

A Study on Socio – Economic Status of Dalit Christians in Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

This paper reviews the empirical study on Excluded people (Dalit Christians) in Indian Society. Dalit Christian is more painful and humiliating to compare than other communities because of the Caste of the society. Dalits who converted to Christianity did not escape the caste system which has a strongly fixed presence in Indian society. The problem of Dalit has elicited considerable interest in the minds of researchers in recent times. In this study main objectives is to identify the socio - economic status of Dalit Christians in Villupuram District and to suggest a suitable action plan for their sustainable development. Tools for Data Collation In the present study data were both 'primary' as well as 'secondary' sources. The dates were collected primary sources constituted of the respondent of all age groups and the sample size was study has been drawn by using census method. Total sample selected for the study are 6246 respondents, in this study would used family census method. The researcher was selected four Taluks in Villupuram District and each four Taluks, five areas have selected based village, urban, semi – urban in this method were selected areas. Design of the Study here, descriptive design will be used to describe the data. The collected data were analysed with the help of descriptive and simple percentage. The collected data were analyzed to get a better understanding of the socio economic statues of Dalit Christians in Villupuram district.

Key words:

Christians; people; Society; Dalit; conversion; Discrimination

Introduction:

Christianity is the world's largest religion, with approximately 2.2 billion devotees are known as Christians. Most Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the saviour of humanity . The word of Christianity from Ancient Greek it is called *Christos*, a translation of the Hebrew is *Messiah*, meaning "the anointed one". The three primary divisions of Christianity are Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. There are other Christian groups that do not fit neatly into one of these primary categories. The Nicene Creed is "accepted as authoritative by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and major Protestant churches.

India is believed Christianity to be 2000 years old. It possibly was introduced to Tamil Nadu by St. Thomas, the Apostle, one of the Apostles of Jesus Christ who landed in Malabar Coast (modern day Kerala) in AD 52. But today, these Saint Thomas Christians or Syrian Christians are found mainly in Kerala. Later the colonial age brought a large number of Portuguese, Dutch, British and Italian Christians to

Tamil Nadu. Priests accompanied them not only to minister the colonizers but also to spread the Christian faith among the millions of non-Christians in Tamil Nadu. Currently, Christians are a minority community comprising 6% of the total population (census of India 2001). While different dimensions of Christianity in Tamil Nadu they are the Roman Catholic Church (Latin Rite), the Church of South India, the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and other evangelical denominations constitute the Christian population in Tamil Nadu. The Latin Rite of Roman Catholic Church is the oldest and the largest among all, the second largest church by number of members is the Church of South India and The Pentecostal Mission.

The term **Dalit Christian** (sometimes **Christian Dalit**) is used to describe those low-castes who have converted to Christianity. Caste system has survived in India more than 3500 years. The word Caste comes from Portuguese word 'Casta' signifying 'breed or race'. Ketkar defines Caste in his book "History of Caste in India" (p.15). Caste system was introduced to the Indian history by Aryans who invaded India in BC 1500. The Hierarchical Caste System was attributed to God's creation. In the traditional understanding the Caste system is derived from Varna system, which has the foundation in Rig-Veda. X 90.12 Mandala describes the creation of different groups from Purusha, the primordial being. Purushasukta (Hymn of Man in Rig-Veda) speaks about Varna as the origin of the

Caste system. "The Brahmana was his mouth; both of his arms were Ranjanya (Kshatriya); his thighs became the Vaishya and from his feet the Shudra was produced. (Griffith Ralph, The Hymns of Rig-Veda, p.603) The people outside of Chatur Varna were called outcastes. Aryans called them Dasas (Dark people), Panchama (fifth order or outcastes) Avarna, Chandala, Antayas, Shvapaka, Meda etc. The term 'Dalit' has roots in Sanskrit where the root 'dal' means 'to split, crack, open'. 'Dalit' has come to mean things or persons who are cut, split, broken or crushed and destroyed. By coincidence, there is in Hebrew a root 'dal' meaning low, weak, poor. In the Bible, different forms of this term have been used to describe people who have been reduced to nothingness or helplessness. In the late 1880s the Marathi word 'Dalit' was used by Mahatma Jotiba Phule for the outcasts and Untouchables who were oppressed and broken by Hindu society.

Dalits who converted to Christianity did not escape the caste system which has a strongly fixed presence in Indian society. The different branches of Christianity in India still engage in these societal practices with regards to the caste system, along with all its customs and norms. The Roman Catholic Church treated the caste system as part of the Indian social structure and, for much of its history in India, it chose to work within the established social system. Other major factors affecting Dalit Christians and other Christians within India in regard to caste statutes are the regional variances in maintaining the caste system. The southern part of the country has

traditionally more rigidly maintained the caste system than the northern regions. Rural communities also hold more strongly to the caste system and Roman Catholics are the majority of Christians in these communities.

