

# **Religious Minorities in India: A Case of Dalits and Dalit Christians in Andhra Pradesh**

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## **Abstract**

The present paper concerns with Religious Minorities in India especially Christians in the Erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh. It attempts to address the issue of feeling their discrimination on the basis of religion as they are deprived of the reservations as they are meant for those who remain in Hindu fold but not for those who converted to Christianity. Their claim is that, since there is no difference either in socio-economic conditions or in the practice untouchability either in the past or in the present by the upper castes between them and those who remained in Hindu fold, restricting the reservations to Hindus only is quite unreasonable. They have been demanding for the deleting the religion and making them eligible for scheduled caste status as in case of Buddhists and Sikhs. This paper broadly argues that does religion make a difference in socio-economic conditions of the Dalits converted to Christianity and those who remained as Hindu. To understand this issue the study conducted an empirical study in three villages of Erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. In this context it first presents the sociological perceptions of conversion of Dalits and why is the issue of the Christians is significant and concludes the significance of region in their daily life.

## Introduction

Religious minorities are 19 percent within the total population of India. Recent statistics showed that 11 percent of families practised Islam, which was followed by about 12 percent of the population of India. A little over 2% of the households, or about 2% of the total population, practised Christianity. In metropolitan areas, the proportions of homes and people who practise Islam were roughly 13 and 16, respectively, whereas the proportions of households and people who practise Christianity were roughly 3 and 3. A list of 121 districts with a majority minority population of at least 25% has also been released by the Indian government. This list excludes areas in states and union territories like Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Lakshadweep where minorities constitute the majority of the population (Akrita Reyar, 2019). The Ministry of Minority Affairs of the Government of India has designated Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, and Jains as minority communities.

## Socio-economic status of Religious minorities in India

According to 66th round of NSS,

- During the years 2004–2005 and 2009–2010, the gender ratio among Muslims saw a decrease in both rural and urban areas, whilst the gender ratio among Christians saw an improvement during this time period. Christians had the smallest average households of any religious group in both rural and urban areas, whilst Muslims had the largest average homes of any religious group in both of these settings. The average size of a household was larger in the countryside, regardless of the religious group, compared to the average size of a home in the metropolis.
- In rural areas, the majority of people in religious communities supported themselves through self-employment rather than any other source of income. The greatest proportion of Sikh families relied primarily on income from self-employment in agricultural-related fields, making them the most likely group to do so (about 36 per cent). The biggest proportion of Muslim families consisted of people working in rural areas than any other religious group (about 41 per cent). In metropolitan India, Muslims had a significantly higher likelihood than non-Muslims of having their principal source of income come from self-employment (46 per cent). The biggest share of income for Christian households in metropolitan areas came from regular wages or salaries (43 percent), which is where most metropolitan areas are located. The percentage of households that owned land in the range of 0.005-0.40 hectares in rural areas was greater than 40 percent across all of the major religious groups. This percentage represented the highest share of households that owned land of any of the land-owning classes. About 43 percent of Christian households and 38 percent of Muslim households farmed an area of land that was greater than or equal to 0.001 hectares but less than 1.00 hectares in size. The largest percentage of Sikh households cultivating more than 4,00 hectares of land was six percent, followed by the Hindu community with four percent (3 per cent) 1947 (Free Press Journal, Thursday, May 30, 2019).
- In both rural and urban India, the average Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) among Sikh households was the greatest, followed by the MPCE among Christian

households. In all of India, the median per capita expenditure (MPCE) for Sikh households was 1659 rupees, whereas the median per capita expenditure (MPCE) for Muslim households was 980 rupees.

- Christians had the highest literacy rate of any religious group among those who were at least 15 years old and lived in either rural or urban areas. The percentage of people who are at least 15 years old and have completed secondary school or above in the Christian and Sikh communities respectively was the highest. It was found that males were more likely to attend educational institutions than females, and that the attendance rates in urban regions were higher than those in rural areas. The current enrollment rates in educational institutions among people aged 0 to 29 that were highest among Christians were seen to be highest among Christians who were either rural men, rural women, urban men, or urban women. The male LFPR was significantly higher than the female LFPR across all religious groups, with the disparity between the sexes being even more pronounced in metropolitan areas. The gender gap between males and females was narrowest among Christians in LFPR. For urban males, urban females, and rural males, Sikhs had the highest life expectancy at birth rate (LFPR), but Christians had the highest LFPR for urban males. The Work Participation Rate (WPR) of men was significantly higher than that of women across all religious groups, with the disparity between the sexes being even more pronounced in metropolitan areas. The gender gap in World Population Ratios was found to be narrowest among Christians.
- The majority of male workers in rural areas were either illiterate or literate up to the primary level (28 percent), but the majority of female workers in rural areas were illiterate. This was the case because the majority of male workers in rural areas were illiterate (59 per cent). The highest percentage of male workers who had completed secondary school or higher was found among Christians (32 percent of all male workers), followed by Sikhs (26 percent of male workers who had completed secondary school or higher) (30 per cent). The vast majority of male workers in urban areas had completed secondary school or furthered their education (52 per cent). In urban areas, the percentage of male Christians and Sikhs workers who had a secondary or higher education was 58 percent, while the percentage of Muslim male workers with such an education was 30 percent.
- The unemployment rate in rural areas is significantly lower than that of urban areas. In rural areas during that time period, those who identified as Christian had the highest rates of unemployment, at three percent for both men and women. (6 per cent). Both Sikh men and women living in urban areas experienced rates of unemployment that were at their highest (6 & 8 per cent).

