



# Observation on Social, Economical and Political status of Dalit Christians: A study in Puthukottai District

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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 Justice, Social, Economical and Political status of Dalit Christians in Puthukottai 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 9310 respondents, in this study would used family census method. The researcher was selected four Taluks in Puthukottai District and each four Taluks, ten 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 Justice, Social, and Economical and Political statues of Dalit Christains in Puthukottai district.

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## Introduction

The word "Caste" originates from Spanish word 'Casta'. Caste means 'breed, race, and complex of hereditary qualities.' The English word 'Caste' is an adjustment of the original term 'Casta'. According to Anderson, Parker and Williams "Caste is that extreme form of social class organisation in which the position of individuals in the status hierarchy is determined by basis of birth into a particular group". Martindale and Monochest defined Caste as "an aggregate of persons whose share of obligations and privileges are fixed by birth, sanctioned and supported by religion and usage.

According to Henry Maine "Castes started as natural division of occupational classes and eventually upon receiving the religious sanction became solidified into the existing caste system. The caste system comes into being when it becomes an integral part of religious dogma which divides the people into superior and inferior groups with different responsibilities, functions and standards of living."

According to Magasthens "It is not permitted to contract marriage with a person of another caste or to undertake an occupation other than ancestral nor for the same person to undertake more than one, except if he is of the Caste of Philosophers, when permission is given on account of dignity". The Indian caste system is systematically divided people bases on birth, the status of birth only give the richest life for all. Any one born in out of caste his definitely suffer untouchability. No one could not escape the caste system. The Indian caste system is desired person life. This is give one sight pleasure life anther side burden or painful life.

## Jatis /Varnas

In ancient India, society member was systematically divided that each group performed a specific job. Each group is necessary for society. According to Mahatma Gandhi "each group is same at all, there is no different in low and high". In 1000 B.C.E., the earliest known the society described the metaphor (symbol) of human body.

According the Rig Veda, the ancient Hindu book, the primal man - Purush - destroyed himself to create a human society. The different Varnas were created from different parts of his body. The Brahmins were created from his head (scholars, teachers, fire priests), the Kshatrias from his hands (kings, warriors, law enforcers, administrators), the Vaishias from his thighs (agriculturists, cattle raisers, traders, bankers), the Sudras from his feet (artisans, craftsmen, service providers). Untouchables (Certain people like foreigners, nomads, forest tribes and the chandalas, who dealt with disposal of the dead were excluded or prohibited altogether and treated as untouchables). The Indian caste system is not only follow the Hindu people even it follow Muslims and Christians etc.

According to Sir H. Risley: "A caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same professional calling and are regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community". According to Hindu tradition, Indian societies are scientifically divided and obviously classify castes (jatis). Caste is order one's occupation, food habits, dress codes, marriage, dine and interaction with members of other castes. The high caste people

enjoy more wealth and opportunities while low caste people live with more difficulties. There is very rare upward mobility in the caste system.

#### **Untouchables / Dalit Christians**

According to orthodox rules anyone who does not belong to the four Varnas, meaning foreigners, are untouchables. According to Manu Smritis, the people who follow the lowest kind of occupations include scavenging, leather work, removal of the carrion etc, are to be regarded as untouchables.

The Indian Caste systems divided people unequal and hierarchical order. The out of caste people or bottoms of consider 'impure, polluting, untouchable and lesser human beings' by upper caste people. The untouchables called the different names in different periods. In Vedic era, they were known as 'Chandala'. In Medieval period, they were addressed as 'Achhuta'. In the British Government period, they were known as 'Exterior Caste'. In the present time, they were known as the 'Scheduled Caste' by the Indian Constitution. According to Dr.D.N Majumdar "Untouchables castes are those who suffer from various social and political disabilities many of which are traditionally prescribed and socially enforced by higher castes."

The first impact is the harsh fact of social stigma. The untouchables are considered polluting and are therefore kept at a distance. Their mere presence as well as their belongings are discarded or avoided. They are made to live separately and often cannot share such common village amenities as the well. The stigma of untouchability is attributed to the traditional occupation of the jati and affects all members of that jati regardless of actually being engaged in that occupation or not. Those jatis who clean up, deal with dead animals or eat their meat, are ritually unclean and beyond the pale. The vast majority of so called untouchables are actually engaged in agricultural labour. For many, their traditional occupation is simply a supplementary and temporary work over and above their main agricultural occupation.

Untouchables are very poorly compensated for their labour and thus forced to live a life of constraints. Their diet is poor; their clothes are few and rarely clean; their homes are small, fragile and unhealthy; and they are hopelessly overwhelmed with debts. Poverty and indebtedness means bondage to and dependence on the village strong man of the moment.

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of nation, says "Untouchability is the hate fullest expression of Caste System and it is a crime against God and man". Mahatmas want to relief the caste problem to SCs. But he was favour of caste hierarchy, that is affected SCs.

"According to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: untouchables form an entirely new class i.e. the fifth varna apart from the existing four varnas. Thus, untouchables are not even recognized under the caste system of Hindus". The social reformers, freedom fighter, genuineness persons are considered out of caste because they are not accept the Indian caste system. The punishment of caste order was to produce lot of caste problem in India.

