

# IMPACT OF SOCIAL TEACHING OF CATHOLIC CHURCHES AMONG DALIT CHRISTIANS

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## **Abstract**

Social teaching in a church is a core system of ensuring the social justice and development of the community people of the church jurisdiction. The promotion of social justice is the voice of the privileged people's expression as well as the service of the mission and an apostolic priority. Catholic Social Teaching is the official body of doctrine that guides the Church's response to social, economic, and political issues, emphasizing that faith must be lived out through justice and compassion. In this context this study was carried out in the Chengalpattu Catholic diocese which covers mainly Chengalpattu and Kancheepuram regions. This study adopted the descriptive method to narrate the socio-economic status of the Christians which conducted with 640 samples through structured questionnaire by using multistage samplings method to identify the field regions from the administrative cluster of the Chengalpattu diocese. This study widely covers the impact of the seven themes of the Catholic Social Teaching in the adopted areas. Some of the findings of this study focusing on the equity and equality among the Christians that disseminate through the community social teaching of the churches. The Major findings of this study suggested to make the updates and reinstate the core ethics vested in the original theology. The major limitation of this study is a theme of the future wide study to be undergoing with cross sectional and higher status people and their approach pattern.

**Key Words:** CST – Catholic Social Teaching, Community Social Teaching, Diocese, Catholic Theology, Dalit, Church Role.

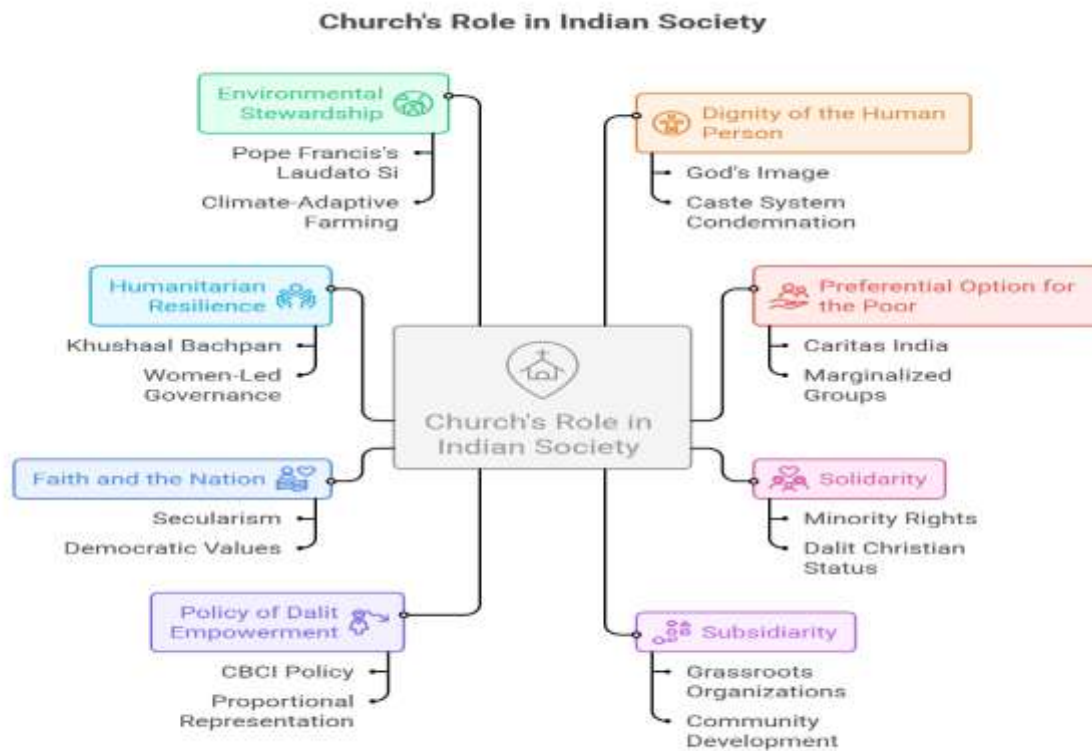
## **INTRODUCTION**

Christianity in India is not a singular narrative, but a complex tapestry woven over two millennia. As the nation's third-largest religion, it accounts for approximately 2.3% of the population (28–30 million people). While it remains a minority on the national stage, its footprint is profound, forming a demographic majority in several North-eastern states and maintaining a foundational presence in the South, particularly in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

The faith's history is uniquely bifurcated between ancient tradition and colonial expansion. It traces its origins back to 52 AD with the arrival of St. Thomas the Apostle, establishing a lineage of "Saint Thomas

Christians" long before the faith reached many parts of Europe. This ancient foundation was later layered with Catholic and Protestant missions during the colonial era, which expanded the religion's reach while introducing the modern educational and healthcare infrastructures that remain the Church's hallmark today.