**Table-1.1: Population trends for major religious groups in India (1947–2011)**

Religious group	Percentage of Religious Population since independence							
	1947	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
<b>Hinduism</b>	85%	84.1%	83.45%	82.73%	82.30%	81.53%	80.46%	79.80%
<b>Islam</b>	9.1%	9.8%	10.69%	11.21%	11.75%	12.61%	13.43%	14.23%
<b>Christianity</b>	2.3%	2.30%	2.44%	2.60%	2.44%	2.32%	2.34%	2.30%
<b>Sikhism</b>	1.9%	1.79%	1.79%	1.89%	1.92%	1.94%	1.87%	1.72%
<b>Buddhism</b>	0.7%	0.74%	0.74%	0.70%	0.70%	0.77%	0.77%	0.70%
<b>Jainism</b>	0.4%	0.46%	0.46%	0.48%	0.47%	0.40%	0.41%	0.37%

Religious group	Percentage of Religious Population since independence							
	1947	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
<b>Zoroastrianism</b>	not counted	0.13%	0.09%	0.09%	0.09%	0.08%	0.06%	not counted
<b>Others/Religion not specified</b>	0.6%	0.43%	0.43%	0.41%	0.42%	0.44%	0.72%	0.88%

Source: Census of India, 2011.

India had more than 330 million people when it gained independence and split into two countries in 1947 (Free Press Journal, Thursday, May 30, 2019). After the country was divided, India had an 85 percent Hindu majority, a 9.1 percent Muslim minority dispersed across the country, and other religious minorities including Christians (2.3 percent), Sikhs (1.9 percent), Buddhists (0.7 percent), Jains (0.4 percent), and animists (0.6 percent), who together made up 5.9 percent of the population. The statistics show that India had an overwhelmingly large Hindu majority of 85% soon after the country's division, with (Crispin Bates, 2011). After 74 years of independence, Hinduism (79.8%), Islam (14.23%), Christianity (2.30%), Sikhism (1.72%), Buddhism (0.7%), Jainism (0.37%), and others (0.88%).

**Table-1.2: Characteristics of religious groups in 2011**

Religious group	Population %	Growth	Sex ratio	Sex ratio (rural)	Sex ratio (urban)	Sex ratio (child)	Literacy	Work participation
<b>Hinduism</b>	79.80%	16.8%	939	946	921	913	73.3%	41.0%
<b>Islam</b>	14.23%	24.6%	951	957	941	943	68.5%	32.6%
<b>Christianity</b>	2.30%	15.5%	1023	1008	1046	958	84.5%	41.9%
<b>Sikhism</b>	1.72%	8.4%	903	905	898	828	75.4%	36.3%
<b>Buddhism</b>	0.70%	6.1%	965	960	973	933	81.3%	43.1%
<b>Jainism</b>	0.37%	5.4%	954	935	959	889	94.9%	35.5%
<b>Others/Religion not specified</b>	0.90%	n/a	959	947	975	974	n/a	n/a

Source: Census of India, 2011.

When compared with 2001, India's population rose by 17.7% in 2011 with an average sex ratio of 943 and a literacy rate of 74.4%. The average work participation stood at 39.79%. In the Hindu community, there were 939 women for every 1,000 men, followed by 951 women for Muslims, 1 023 women for Christians, 903 women for Sikhs, 965 women for Buddhists, and 954 women for Jains. According to further census statistics, Sikhs and Jains have the worst sex ratios in the nation, while Christians have the best ratio with 958 girls to 1,000 boys. In the Sikh community, there were 828 girls and 1,000 boys between the ages of 0 and 6, according to the 2011 census. In the 0 to 6 year age range, there were 889 girls and 1,000 boys among Jains. There were 918 girls and 1,000 boys in the country's total population, which was the child sex ratio. There were 958 Christian girls versus 1,000 boys, 913 Hindu girls versus 1,000 boys, 943 Muslim girls versus 1,000 boys, and 933 Buddhist girls versus 1,000 boys, among other communities.

According to the 2001 census, there were 925 Hindu females for every 1,000 boys, 950 Muslim girls, 964 Christian girls, 786 Sikh girls, 942 Buddhist girls, and 870 Jains girls for every 1,000 boys. During the 2011 Census, there were 943 more females than males overall. In the Hindu community, there were 939 women for every 1,000 men, followed by 951 women for Muslims, 1 023 women for Christians, 903 women for Sikhs, 965 women for Buddhists, and 954 women for Jains. According to the 2011 census, the Sikh community has a total population of 2,08,33,116 people, with 47.4% of women and 52.5% of men. By contrast, Christians have a total population of 2,78,19,588 people, with women making up 49.4% and men making up 50.5% of that total. There are 96,62,57,353 Hindus, 48.4% of whom are women and 51.5% of them are men. Muslims, the second-largest religious group in the nation, have a population of 17,22,45,156 and a gender distribution of 48.7% women and 51.2% males. With a population of 84,42,972, Buddhists have a gender split of 50.8% male and 49.11% female, while Jains have a population of 44,51,753, with a gender split of 51.1% male and 48.8% female.