They were forbidden entry to many temples, to most schools, and to wells from which higher castes drew water. Their touch was seen as seriously polluting to people of higher caste, involving much remedial ritual. In southern India, even the sight of some untouchable groups was once held to be polluting, and they were forced to live a nocturnal existence. These restrictions led many untouchables to seek some degree of emancipation through conversion to Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism. However, caste systems and the ensuing discrimination have spread into Christian, Buddhist, Muslim and Sikh communities. The Dalit change the religions but not change the status. The statement of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Mahatma

Gandhi said Dalit remains a Dalit which ever religion he embraces in India. The Indian government appointed various commissions for to find out the reality of Dalit Christians. According to Government commission: The backward class commissions like Kaka Kalekar Commission (1951), Kumar pillai Commission (1965), Elayaperumal Commission (1969), Sattanathan Commission (1970), Chidambaram Commission (1975), Mandal Commission (1982), and Mandal Case Judgment (1992) found the socio – economical, educational, employment, and political disabilities of Dalit Christians in the society and Church. Dr. Jose Kananaikil conducted National sample survey of Indian Social Institute (1986) identified that Scheduled Caste convert Christianity suffer more socio – economical, educational, employment, and political disabilities than the Hindu Dalits.

#### **Statement of the problems**

- Untouchability practices still exist in the church and the positive changes have not taken place.
- There is no monitoring committee of the laity to monitor the admissions and the employment is taking place as said in the ten points program. The habitat of the Dalits still looks miserable and the church of the Dalits.
- Equality is a dream. There is a long way to move further.
- Educated become alienated from their community and there is least instance of the educated coming back to the hamlet and work for the development.
- Dalit Christians bargaining power is weak due to lack of various capitals.
- The Dalits Christians are not appointed in the powerful positions in the hierarchy of the church.
- The Dalit youth are discouraged from becoming clergy or religious.

#### **Research Methodology**

##### **Objectives of the study**

- To identify the Justice, Social, Economical and Political status of Dalit Christians in Puthukottai District.
- 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 6 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 9310 respondents, in this study would used family census method. The researcher selected four Taluk in Puthukottai District and each four Taluk ten 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 Justice, Social, Economical and Political statues of Dalit Christians in Puthukottai district.

**Table 1. Personal detail of the respondents**

S.No	Characteristics	Particulars	Total No of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Age	0 to 20	2450	26.32
		21 to 40	4492	48.25
		Above 40	2368	25.43
2.	Residence	Rural	6083	65.34
		Urban	1348	14.47
		Semi - Urban	1879	20.19
3.	Type of family	Joint	1637	17.58
		Nuclear	7673	82.42
4.	Marital status	Married	3753	40.32
		Unmarried	5557	59.68
5.	Annual Income in Rs:	Below 4000	2538	27.26
		4000 - 6000	246	2.64
		Above 6000	108	1.16
		Others	6418	68.93
		Total sample	9310	100

**Table 2. Education and economic status of Dalit Christians**

S.No	Particulars	Characteristics	Total No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Educational Level	+2	357	3.83
		Degree studying	446	4.79
		Degree	472	5.08
		Others	8035	86.30
2	Employment status	Daily cooly	2615	28.08
		Christian Institutional Teacher	11	0.11
		Govt. Staff	37	0.39
		Govt. Teacher	13	0.13
		Private	216	2.34
		Unemployment	135	1.47
		others	6283	67.48
3	Religious Father and Sister	Religious Father	1	0.01
		Religious Sister	3	0.02
		Lay People	9306	99.97
4	Willing for to start new Political for Dalit Christians	Willing	7749	83.24
		Unwillingness	388	4.17
		None of the said	1173	12.59
		Total sample	9310	100.00

### Analysis and Interpretation

#### Figure 1. Personal detail of the respondents

From the above table, it is clearly found that 26.32 per cent of the respondents belonged to the age group of below 20 years. 48.25 per cent belonged to the age group of 30 - 40 years, and were 25.43 per cent belonged to the age group of above 60 years.

The respondents were enquired about their Residence 65.34 per cent of the respondents are from rural area, 14.47 per cent are from urban area, and 20.19 Per cent are from Sub – urban area.

The respondents were enquired about their family type, 82.42 per cent respondents are reported that, they are from nuclear family, 17.58 per cent are from joint family.

The respondents were asked about marital status 40.32 per cent of the respondents are married, 59.68 per cent are unmarried.

The respondents were asked about their monthly income of their family 27.26 per cent are earning money below Rs.4000, 2.64 per cent are earning Rs.4000 – 6000, 1.16 per cent are earning money above Rs.6000 and 68.93 percent of the respondents are not earning but depend on family earning members.

