited; rather, the ruling depends on the purpose, nature of the practice, and the religious elements involved. If an activity is purely cultural and does not contain religious rituals, it may be permissible based on social benefits (*maslahah*) and the preservation of societal harmony (Mohd Faqih & Zuliza, 2020).

For Muslim converts, this issue becomes more sensitive because they often maintain close relationships with non-Muslim family members. Some converts experience dilemmas between preserving family ties and fulfilling religious obligations. In such circumstances, a moderate and wise approach based on Islamic jurisprudence is necessary. Islam does not prohibit Muslim converts from showing kindness towards their non-Muslim parents and family members. Instead, the Quran encourages Muslims to maintain good relations and demonstrate kindness towards them as long as such interactions do not involve practices that contradict Islamic principles (Basri, 2010). Therefore, attending family gatherings or open houses based on kinship and social relationships is generally considered permissible as long as religious rituals are not involved.

Generally, Islamic institutions in Malaysia also emphasise that Muslim participation in non-Islamic festivals should consider matters related to faith boundaries, the intention of attendance, and the social context of the local community. An overly rigid approach without considering the realities of a plural society may create misunderstandings about Islam and place pressure on Muslim converts (MAIS, 2010). Therefore, a balanced and wise approach is required to preserve family relationships and social unity without compromising Islamic beliefs.

***Fiqh Al-Ta'āyush* in Interreligious Relations**

In Islam, relations between Muslims and non-Muslims are closely associated with *fiqh al-ta'āyush*, a discipline based on Islamic legal principles that outlines peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims through values such as *ta'āruf* (mutual recognition), *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance), *ta'āwun* (cooperation), and *mahabbah* (love and compassion) (Khambali, 2020). Relationships among members of the same ethnic group with different religious affiliations can be strengthened through a form of interreligious engagement known as dialogue of life.

Dialogue of life between Muslims and non-Muslims in Malaysia represents a form of daily interaction within a multi-religious society that emphasises peaceful and respectful coexistence in various aspects of life, including participation in cultural and social activities such as festivals. However, for Muslims, dialogue of life must be practised within the boundaries established by Islamic principles (Azarudin & Khadijah, 2015). Through dialogue of life, individuals and communities of different religious backgrounds can develop social relationships in various settings, such as schools, public transportation, markets, and workplaces, based on mutual respect and concern while maintaining the boundaries of their respective beliefs. For example, individuals may avoid participation in religious rituals that contradict their faith while continuing to cooperate in social areas such as welfare activities and community engagement. This concept helps reduce prejudice, preserve social stability, and promote harmony within a plural society (Khalli, 2021). For Indian Muslim converts, dialogue of life serves as an important bridge to explain religious boundaries with wisdom, maintain family relationships, and adapt to a multicultural society.

Dialogue of life is a form of symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969), whereby individuals construct meanings through moral examples, social norms, and humanitarian values (Mohd Khambali et al., 2022). Furthermore, dialogue of life is also aligned with intercultural dialogue, which emphasises open communication between groups of different cultural and religious backgrounds to develop understanding, respect differences, and identify shared values (IKIM, n.d.a; IKIM, n.d.b). Thus, dialogue of life becomes an important bridge in negotiating religious boundaries, maintaining family relationships, and adapting to a diverse society. This



approach not only reduces misconceptions and prejudice but also contributes to the development of sustainable social harmony within culturally and religiously diverse communities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were obtained through two main methods, namely document analysis and fieldwork. Document analysis involved the examination of various secondary sources, including scholarly books, journal articles, theses, dissertations, and academic publications related to the research focus. This process was conducted during the early stage of the study to enable the researcher to understand the theoretical framework, identify findings from previous studies, and explore research gaps that require further investigation. Through this literature review process, the researcher was able to establish a strong foundation of knowledge before proceeding to the field data collection phase.

For the collection of primary data, fieldwork was conducted at several Muslim convert guidance centres located in Johor Bahru, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Kuala Terengganu, and Gua Musang. These locations were selected based on their roles as major training and guidance centres for Muslim converts in their respective areas. This study employed purposive sampling, whereby participants were selected based on specific characteristics that corresponded with the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although this study did not involve the entire population of Muslim converts in Malaysia, selecting informants from different geographical zones enabled the researcher to obtain a broader understanding of the experiences of Muslim convert communities in Peninsular Malaysia. In addition, this approach assisted the researcher in examining issues influenced by different demographic, cultural, and socioeconomic factors across various locations.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews guided by an interview protocol that had undergone review and evaluation by experts in relevant fields. The interviews employed a semi-structured approach, allowing the researcher to explore participants' experiences in greater depth without being completely restricted to a rigid set of questions. The interview questions were developed based on themes identified from the literature review and served as a guide throughout the interview sessions.