According to the census completed in 2011, Jains have risen to the position of having the most literate community, followed by Christians and Buddhists. It was noted that the effective literacy rate (7+ years) for main religious groups was 73.3% (Hindus), 68.5% (Muslims), 84.5 % (Christians), 75.4 % (Sikhs), 81.3 % (Buddhists), and 94.9 % (Jains), while the overall literacy rate for the population was 73.0%.

Work participation rate for overall population stands at 39.8 percent; by religious communities, it is as follows: 41.0 percent for Hindus; 32.6 percent for Muslims; 41.9 percent for Christians; 36.3 percent for Sikhs; 43.1 percent for Buddhists; and 35.5 percent for all other people (Jains).

### **History of Christianity in Andhra Pradesh**

As the tradition goes, Christianity had its beginning in India in the first century itself, that is, around 54 AD with the arrival of one of twelve the disciples of Christ, St. Thomas. But it largely confined to Kerala. This belief received a clear credence from the writings of a Greek traveller Cosmos Indicopleustes who mentioned a thriving Christian community in the southern and western coast of India, that is, between 525 and 530 AD (Frykenberg 2008:110, Rajpramukh, 2008:27). Other authentic sources further suggest that while the Roman Catholic missionaries first started their work since 1500 (Viswanathan, 1994), they were followed by Protestants who started their missionary work sometime in 1770, albeit, their work progressed at a faster pace on the arrival of William Cary in Bengal in 1793, and his efforts in translating the Bible and scriptures in several Indian languages.

In the beginning the missionaries came from European countries and later on from the USA etc., extending social service particularly in education and health besides engaging themselves in proselytization and thus, established different Christian denominations which are now often referred as mainline churches. After independence the missionary activities continued despite withdrawal of foreign missions and return of the missionaries to home countries, the church activities continued with the active participation and engagement of indigenous voluntaries. Further, several independent indigenous and self-supporting churches

arose. Also, many independent preachers proliferated to carry out the mission in different parts of the country.

Though a few upper caste households were the initial converts in Kerala, Mangalore and Goa, gradually a large numbers of scheduled castes and lower castes accepted Christianity all over south India, and the tribes of Chotanagpur and North-East India followed them later. As of today scheduled castes constitute about 50 to 70 percent of the Christian population in the country (Lobo 2005:187). Mala and Madiga, ex-untouchables, constitute the major component of Christian community in the combined state of Andhra Pradesh, even though there are few numbers from dominant castes such as Reddy, Kamma, Choudhury, Kapu etc. Relatively there are few tribal households in the fold of Christianity in Andhra Pradesh.

The history of Christianity in Andhra Pradesh shows that Jesuits were the first missionaries that arrived in Andhra area in around 1542, but with the killing of Francis Xavier in 1549 there was a setback. However, Francisco Manco was able to establish Christian communities around Machilipatnam in 1640. In 1701 the Jesuits were able to establish a church in Punganuru of Chittoor district, and from there they moved to Ananthapur district. By 1843 a vicariate was established in Visakhapatnam. From 1866 onwards some significant work was done by Mill Hill Missionary society at Phirangipuram of Guntur district. The protestant missionary work began by London Missionary in 1795 Society in Visakhapatnam and in 1810 in Bellary. After 1851 vigorous work of conversion had taken place in Cuddapah district. The Society for Propagation of Gospel through initiated their work in 1698, the actual establishment of churches took place only after 1826. The American Baptists commenced their work in around 1835 in Krishna and Kurnool districts. However, later they established Nellore as their base. The Canadian Baptists started their work in 1867 and established their base in Kakinada and extended their work towards Vizianagaram and Srikakulam etc. The Telugu Baptist Missionary was started in 1875. The South Asia Methodist Mission began its activities from 1819 in Hyderabad. In 1842 the Evangelical Lutheran Church was established in Guntur that had drawn a large number of families to the fold of Christianity (see Rajpramukh 2008). In this way several other missions were established with social service of providing education and health through establishment of schools and colleges, and health institutions. Apart from these denominations several independent individuals also started the missionary work without providing social services. The brief history also points out that conversion largely took place in the middle of nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Perhaps Andhra Pradesh has not witnessed massive conversions after the independence, but there have certainly been some sporadic incidents of conversion here and there.

All India Census figures indicate that Christianity has the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest population in India. But it constitutes 1.9% in 2001 and 2.3% in 2011 of the total population. The decadal growth rate (1991- 2001) of 22% shows it is next to Muslim (36%), Jain (26%) and Buddhists (24%), while the Hindu growth rate is 20 %. The population in Andhra Pradesh 1,81,917 in 2001 has grown to 11,29,784 in 2011, and thus, the percentage of 1.6 in 2001 fell down to 1.38 in 2011 to the total population. Why this fall is not an issue here.