From the above table, it's clearly found educational status 3.83 per cent of the respondents were Higher Secondary studied

(+2), 4.79 per cent are studying Degree and Technical Education, 5.08 per cent were completed Degree and Technical Education, and 86.30 per cent were qualified (0 – 10<sup>th</sup> standard)

The respondent were asked about employment status 28.08 per cent of the respondents are Daily cooly, 0.11 per cent Teacher are working on Christian Institution, 0.39 per cent are working on Government employee, 0.13 per cent teacher working on Government school, 2.34 per cent working on private institution, 1.47 per cent unemployment, 67.48 per cent dependents on family members (Children, Home Maker, Old age)

The respondents were enquired about Religious Father and Religious Sister 0.01 per cent of the respondents are Religious Father, 0.02 per cent is Religious Sister and 99.97 per cent are lay people

The respondent were asked about willing for to start new political party for Dalit Christians 83.24 per cent of the respondents are willing, 4.17 per cent are unwillingness and 12.59 per cent are none of the said

#### Findings

❖ 3.83 per cent of the respondents were Higher Secondary studied (+2)

❖ 4.79 per cent are studying Degree and Technical Education

❖ 5.08 per cent were completed Degree and Technical Education

- ❖ 86.30 per cent were qualified (0 – 10<sup>th</sup> standard)
- ❖ 28.08 per cent of the respondents are Daily cooly
- ❖ 0.11 per cent Teacher are working on Christian Institution
- ❖ 0.39 per cent are working on Government employee
- ❖ 0.13 per cent teacher working on Government school
- ❖ 2.34 per cent working on private institution
- ❖ 67.48 per cent dependents on family members ( Children, Home Maker, Old age)
- ❖ 0.01 per cent of the respondents are Religious Father
- ❖ 0.02 per cent is Religious Sister
- ❖ 99.97 per cent are lay people
- ❖ 83.24 per cent of the respondents are willing

#### **Recommendation**

1. The Christian minority educational Institution should to give 50 percentages of seats for Dalit Christians students.
2. The Government should provide scholarship and other educational support for Dalit Christians as well as Dalit Hindu students.
3. Dalit and Non – Dalit Christians must understand the meaning of Christianity and should follow their life.
4. Caste system was prevent humanity among the society, therefore should eradicate caste system.
5. Caste Christians should join with Dalits Christians for their development
6. The Indian Churches have been served many schools and Hospitals under their control. Through this institution create an awareness among the people for reduce caste violence.
7. The Social reforms of the Churches do not bring any successful results in Dalit's Christians upliftment. Hence, the Churches should more careful in future while announcing social reform measures.
8. Foreign funds - Churches and Action Groups in India get lots of money from Missions abroad. These are received for Dalit and Dalit Christians cause. But, usually such kinds of funds are not used purposefully. Therefore proper spend funds for Dalit and Dalit Christians development.
9. The efforts to Indianise the Churches should be stopped with immediate effect as it allows a kind of Indians culture to take roots in the Churches.
10. Church run institution should provide employment opportunity for their empowerment
11. Indian Church should ban all forms of divisions and separations or exclusion viz. in the church, in the funeral paths and in the Church festivals, etc.
12. 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.
13. 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
14. 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.
15. Take effective steps to appoint Dalit members in the administration of the Church and related organisations according to the proportion of Dalit population.
16. Work at having reservation policy for the Dalits/Tribals in the diocesan/religious institutions.
17. Make efforts to recruit candidates of Dalit origin for

priesthood and religious life in keeping with their numerical strength.

18. Central and state Government should provide employment opportunities and other rights as well as Dalit Hindu.

19. Diocesan and congregations should encourage Dalit youth for Religious spiritual service and guide become a good clergy.

20. More than people like to start new political party. It is very useful for convenience your need on central Government and state Government.

#### **Conclusion**

In Puthukottai district, the Dalit Christians are economically poor, political powerless, socially depressed. A change of religions has not cleaned their scar and not brought big changes. “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” Indian government is playing politics with this community. Mr Masih said, “The denial of reservation status to the Dalit Christians is a discrimination and human rights violation.” There is a need to educate and create awareness among the Dalit Christians for social justice. The Christian leader should shoulder the responsibility and make sincere efforts to organize Christian community on one platform. They should join with all other Dalit liberation organizations for socio-economic justice.

The church needs to rethink its stand in respect of the poor and marginalised dalits of the church. This is the foremost and important part of the Church before confronting the enemies of the society. And finally among the missiological discussions, let me present a Lutheran Theologian Richard H. Bliese's view on Church's mission today in our Indian Context. His view is based on Paul's Rev. A. Vincent Thomas 279 Global Religious Vision, Vol. 3/IV famous theological position on freedom, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male or female; for all are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). He observes: “The Indian Churches should consider grounding their mission efforts not on the shallow waters of liberation and renewal but on the ocean depths of Paul's gospel of freedom”. He explains the Gospel of freedom in three ways. 1. It is not wholistic. He affirms that this approach is primarily with the responsibility of the state to establish a just and orderly society. 2. It is very wholistic. This freedom according to him is that it is a freedom from slavery and from all oppressions. He claims that through faith we are free from all bondages. 3. It recognises the church's engagement in revolution against the political unjust orders which prohibit freedom when the Gospel of freedom of Paul is under threat and attack. By explaining Paul's Gospel of freedom, he affirms that this ‘missional orthopraxis’ is well suited to situation such as this today in our own context.

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