Although the number of informants was limited to seven participants, this number was determined based on the principle of data saturation, whereby information obtained from additional interviews no longer generated new themes related to the experiences of dialogue of life and their involvement in ethnic community festivals (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Prior to the actual study, a pilot study was conducted to assess the suitability of the research instrument. The pilot study enabled the researcher to identify weaknesses in the interview protocol, improve the questions, and adjust them based on feedback received from the participants. Besides enhancing the validity of the instrument, the pilot study also provided preliminary insights into data collection procedures, logistical requirements, and potential challenges during the actual research process. This process ensured that the questions used were capable of generating consistent information aligned with the research objectives.

A total of seven Indian Muslim converts were selected as research participants and interviewed using a semi-structured interview approach. To ensure research ethics and protect participants' identities, each informant was assigned a specific code, namely Info#1 to Info#7. The interviews continued until data saturation was achieved, whereby newly obtained information became increasingly limited and the collected findings were considered sufficient to address the research questions. All interview sessions were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The data were then manually coded to identify categories and emerging themes from the interview transcripts, enabling a systematic and organised analysis process.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Background of the Informants

The profile of the research informants indicates that Indian Muslim converts come from diverse religious backgrounds. Five informants were former Hindus, one was a former Christian, and one was an atheist before embracing Islam. This situation demonstrates that the experience of conversion to Islam among the Indian



community is not limited to a particular religious background but encompasses diverse faith experiences. The informants consisted of five males and two females. In terms of geographical background, the informants originated from several different states, namely Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Kelantan, Johor, and Terengganu, thereby providing variations in social and cultural contexts that may influence their experiences after embracing Islam. The duration of their commitment to Islam ranged from three to twenty-one years, representing a combination of newly converted Muslims and those who have practised Islam for a longer period. This diversity in the duration of conversion enables the study to examine changes in perceptions, adaptation challenges, and the development of relationships with non-Muslim family members across different stages of their Muslim journey. Consequently, it enriches the analysis of their experiences of dialogue of life and involvement in ethnic community festivals. The profile information of the informants is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Profile of Indian Muslim Convert Informants

Informant	Gender	Previous Religion	Place of Origin	Duration Since Embracing Islam
Info#1	Male	Christianity	Kuala Lumpur	12 years
Info#2	Male	Ateist	Kuala Lumpur	7 years
Info#3	Male	Hinduism	Kuala Lumpur	6 years
Info#4	Female	Hinduism	Pinang	11 years
Info#5	Female	Hinduism	Kelantan	3 years
Info#6	Perempuan	Hinduism	Johor	5 years
Info#7	Male	Hinduism	Terengganu	21 years

Dialogue of Life in Knowing Islam Before Conversion

Interactions with Muslim friends provided opportunities for Indian Muslim converts to know and understand Islam more deeply. This experience of dialogue of life is reflected in the experience of Info#2 as follows:

“Since I was 10 years old, when I was in primary school. I was interested because most of my friends were Malay. It was a national school. My friends were mostly Muslim, so I became curious to know about Islam. However, I did not tell anyone about it. The feeling remained dormant.”
(Info#2)

The experience of dialogue of life in understanding the practices of Muslim friends also encouraged some informants to participate in certain Islamic practices. This is illustrated as follows:

“When I entered school... during Form Six, I stayed in a hostel because my family had already moved. At that time, I was the only non-Muslim student in the hostel. When the fasting month came, I also fasted for the whole month together with them.”
(Info#2)

Similarly, Info#7 shared that exposure to Islamic practices through interactions with Muslim friends during school years provided early familiarity with Islamic expressions:



“Since school days, I knew how to recite prayers... by following my Muslim friends. I could recite the school prayers. In the morning, when people recited prayers, I was able to follow them. But at that time, I did not have the intention or interest to embrace Islam.” (Info#7)

Nevertheless, some informants indicated that other factors contributed to their decision to embrace Islam more quickly. This was expressed by Info#1:

“Before the night I embraced Islam, I had a dream where someone wearing white clothes came and seemed to invite me. When I woke up, my body was sweating. I sat down and thought deeply... someone is calling me.” (Info#1)

Meanwhile, Info#6 explained that dialogue of life through interactions with a Muslim friend from the same ethnic background encouraged her to explore Islam further:

“When my husband passed away (he was Hindu), I was extremely stressed. My friend often came to visit me, showed concern, and asked about my well-being. One day, she sent me the translation of *iybaka na ‘budu wa iyyaka nasta ‘in* and encouraged me to study this verse.” (Info#6)