### **Sociological Perceptions of Conversions**

There are several perceptions about the Christian conversions. The critiques of conversions find that the phenomenon conversion from Hinduism to other religions is a subversion that weakens the Hindu society. Secondly, even as the conversion to other religion does not change the low status accorded to the scheduled castes, as they are discriminated by the practitioners of other religion also, they point out, there is no reason for conversion to other religions. In this regard it has been argued that for Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism is actually to subvert and overthrow the Hindu society which is inflexible, highly discriminatory and terribly iniquitous (Pinto 2005).

Another perception is that the scheduled castes have been trying to transform themselves for centuries within the Hindu society and eager to be part of the same society. In this effort they did make several attempts launching social and religious movements against the suppression and oppression of the Hindu society. The Adi-Dharam and Satnami are the religious movements of this kind. The social movements of Mahars and Jatavs are meant for their social mobility (Zelliot 2001, Lynch 1969). Those converted to other religions realize change in their vision, behavior, attitudes and socio-economic conditions which otherwise would not have taken place. For them conversion provides new vision and empowerment (Juergensmeyer 1982).

Yet another view is that the lower castes, particularly scheduled castes, have long been struggling for social equality within Hinduism and Hindu society. The 10th century charismatic religious leaders who tried very hard for equality include Ravidas, Chaitanya, Ramanand, Eknath, Chokha Mela, Tukaram, Ramanuja, Basava and Nambikar and so on preached for social equality. The scheduled castes follow these saints and their preaching which is meant embracing non-hierarchical Hinduism (c.f. Lorenzen, 1988). In this sense conversion of Dalits to Christianity or Islam is for social equality rather than any material or spiritual gains.

Further, it has been argued that several movements of the scheduled castes in the past or present point to their quest for equality, dignity and removal of untouchability. They are concerned with self-esteem and image in the larger society. This is precisely the struggle for identity as to how they are related to others (Shah, 2001). Therefore, the conversions to other religions are the efforts to construct their worth, and also achieve the ones which they could not in Hinduism.

### **Perception of Dalit Christians:**

While the critiques of conversions lay more emphasis on the socio-economic benefits and others as the main reasons for conversion to Christianity, but for the converts ideology is more important than the material benefits or any other besides the others. They argue if the material benefits are so important why they have not returned to Hinduism when the benefits or social services are ceased or diminished or not available from the foreign missions. In fact the material benefits are extended to insignificantly few, but for overwhelming majority the material benefits and conversion has no link at all. Even the material benefits are provided

only by very few Churches but not all that took to the poorest of the poor, but majority of the people are converted for ideological reasons. The benefits provided by the welfare state now a day are matchless more than the Churches', yet people are converted and people returning to Hinduism is almost non-existing. Christianity has provided them what Hinduism failed to give.

There are two important aspects in the perception of Dalit Christians about themselves. First, Christian community does not really practice social egalitarianism and there is an element of discrimination on the basis of caste, though in principle Christianity is an egalitarian religion. In several churches caste endogamy is practiced though not as a code of conduct with exceptions apart. One may not find discrimination in terms of dining and sitting together and so. Secondly, Upper castes do not distinguish the Dalit Christians and scheduled caste Hindus, religion to which they belong to is immaterial, both of them are (ex) untouchable. Since the Dalits Christian have no additional material advantages being Christian, they claim that their discrimination on the basis of religion to avail the benefits of the constitutional provision of reservations in education, employment and political institutions is unjustified.

### **The question conversion in the present context:**

In view of the above, the Dalit Christians have been demanding the government for extending the benefits of scheduled castes. Heeding to this, the Ministry of Minorities, Government of India set up a National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities or Ranganath Mishra's Commission to look into the above issue along with others on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2004 which submitted its report on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2007. The recommendations of the Commission include,

14...The Commission was of the view that ideally the criteria for reservation should be socio-economic backwardness and not religion or caste. (page 147)

16.1.8. To be more specific, we recommend that all those social and vocational groups among the minorities who but for their religious identity would have been covered by the present net of Scheduled Castes should be unquestionably treated as socially backward, irrespective of whether the religion of those other communities recognises the caste system or not. (page 149).

The above raises several questions such as, is it true that the Dalit Christians actually were not better compared to their counter parts in the beginning which the government did not recognize? Is that the non-Christian Dalits have improved their socio-economic conditions because of the government policy of reservations, whereas the Dalit Christians have not improved themselves and thus now there is no difference between these two? Is it that the socio-economic conditions of Dalit Christians got deteriorated over the years after the Independence? To what extent the difference between the Dalit Christians and non-Dalit Christians exists in social and economic domains? Is that the difference tangible enough to make two separate categories of Hindu and Christian Dalits? Though all these questions

deserve careful examination, the present study confines itself to address the issue of the difference between the Hindu and Christian Dalit in rural Andhra Pradesh.