In the Catholic Church, the Dalits form the majority, almost 70%: but it is the higher caste-people, only 30% of church population. The majority of the catholic bishops and clergy, the religious and lay leaders, come from the upper caste, and occupy the 90% of the administration and leadership of the church. Scheduled Caste converts to Christianity (Dalits) in India are thrice discriminated community. They were treated as untouchables in the society and after conversion, they suffer discrimination in the Church on the basis of Caste. The Government of India also denies Scheduled Caste rights and constitutional privileges to Dalit Christians due to their conversion to Christianity. They continue to live in deep faith and witness for values for gospel even after the denial of rights in the church. The racism on the basis of color in the world was abolished and Africans achieved freedom and equal rights but Dalits in India suffer all the disabilities due to the traditional practice of untouchability. The prime purpose of this research programme is to find out the Dalit Roman catholic Christian strength and weakness. Especially Social, Economical,

Educational and Employment level status. This would make people (Dali Christian) to be aware of them. This would help the religious institutions to come forward to promote the Dalit Christians. The prime purpose of this research programme is to find out the Dalit Roman catholic Christians strength and weakness. Especially Social, Economical, Educational and Employment level status. This would make people (Dali Christian) to be aware of them. This would help the religious institutions to come forward to promote the Dalit Christians

Statement of the problems:

- There are 85% of Dalit Christians to continue to live in the same segregated place, such as Cheri or Colony, Slums even two generation after becoming Christians.
- Dalit Christian children do not have equal opportunities for education in Christian institution. Firstly the Dalit Children are denied during the admission – secondly the fee structure is very high and therefore the high standards were set by Christian institution.
- Purposively the employment opportunities are denied as there are provisions for to this community.
- And only 2 per cent of clergy from Dalit Christians in India but 80 per cent population from Dalit Christian community.

- *To suggest a suitable action plan for their sustainable development*

Tools for Data Collation

In the present study data were both 'primary' as well as 'secondary' sources. The dates were collected primary sources

Research Methodology

Objectives of the study

- *To identify the socio - economic status of Dalit Christians in Villupuram District*

constituted of the respondent of 18 months and above and were by Participatory scientific observation, Interview schedule, and Secondary sources include census reports, articles, newspaper reports, journals and books.

Sample Size

The study has been drawn by using census method. Total sample selected for the study are 6246 respondents, in this study would used family census method. The researcher selected four Taluk in Villupuram District and each four Taluk five areas have selected based on village, urban, semi – urban, in this method selected area total respondents data have collected.

Design of the Study

Here, descriptive design will be used to describe the data. Descriptive research design is a scientific method which involves observing and describing the behaviour of a subject without influencing it in any way.

Collection of Data

The collected data were analysed with the help of descriptive and simple percentage. Census method of tools used to collect data. The collected data were analyzed to get a better understanding of the socio economic statues of Dalit Christians in Villupuram district.

Table 1- Personal Details

Table: 1 Personal detail of the respondents

S. No	Characteristics	Particulars	Total No of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Age	0 to 20	1657	26.52
		21 to 40	2610	41.79
		Above 60	1979	31.69
2.	Residence	Rural	2835	45.38
		Urban	1849	29.61
		Semi - Urban	1562	25.01
3.	Type of family	Joint	966	15.47
		Nuclear	5280	84.53
4.	Marital status	Married	2583	41.37
		Unmarried	3663	58.63
5.	Annual Income in Rs:	Below 4000	1548	24.79
		4000 - 6000	184	2.95
		Above 6000	127	2.04
		Others	4387	70.22
		Total sample	6246	100

Analysis and Interpretation

Figure: 1 Personal detail of the respondents

From the above table, it is clearly found that 26.52 percent of the respondents belonged to the age group of below 20 years. 41.79 percent belonged to the age group of 30 - 40 years, and were 31.69 percent belonged to the age group of above 60 years.

The respondents were enquired about their Residence 45.38 per cent of the respondents are from rural area, 29.61 per cent are from urban area, and 25.01 Per cent are from Sub – urban area.

The respondents were enquired about their family type, 84.53 per cent

respondents are reported that, they are from nuclear family. 15.47 per cent are from joint family.

The respondents were asked about marital status 41.37 per cent of the respondents are married, 58.63 per cent are unmarried.

The respondents were asked about their monthly income of their family 24.79 per cent are earning money below Rs.4000, 2.95 per cent are earning Rs.4000 – 6000, 2.04 per cent are earning money above Rs.6000 and 70.22 percent of the respondents are not earning but depend on family earning members.