Although non-Muslim Indian communities may experience various forms of introduction to Islam through social interactions and dialogue of life activities, the guidance (*hidayah*) from Allah SWT remains the most significant foundation that motivates them to accept Islam as their chosen faith. This was expressed as follows:

“For me, it was because of guidance from Allah. I received guidance. It was not simply because someone invited me or preached to me...” (Info#5)

The findings demonstrate that cross-religious social relationships and dialogue of life with Muslim friends are among the important factors that create opportunities for Indian Muslim converts to know and understand Islam more closely. The experiences of Info#2 and Info#7 illustrate that daily interactions at schools and hostels not only generated curiosity towards Islam but also encouraged them to participate in certain practices such as fasting and reciting prayers with Muslim friends. This indicates that the process of Islamic introduction occurred naturally through observation, shared experiences, and participation in the everyday lives of Muslim communities.

Furthermore, the experience of Info#6 highlights that care and emotional support demonstrated by Muslim friends during personal life crises also became a catalyst for exploring Islamic teachings. This finding is consistent with the study by Azarudin and Khadijah (2015), which explains that interpersonal relationships with Muslim communities, particularly through dialogue of life activities such as sharing meals, social interactions, and living together, can function as effective informal da‘wah mediums that influence the process of knowing Islam and subsequently embracing Islam. However, social relationships are not the sole factor contributing to conversion, as informants such as Info#1 associated their decision with personal spiritual experiences, while Info#5 emphasised that Allah SWT’s guidance was the primary factor that moved his heart towards accepting Islam. Therefore, the findings indicate that the process of embracing Islam among Indian Muslim converts is shaped by a combination of social interactions, life experiences, emotional support, and spiritual experiences. Nevertheless, the guidance of Allah SWT remains perceived as the most significant determining factor in their journey towards Islam.

Family Relationships after Embracing Islam

The primary challenge faced by Indian Muslim converts after embracing Islam is resistance from their immediate family members. This experience is reflected in the following account:

“At first, the challenges were extraordinary. I cried every day. My family simply could not accept that I had embraced Islam.” (Info#4)

A similar experience was shared by Info#1:



“My family threw me out of the house. We had been Christians for six generations. Our family was strongly devoted to Catholicism. We belonged to a large church, and every Sunday we had to attend church services. Suddenly, I was the only one who embraced Islam, and my family was shocked.” (Info#1)

Info#6 also explained that all members of her family opposed her conversion:

“I kept my conversion to Islam a secret. One day, my grandchild looked through my phone and found many Islamic materials. My son did not speak to me for two days. My siblings and my mother were all angry with me.” (Info#6)

Similarly, Info#5 explained that it took two months after embracing Islam before he attempted to rebuild communication with his family because of their opposition:

“Only after two months did I begin communicating with them again by phone. We needed time to adjust to the reality that I was now a Muslim while they were not.” (Info#5)

In contrast, Info#2 received encouragement from his father to embrace Islam:

“I lived with my father and took care of him. My father always told me, ‘If you live alone and have no relatives around you, the best thing to do is embrace Islam because Islam will take care of you.’” (Info#2)

Meanwhile, the reaction of Info#7’s family was relatively neutral:

“People asked my mother, ‘Has your son become a Muslim?’ She replied, ‘Yes, he has embraced Islam.’ They were surprised and asked whether it was true. But she was not angry.” (Info#7)

For Info#3, the family allowed their children to choose any religion except Islam:

“Since we were young, our mother always told us not to marry Muslims. She said we could choose any religion, but not Islam. We were raised with that belief because, in their view, once a person embraces Islam, there is no turning back.” (Info#3)

The findings indicate that family opposition is the most dominant challenge experienced by Indian Muslim converts after embracing Islam. The experiences of Info#1, Info#4, Info#5, and Info#6 demonstrate that religious conversion often results in emotional conflict, social rejection, and strained family relationships. Some informants were expelled from their homes, isolated by family members, or experienced difficulties in maintaining communication with relatives who could not accept their new religious identity. Such reactions appear to stem from the perception among non-Muslim family members that conversion to Islam represents a rejection of long-established family traditions, cultural identity, and inherited religious beliefs.