### The Study

The study adopted an explorative methodology using a survey of the Christian and Hindu Dalit households in three villages from the three different regions of Andhra Pradesh – Telangana, Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema viz., Palliwada in Nalgonda, Ravinuthala in Prakasam and Nossam in Kurnool district respectively. These villages are selected randomly with the criteria of having both Hindu and Christian Dalit households in the same village preferably or in the neighbouring villages, and should be at least 10 kilometres away from an urban centre so as to minimize the urban influence. In each village a sample of 50 Hindu and 50 Christian households are drawn for the survey, and these equally distributed within the Madiga and Mala castes. The households are selected on random basis covering entire physical space of the Dalit habitat in the village. Thus, in total 300 sample households are drawn from these three villages for the study (Table 3).

**Table -1.3: Sample Design**

S.No	Village	Hindu		Christian		Total
		Madiga	Mala	Madiga	Mala	
1	1	25	25	25	25	100
2	2	25	25	25	25	100
3	3	25	25	25	25	100
4	All	75	75	75	75	300

The total population of Palliwada village is around 3,400 wherein the male and female are in the proportion of 1800 and 1650, and distributed among 21 castes. However, the majority is either Yadava and Madiga followed by Mala and Jangala castes. The Ravinuthala village has approximately 1800 households with a population of 6,053 of which 3030 are male and 3024 are female. Of the 1800 households distributed in 15 castes, 200 belong to the Madiga and 100 Mala castes. In Nossam village the total population is 5, 750 in which the males are 2941 and females are 2759, and distributed among 19 castes. The total number of households in the village is 1373 in which the Mala and Madiga household are approximately 204 and 148 respectively. It may be stated at this point that all Christian belong to different denominations of Protestant Christianity.

The data make is clear that out of 150 Christian households about 95 (63.3 percent) is of second generation or even more for their parents were already Christian, and it means that 36.7 percent of them are of the first generation converted from Hindu religion, as the Table No 2. shows.

**Table- 1.4: Religion of the Earlier Generations (Percentage in Parenthesis)**

Sl. No	Religion	Father's	Mother's	Spouse's father's
1	Hindu	205 (68.3)	204 (68.0)	218 (72.7)
2	Christian	95 (31.7)	96 (32.0)	82 (27.3)
3	Total	300 (100.0)	300 (300.0)	300 (100.0)

It shows that in 18 cases, family of the spouse, mostly wife as 226 (88.7 percent) respondents are males, has come from a Hindu household. With this background, the results of the study are examined with reference to the following parameters: type of the house, number of rooms in the house, availability of toilet and electric facility in the house, family size, education of the members in the house, occupation, dry and wet land in possession, earners in the house, annual income and availing the benefits of reservation.

**House Types:** One of the economic indicators is house type. Table 5 shows that regardless of religion above 60 percent live in semi-pucca houses and in fact, more number of Hindus live in better houses. But, the independent-sample t test shows no significance with reference to religion (Table 6).

**Table-1.5: House Type**

Sl.No	Type of house	Religion		Total
		Hindu	Christian	
1	RCC	48 (32.0)	46 (30.7)	94 (31.3)
2	Semi-pucca	99 (66.0)	96 (64.0)	195 (65.0)
3	Kutcha	3 (2.0)	8 (5.3)	11 (3.7)
4	Total	150 (100)	150 (100)	300 (100)

**Table 1.6: Independent-sample t test - Type of House**

	Religion	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig (2 tailed)
Type of house	Hindu	150	1.7133	.49611	.906	.366
	Christian	150	1.7667	.52350		

P < 0.05

**Rooms in the house:** The number of rooms in the house also indicates the economic status of the household and the Table 7 indicates that the Christian households are having few more number of rooms relative to their counter parts. Though equal number of Hindu and Christian households live in single room tenements, slightly more number of Christians live in 3 room

houses and one lives in a 5 room house also (Table 8). But there is no significant relationship between the religion and the type of house that they live in as the Table 4 shows.

**Table- 1.7: Number of the Rooms in the House**

Sl.No	Number of rooms	Religion		Total
		Hindu	Christian	
1	1	88 (58.7)	88 (58.7)	176 (58.7)
2	2	59 (39.3)	52 (34.7)	111 (37.0)
3	3	1 (.7)	7 (4.7)	8 (2.7)
4	4	2 (1.3)	2 (1.3)	4 (1.3)
5	5	0 (.0)	1 (.7)	1 (.3)
Total		150 (100)	150 (100)	300 (100)

**Facilities in the house:** The electricity and toilet facilities in the house not only indicates economic status but also health consciousness and inclination for modern living. In this case Christians are slightly in a better position as the Table 8 shows.

**Table-1.8: Facilities**

Sl.No	Facility	Religion		Total
		Hindu	Christian	
1	Toilet	15 (10.0)	20 (13.3)	35 (11.7)
2	Electricity	100 (67.3)	104 (68.7)	204 (68.0)
Total		N = 150	N=150	300

**Family size:** The total population of the sampled scheduled caste households for the study has 1400 as shown in Table 9. Of all the three Nossam has the highest population out of the 300 households.