Table – 2 Education and economic status of Dalit Christians

S.No	Particulars	Characteristics	Total No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Educational Level	+2	154	2.46
		Degree studying	220	3.54
		Degree	314	5.02
		Others	5558	88.98
2	Employment status	Daily cooly	1330	21.28
		Christian Institutional Teacher	122	1.95
		Govt. Staff	20	0.34
		Govt. Teacher	32	0.52
		Private	6	0.09
		Unemployment	288	4.61
		others	4448	71.21
3	Religious Father and Sister	Religious Father	7	0.11
		Religious Sister	13	0.20
		Lay People	6226	99.69
4	Willing for to start new Political for Dalit Christians	Willing	5229	83.72
		Unwillingness	564	9.04
		None of the said	452	7.24
		Total sample	6246	100.00

From the above table, it's clearly found educational status 2.46 per cent of the respondents were Higher Secondary studied (+2), 3.54 per cent are studying Degree and Technical Education, 5.02 per cent were completed Degree and Technical Education, and 88.98 per cent were qualified (0 – 10th standard)

The respondent were asked about employment status 21.28 per cent of the respondents are Daily cooly, 0.09 per cent Teacher are working on Christian Institution, 0.34 per cent are working on Government employee, 0.52 per cent teacher working on Government school, 1.95 per cent working on private institution, 4.61 per cent unemployment, 71.21 per cent dependents on family members (Children, Home Maker, Old age)

The respondents were enquired about Religious Father and Religious Sister 0.11 per cent of the respondents are Religious Father, 0.20 per cent is Religious Sister and 99.69 per cent are lay people

The respondent were asked about willing for to start new political party for Dalit Christians 83.72 per cent of the respondents are willing, 9.04 per cent are unwillingness and 7.24 per cent are none of the said

Findings

- ❖ 2.46 per cent of the respondents were Higher Secondary studied (+2)
- ❖ 3.54 per cent are studying Degree and Technical Education
- ❖ 5.02 per cent were completed Degree and Technical Education
- ❖ 88.98 per cent were qualified (0 – 10th standard)
- ❖ 21.28 per cent of the respondents are Daily cooly

- ❖ 0.09 per cent Teacher are working on Christian Institution
- ❖ 0.34 per cent are working on Government employee
- ❖ 0.52 per cent teacher working on Government school
- ❖ 1.95 per cent working on private institution
- ❖ 71.21 per cent dependents on family members (Children, Home Maker, Old age)
- ❖ 0.11 per cent of the respondents are Religious Father
- ❖ 0.20 per cent is Religious Sister
- ❖ 99.69 per cent are lay people
- ❖ 83.72 per cent of the respondents are willing

Recommendation

1. The Government should provide scholarship and other educational support for Dalit Christians as well as Dalit Hindu students.
2. The Christian minority educational Institution should to give some percentage of seat for Dalit Christians students.
3. The Christian minority educational Institution must to give free cost education for economically most backward Dalit Christian students. Because more than student dropout their education due to economic situation.
4. To encourage higher education, particularly technical and professional education among Dalit Christians, the Diocesan and Religious Congregations should jointly create a scholarship Fund as an encouragement deserving students
5. The Christian minority educational Institution and social worker should to give more awareness for Dalit Christian for an Importance of the education. Weekly once and

summer period will conduct special lecture on English communication skills and Personality development course etc as well as religious education for their development.

6. Take effective steps to appoint Dalit members in the administration of the Church and related organisations according to the proportion of Dalit population.
7. Work at having reservation policy for the Dalits/Tribals in the diocesan/religious institutions.
8. Make efforts to recruit candidates of Dalit origin for priesthood and religious life in keeping with their numerical strength.
9. Central and state Government should provide employment opportunities and other rights as well as Dalit Hindu.
10. Diocesan and congregations should encourage Dalit youth for Religious spiritual service and guide become a good clergy.
11. More than people like to start new political party. It is very useful for convenience your need on central Government and state Government.
12. Practice of discrimination in any form in the place of worship, burial ground and in the community should be abolished with time bound action by appointing a monitoring team which identifies places and forms of discrimination practiced in the substations and main stations of parishes, religious institutions and eradicates this sinful practice with the cooperation of all sections of people, and the religious communities.

Conclusion

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Baba Sahib Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi made statements that Dalit remains a Dalit which ever religion he embraces. And the Mandal commission report of affirms “there is no doubt that social and educational backwardness among non Hindu communities is more or less of the same order as among Hindu communities. Thus, both from within and without, caste amongst non – Hindu communities receive continuous sustenance and stimulus” A Dalit is a Dalit, whether Christian or not, they are basically toilers, landless peasants and rural wage labours. The Jesuit evidence show, the church has clearly failed to give to the educational facilities for Dalit Christian. Dalit Christians are socially, economically and religiously differentiated by others. Therefore central and state Government provide equal rights opportunities as well as Hindu Dalit. Christian institution should give the preference an Educational facilities and Employment opportunities for Dalit Christians development.

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