These findings are consistent with the study by Nur Najwa Hanani et al. (2020), which found that Muslim converts frequently experience emotional distress and challenges in maintaining family relationships after conversion, although they strive to preserve these relationships through emotional resilience and good moral conduct. Likewise, the literature review by Aliakbar and Md Rasip (2023) identified family conflict and identity crises as among the major challenges faced by Muslim converts during the early stages of conversion. Nevertheless, the findings also demonstrate that family responses are not uniform. Informants such as Info#2 received encouragement from his father to embrace Islam, while the family of Info#7 responded in a relatively neutral manner. These findings suggest that family acceptance of religious conversion is influenced by religious background, perceptions of Islam, and the existing dynamics of family relationships prior to conversion.

Dialogue of Life through Ethnic Community Festivals

Info#1 explained that he continues to participate in Christmas celebrations by engaging only in activities that do not contradict Islamic principles. His experience of dialogue of life during the celebration is described as follows:

“I still visit my family. I buy many gifts and go every year. My purpose is to show them that embracing Islam does not mean taking family relationships lightly.”
(Info#1)

Similarly, during Deepavali, Info#4 participates in the celebration by visiting her mother and accepting family invitations. She described her experience as follows:

“I always visit my mother's house during Deepavali. Now that I am married, I still visit her. When I am there, I only eat the food, such as *thosai*.”
(Info#4)

Info#5 shared a similar experience:

“After embracing Islam, I still visited my late brother's house during Deepavali. He passed away as a non-Muslim. I attended because my relatives and friends were there. Although we have different religions, our family bond remains strong.”
(Info#5)

Meanwhile, Info#7 explained that he assists his mother in preparing food during the celebration:

“We prepare lunch for everyone. Neighbours and friends come to eat. I go to my mother's house early in the morning, perform my dawn prayer there, and then help her with the cooking. From the beginning, we explained our religious boundaries to the family. For example, if food has been offered during a religious ritual, my children know that they are not allowed to eat it because we have already explained that such food is prohibited.” (Info#7)

Nevertheless, experiences of dialogue of life do not always proceed smoothly. Info#4 described feeling uncomfortable because her sister could not accept her Islamic attire:

“When I returned home for Deepavali, my sister could not accept the fact that I wore the hijab and face veil. She felt that it was something inappropriate.”
(Info#4)

Likewise, Info#3 explained that although he attended the celebration, he refrained from participating in religious rituals:

“I go home as usual during Deepavali. However, I do not participate in any rituals or prayers. Even if they ask me to, I will not do it. During Pongal, I simply join the gathering, but I do not take part in the religious rituals.” (Info#3)

At times, the informants found it necessary to explain the religious boundaries that should be observed during the celebrations. Info#4 recalled:

“About one or two months after I embraced Islam, Deepavali arrived while I was still living with my family. They asked me to take part in the traditional oil-bathing ritual, but my daughter told my mother that since I had embraced Islam, I could no longer participate in it.” (Info#4)

Info#1 also expressed his view regarding festive greetings:



“Strictly speaking, we should not say *Selamat* because, from an Islamic perspective, they have not yet attained salvation. Therefore, praying for their ‘salvation’ is not appropriate. However, saying *Merry Christmas* is acceptable because it simply conveys the meaning of wishing someone a joyful Christmas.” (Info#1)

To avoid uncertainty, Info#6 adopted a more cautious approach by visiting her relatives only after the main Deepavali celebration had ended:

“I asked an ustaz, and he explained that if it is merely a cultural practice, I may attend, but if it involves religious rituals, I should not. Therefore, to be on the safe side, I visit my siblings on the second or third day after Deepavali.” (Info#6)

The findings indicate that Indian Muslim converts continue to maintain family relationships through dialogue of life during ethnic community festivals after embracing Islam. However, their participation is carefully conducted within the boundaries of Islamic principles as understood by the informants. The experiences of Info#1, Info#4, Info#5, and Info#7 demonstrate that their presence during celebrations such as Christmas and Deepavali is primarily intended to preserve family ties, visit relatives, accept family invitations, and reassure non-Muslim family members that embracing Islam does not sever kinship relationships. At the same time, they consistently avoid participating in religious rituals, acts of worship, and practices that they consider incompatible with Islamic beliefs.

The findings further reveal that Indian Muslim converts actively explain their religious boundaries to family members as part of negotiating their new identity as Muslims. This finding is consistent with Mohd Faqih and Zuliza (2020), who argued that Islam encourages Muslim converts to maintain good relationships with their non-Muslim parents and relatives through visits, communication, and mutual respect, provided such interactions do not involve practices contrary to Islamic principles. The same authors also reported that Indian Muslim converts generally strive to preserve family relationships by attending family gatherings and ethnic community festivals while continuing to face challenges in determining the limits of participation in non-Islamic religious rituals. Overall, the findings suggest that dialogue of life through ethnic community festivals functions as an important mechanism for preserving interreligious family harmony while enabling Indian Muslim converts to remain committed to the principles of Islamic faith (*‘aqidah*) and *Shari‘ah*.