**Table- 1.9: Population of the Villages under the Study**

S.No.	Name of the Village	Population
1	Ravinuthala	405
2	Pallawadi	484
3	Nossam	511
Total		1400

The modal distribution of the family size of these households as show in Table 10 is 3-5 members, which implies parents and three children regardless of religious affiliation.

**Table-1.10: Family Size**

Sl.No	New family	Religion		Total
		Hindu	Christian	
1	Single	1 (.7)	2 (1.3)	3 (1.0)
2	Two member	8 (5.3)	13 (8.7)	21 (7.0)
3	3-5 members	105 (70.0)	95 (20.0)	200 (66.70)
4	6-7 members	26 (17.3)	31 (20.7)	57 (19.0)
5	More than 8 members	10 (6.7)	9 (6.0)	19 (6.3)
Total		150 (100)	150 (100)	300 (100)

The independent-sample test results for ‘t’ for family size shows that there is no significance which implied there is no difference between the two sample populations tested with reference to family size (Table 11).

**Table-1.11: Independent-Sample t Test – Family size**

	Religion	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t	Sig (2 tailed)
Family size	Hindu	150	4.67	1.557	.000	.137
	Christian	150	4.67	1.717		

P < .05

**Education Patterns:** Education is an important variable to examine the variance between two religious groups. The Table 12 shows Christians are having edge over their Hindu counter parts. The illiterate population is more by 4 percent. A significant difference can also be noted at secondary level onwards where the Christians are ahead of Hindu scheduled castes.

**Table-1.12: Education**

Sl.No	Education level	Religion		Total
		Hindu	Christian	
1	Illiterate	362 (51.7)	329 (47.0)	691 (49.4)
2	Primary	120 (17.1)	93 (13.3)	213 (6.50)
3	Up primary	47 (6.7)	44 (6.3)	91 (6.5)
4	Secondary-SSC	69 (9.9)	104 (14.9)	173 (12.4)
5	Inter	48 (6.9)	57 (8.1)	105 (7.5)
6	Graduate	28 (4.0)	38 (5.4)	66 (4.7)
7	P.G. Graduate	4 (.6)	12 (1.7)	16 (1.1)
8	Engineering/Technical (ITI/Poly-technique)	6 (.9)	5 (.7)	11 (1.1)
9	Engineering- Graduate	1 (.1)	4 (.6)	5 (.4)
10	Medical-Paramedical	1 (.1)	0	1 (.1)
11	Medical- Graduate	0	2 (.3)	2 (.1)
12	Child	14 (2.0)	12 (1.7)	26 (1.9)
Total		700 (100)	700 (100)	1400 (100)

However, the independent-sample t test of the variables also indicates significant association between religion and educational achievements as the Table indicates.

**Table-1.13 : Independent-Sample t Test - Education**

	Religion	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig (2 tailed)
Education Levels	Hindu	700	1.4343	2.25549	-.2443	.015
	Christian	700	1.7343	2.33851		

P < .05

**Occupations:** If all members of the households in the villages are considered, though 60 per cent of the Dalits are engaged in coolie or agricultural labour, the Hindu Dalits are more compared to the Christians in this category. In the rest of the categories such as private service, government service, and self-employment, again the Christian are in a better position

compared to the Hindus. Therefore, the Dalit Christians are relatively better so far as employment is compared, but the difference between them is not huge (Table 14).

**Table-1.14: Occupations of the Dalit Population in the Villages**

Sl.No	Occupations	Religion		Total
		Hindu	Christian	
1	Non-Worker- Children	10 (1.4)	11 (1.6)	21 (1.5)
2	Non-Worker- Student	139 (19.9)	159 (22.7)	298 (21.3)
3	Non- Worker- House wife	16 (2.3)	34 (4.9)	50 (3.6)
4	Non- Worker-Old	0	10 (1.4)	10 (.7)
5	Coolie/ Agri. Labour	464 (66.3)	378 (54.0)	842 (60.1)
6	Private Service	29 (4.1)	45 (6.4)	74 (5.3)
7	Govt. Service	7 (1.0)	37 (5.3)	44 (3.1)
8	Self employed	33 (4.7)	21 (3.0)	54 (3.9)
9	Farmer	2 (.3)	5 (.7)	7 (.5)
10	Total	700	700	1400

But the independent-sample t test of the independent reveals, there is little association between religion and occupation (Table 15).

**Table-1.15: Independent-Sample t Test - Occupation**

	Religion	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig (2 tailed)
Occupation	Hindu	700	4.5186	1.56717	.897	.370
	Christian	700	4.4400	1.70855		

$P < .05$

**Land in Possession:** The landholding data show that the Dalits possess 21.7 per cent dry land and 23.3 per cent wet land. It means, more than 75 per cent of them is landless labourers. Even in this case 70.8 per cent of them possess one or less than one acre of dry land. However, the situation appears to be little better when it comes of wet land. About 65.8 per cent of the households is having one to two acres of wet land. And the rest of them are having

wet land between three to four acres. These facts speak about the economic resource base of the Dalits; they are mostly agricultural labourers and about one fourth of them possesses some land.

The Christian and Hindu Dalits households appear to be more or less equal with regard to possessing dry land (see Table 16). In fact the Hindu Dalits have slight edge over the Christian Dalits.