Implications of Dialogue of Life during Ethnic Community Festivals

The experience of dialogue of life demonstrates to non-Muslim family members that embracing Islam does not sever family relationships. As a result of these continuing family visits during festive occasions, the mother of Info#4 began preparing halal food whenever her Muslim family members visited. She explained:

“Alhamdulillah, now my mother respects my beliefs. She even buys halal food from Malay vendors.” (Info#4)

From another perspective, visiting family members during festive celebrations brought happiness to non-Muslim relatives because family ties were preserved despite religious differences. This is reflected in the following excerpts:

“When we visit them, we are able to maintain family ties. At the same time, it also becomes a form of *da‘wah*. It shows them that just because we have embraced Islam does not mean we stop coming home.” (Info#7)

“Yes, they were happy. My parents were quite surprised that I came home. It was the first year I celebrated with my spouse after embracing Islam.” (Info#3)

Dialogue during these visits also provided non-Muslim family members with opportunities to learn more about Islamic teachings. As one informant explained:



“That is why we have to explain these matters to our non-Muslim family members. If we do not tell them, they will not know. They do not really understand what *halal* means. They simply think that as long as there is no pork or dog meat, the food is permissible.” (Info#7)

The findings indicate that dialogue of life within the context of ethnic community festivals generates various positive implications for social relationships and interactions among family members of different religious backgrounds. The experiences of the informants demonstrate that family visits and interactions during festive occasions help non-Muslim relatives understand that embracing Islam does not lead to the breakdown of family relationships. For example, the experience of Info#4 illustrates that her mother gradually understood the requirements of Islamic law and subsequently prepared halal food for visiting Muslim family members.

Furthermore, the presence of Indian Muslim converts during ethnic community festivals brought joy to their non-Muslim relatives because family relationships were maintained despite differences in religious beliefs. At the same time, these interactions created opportunities for dialogue and the sharing of information about Islam, particularly concerning the concept of *halal*, which had previously been poorly understood by non-Muslim family members.

These findings are consistent with the study by Sarip Abdul (2015), which found that the continuation of family relationships contributes to greater understanding among non-Muslim family members regarding Islamic teachings and helps reduce conflicts following religious conversion. Likewise, the study by Siti Nurjannati and Razaleigh (2020) reported that the daily interactions and exemplary conduct of Muslim converts serve as an effective form of informal *da'wah* in introducing Islamic values to non-Muslim communities.

Overall, the findings suggest that dialogue of life in the context of ethnic community festivals not only serves to preserve interreligious family harmony but also functions as an important platform for fostering mutual understanding, reducing prejudice, and strengthening social cohesion within Malaysia's multicultural society.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the process of embracing Islam among Indian Muslim converts does not occur instantaneously but develops through experiences of dialogue of life manifested in various forms of social interaction with Muslim communities. Interactions with Muslim friends in schools, residential settings, and everyday social environments provided opportunities for the informants to gain a deeper understanding of Islam through observation, shared experiences, and exemplary moral conduct. Although social relationships, emotional support, and personal spiritual experiences played important roles in their conversion journeys, the guidance (*hidayah*) of Allah SWT was consistently perceived as the most significant factor motivating their acceptance of Islam. Following their conversion, most informants experienced rejection and opposition from non-Muslim family members. Nevertheless, they sought to preserve family relationships through patience, wisdom, and good moral conduct. These findings demonstrate that embracing Islam involves not only a change of religious affiliation but also a complex process of identity reconstruction, emotional adjustment, and social adaptation.

The study further demonstrates that dialogue of life through ethnic community festivals serves as an important mechanism for maintaining interreligious family harmony without compromising the principles of Islamic law. The participation of Indian Muslim converts in family visits, social gatherings, and cultural activities that do not involve religious rituals has helped reduce misunderstandings, preserve family ties, and enhance non-Muslim family members' understanding of Islamic teachings. Moreover, interactions during these festive occasions provide opportunities for informal *da'wah* through discussions on the concept of *halal*, the boundaries of Islamic faith (*aqidah*), and Islamic values. These findings suggest that the principles of *fiqh al-ta'ayush*, which emphasise tolerance, mutual respect, and wisdom, remain highly relevant for managing interreligious relationships in multicultural societies. Accordingly, religious institutions and Muslim convert guidance centres should strengthen educational programmes that emphasise dialogue of life and the management of interreligious family relationships to facilitate the successful social integration of Muslim converts within Malaysia's multicultural society.



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