**Table-1.16: Total dry and wet land**

Sl.No	Land in acres	Dry			Wet		
		Hindu	Christian	Total	Hindu	Christian	Total
1	1	21 (63.3)	25 (78.1)	46 (70.8)	11 (32.4)	12 (33.3)	23 (32.9)
2	2	4 (12.1)	4 (12.5)	8 (12.3)	11 (32.4)	12 (33.3)	23 (32.9)
3	3	6 (18.2)	3 (9.4)	9 (13.8)	9 (26.5)	4 (11.1)	13 (18.6)
4	4	2 (6.1)	0	2 (3.1)	3 (8.8)	8 (22.2)	11 (15.7)
Total		33 (100)	32 (100)	65 (100)	34 (100)	36 (100)	70 (100)

The holding of wet land shows that the Christian Dalits have a slight edge over the Hindu Dalits. They possess a little more land compared to the Hindu Dalits. Now, the independent-sample t test results show that there is a significant relation between religion and land, both dry and wet.

**Table-1.17: Independent-Sample t Test – Dry and Wet Land Possessed**

	Religion	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig (2 tailed)
total dry land	Hindu	36	2.250	1.1244	-2.229	.029
	Christian	48	3.071	1.9814		
Total wet land	Hindu	33	1.467	1.0391	2.359	.021
	Christian	32	.914	.8347		

P < .05

**Earners in the Household:** The number of earners in a household is also an indicator of economic status of the household. If there is more financial need in a household there is need for more number of earners, vis-à-vis, if there is no need of much financial need, there is no need of more earners. Thus, it is found in these Dalit households, in a couple of households there are nine earners and more than five in 43 households in 300. However, the model value stands at two members, most likely a couple. Interestingly enough, there are more Christian households with single earner. Over all, there are more number of earners in the household in both the cases (Table 18).

**Table-1.18: Earners**

S. No.	No. of Earners	Religion		
		Hindu	Christian	Total
	1	4	16	20
		(2.7)	(10.7)	(6.7)
	2	54	48	102
		(36.0)	(32.0)	(34.0)
	3	21	29	50
		(14.0)	(19.3)	(16.7)
	4	27	23	50
		(18.0)	(15.3)	(16.7)
	5	23	12	35
		(15.3)	(8.0)	(11.7)
	6	12	13	25
		(8.0)	(8.7)	(8.3)
	7	4	6	10
		(2.7)	(4.0)	(3.3)
	8	3	2	5
		(2.0)	(1.3)	(1.7)
	9	2	1	3
		(1.3)	(0.7)	(1.0)
10	Total	150	150	300
		(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)

The independent-sample t test results reveal the fact there is no significant difference between the Hindu and Christian household with regard to the number of earners in the households (Table 19).

**Table-1.19: Independent-Sample t Test - Earners**

	Religion	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig (2 tailed)
Earners	Hindu	150	3.6000	1.74556	1.444	.150
	Christian	150	3.3067	1.77207		

$P < .05$

**Income:** The majority of the sampled households (33.3 per cent) are in the income range of Rs. 1,20,000 to Rs. 2,40,000 per annum which means that their incomes range from Rs.10,000 to 20,000 per month. It is also observed that about 13.7 per cent of the households cannot even make Rs. 4,000 per month which is less than Rs. 133 per day. Thus, the economic pattern is quite diverse. The difference between the Hindu and Christian Dalits shows a higher percentage of Christian Dalit households in the range less than Rs. 24,000 and Rs. 72,000 compared to the Hindus. Only in the range between Rs.96, 000 and Rs. 1,20,000 the percentage they are little better compared to the Hindu households (see Table 20). Thus, it may be said that more or less the income of the Christian and Hindu households is same,

however, the mean income of the Hindu households is higher than the Christian households. This is assertion is apparent in the independent-sample t test (Table 21).

**Table-1.20: Annual Income**

Sl.No	Income in Rupees	Religion		Total
		Hindu	Christian	
1	Less 24,000	1 (.7)	7 (4.7)	8 (2.7)
2	24,000 - 48,000	10 (6.7)	23 (15.3)	33 (11.0)
3	48, 000 -72,000	32 (21.3)	23 (15.3)	55 (18.3)
4	72,000 - 96,000	34 (22.7)	21 (14.0)	55 (18.3)
5	96,000 -1,20,000	10 (6.7)	19 (12.7)	29 (9.7)
6	1,20,000 – 2,40,000	53 (35.3)	47 (31.3)	100 (33.3)
7	Above 2,40,000	10 (6.7)	10 (6.7)	20 (6.7)
Total		150 (100)	150 (100)	300 (100)

**Table-1.21: Independent-Sample t Test - Income**

	Religion	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig (2 tailed)
Income	Hindu	150	4.6067	1.50568	1.344	.180
	Christian	150	4.3533	1.74992		

P < .05

**Availing the benefits of reservations:** Another important aspect to be considered is how far these communities have been able to reap the government's benefits of reservation made available to them. Table 18 clearly demonstrates that except the Scheduled Castes Finance Corporation and loans from Banks, the Christian Dalits have been able to use the benefits of reservations more than those of Hindu households.

**Table-1.22: Availing the benefits of Reservations**

Sl.No	Availing Reservations	Religion		Total N=300
		Hindu N=150	Christian N=150	
1	Admissions into Educational Institutions	56 (37.3)	87 (58.0)	143 (47.7)
2	Admission into Hostel	56 (37.3)	76 (50.7)	132 (44.0)
3	Pre-matric scholarships	50 (33.3)	74 (49.3)	124 (41.3)
4	Post-matric scholarships	34 (22.7)	64 (42.7)	98 (32.7)
5	Housing	103 (68.7)	114 (76.0)	98 (27.7)
6	House-sites	93 (55.3)	90 (60.0)	173 (57.7)
7	Government employment	9 (6.0)	29 (19.3)	38 (12.7)
8	Benefits from SC Corporation	46 (30.70)	38 (25.3)	84 (28.0)
9	Loans from Banks	51 (34.0)	50 (33.3)	101 (33.7)

Finally let us examine comparison of these communities bringing together all the parameters compared for the study.

**Table-1.23: Independent-Sample t Test – All Parameters**

	Religion	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig (2 tailed)
Type of house	Hindu	150	1.7133	.49611	.906	.366
	Christian	150	1.7667	.52350		
Family size	Hindu	150	4.67	1.557	.000	.137
	Christian	150	4.67	1.717		
Education Levels	Hindu	700	1.4343	2.25549	-0.2443	<b>.015</b>
	Christian	700	1.7343	2.33851		
Occupation	Hindu	700	4.5186	1.56717	.897	.370
	Christian	700	4.4400	1.70855		
Dry land	Hindu	36	2.250	1.1244	-2.229	<b>.029</b>
	Christian	48	3.071	1.9814		
Wet land	Hindu	33	1.467	1.0391	2.359	<b>.021</b>
	Christian	32	.914	.8347		
Earners	Hindu	150	3.6000	1.74556	1.444	.150
	Christian	150	3.3067	1.77207		
Income	Hindu	150	4.6067	1.50568	1.344	.180
	Christian	150	4.3533	1.74992		

P < .05

Table 23 shows that there is no significant difference between Hindu and Christian households on six parameters but there is difference only for two i.e., education and land possessed.

## Conclusion

The data collected from 300 households from three randomly selected villages, each from Telangana, Rayalaseema and coastal Andhra, about the socio-economic conditions of scheduled castes converted to Christianity and those who remained as Hindu, are compared to find if religion makes any difference. The parameters compared include: type of the house, number of rooms in the house, availability of toilet and electric facility in the house, family size, education of the members in the house, occupation, dry and wet land in possession, earners in the house, annual income and availing the benefits of reservation. The analysis clearly points out that there is little significant difference between the Hindu and Christian households except in education and land possessed.

With reference to availing the benefits of reservations, it needs to be stated that Christian maintain dual identity: Hindu and Christian. Though Christian some of them claim themselves in official records such as school and college as Hindu for enjoying the benefits of reservation. While this is a fact, the survey avoided this dual identity but accepted the projected identity. Probing into this aspect is thought to be unnecessary, rather it would negatively affect as the Christian were likely to be non-cooperative for the fear of reprisals from the officials in case the information is passed on to them. The analysis shows more Christian households have derived all the benefits except the schemes from the Scheduled Caste Finance Corporation. In availing the loans from banks both the communities have availed more or less equally. Thus, on the whole there is no significant difference in this regard between the Hindu and Christian households in these three sampled households of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh.

In the light of the above discussion it is important return to the questions that prompted the present study. By all means Rangnath Mishra Commission's recommendation of delinking religion with religion seems to be valid. Then, why is that when the policy of affirmative action was formulated without considering the parity between the Hindu and Christian of same Dalit in terms of socio-economic conditions? Perhaps, there was a heavy urban bias where a good number of high profile educated Dalit Christians who concentrated in urban centres decided the fate of the rural poor illiterate Dalits. It seems no empirical study was ever conducted to find out the socio-economic differences between the Hindu and Christian Dalits and differential discriminatory practices prevalent within and without. The cry of the Dalit Christians remains unheard for so many years. Not only politicians even commoners are quite aware of the ground realities, and that is why the politicians make promise of delinking religion with the scheduled caste status particularly at the time of elections. The claim of the Dalits Christians seems to be justified if one trusts this present study. No other reason

accounts for the discrimination of Dalit Christians except prejudice as regards to the extension of scheduled caste status for them.

The Dalit Sociology requires to not only the above facts, but also why conversion if there is no injustice in the Hindu society? If there is no material difference between the Hindu and Christian Dalits, or no gains accrued being Christian why continue as Christian? The present study dismisses the argument that embracing Christianity has been for material gains, as there is no big difference between Hindu and Christians. However, conversion to Christianity cannot be just for one reasons but multiple: identity, self-respect, progress, escape from indignity, aligning with ruling class for higher status including material benefits, if any, etc. Christianity provides all of these at least at ideological level.

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The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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