### Core Principles Applied in India



- ❖ **Dignity of the Human Person:** The foundational belief that every person is created in God's image. In India, the Church uses this to condemn the caste system as a "grave social sin".
- ❖ **Preferential Option for the Poor:** A commitment to prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable. This is realized through Caritas India's extensive network of hospitals, schools, and disaster relief programs that serve marginalized groups like Scheduled Castes (Dalits) and Tribes (Adivasis) regardless of their religion.
- ❖ **Solidarity:** The recognition that all humans are part of one family. This manifests in advocacy for the constitutional rights of minorities and legal support for Dalit Christians seeking Scheduled Caste status.
- ❖ **Subsidiarity:** The principle that social issues should be handled at the most local level possible. Caritas India implements this by empowering grassroots "people's organizations" to lead development in their own communities.
- ❖ **Policy of Dalit Empowerment:** A landmark CBCI policy aimed at rooting out internal caste discrimination and ensuring proportional representation for Dalits in Church leadership.
- ❖ **Faith and the Nation:** The theme of the 37th CBCI General Body Meeting (February 2026) was "Faith and the Nation: The Church's Witness to India's Constitutional Vision," emphasizing the Church's role in upholding secularism and democratic values.
- ❖ **Humanitarian Resilience:** Programs like KhushaalBachpan (advancing child well-being) and women-led governance initiatives continue to address systemic poverty and inequality in rural zones.

❖ **Environmental Stewardship:** Following Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*, the Indian Church has integrated "Care for our Common Home" into local agriculture projects, focusing on climate-adaptive farming for smallholder farmers.

In response, the Church in India has increasingly turned to Catholic Social Teaching (CST) as a tool for justice. Through the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), the faith is currently navigating a pivotal era of reform, advocating for constitutional rights in the Supreme Court while implementing internal policies to empower the marginalised. This ongoing journey reflects the broader story of Christianity in India: a faith that is at once ancient and evolving, deeply Indian yet globally connected, and consistently striving to reconcile its message of dignity with the complex social realities of the subcontinent.

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is the official body of doctrine that guides the Church's response to social, economic, and political issues, emphasizing that faith must be lived out through justice and compassion. In India, these principles are contextualized by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) and Caritas India to address unique challenges like caste discrimination, rural poverty, and religious freedom.

However, the contemporary reality of Indian Christianity particularly in Tamil Nadu is defined by a stark internal and external struggle. Despite the universal theological promise of equality, the community is deeply impacted by the Indian caste system. Dalit Christians, who comprise the vast majority of the faithful, face a "dual marginalisation": they are excluded from state-mandated Scheduled Caste (SC) benefits due to their religious status, while simultaneously battling systemic discrimination and a leadership gap within the Church hierarchy.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Axeena (2025)**, in her study titled "*Bound with Two Wounds: A Dalit Woman's Fight Against Caste and Church in Postcolonial India*", examined Bama's *Karukku*, which is a foundational text in Dalit literature, with a focus on the reciprocation of caste oppression and Christian colonialism in postcolonial India. It analyzes Bama's personal story to investigate how the caste system, supported by colonial structures, continues to marginalize Dalits even in the post independent India. It explores the simultaneity of oppression for Dalits who often are, especially Dalit women, subject to oppression in both society and the church. Additionally, this paper examines Bama's act of resistance through education and storytelling, demonstrating how her choice to leave the convent and subsequently to speak is about taking back identity and fighting against systemic injustice. This combination of postcolonial analysis around caste and religion, contributes to new ways of thinking about how colonial legacies continue to persist in contemporary India and shines light on personal storytelling as an act of social change.

**Jesudoss, Lourdu Xavier (2022)**, in his study titled "*The Dalits experience of discrimination in the Indian Catholic Church: A Pastoral exploration and response*", examined three themes in regard to the current reasons for leaving, historical and social context, and theological teachings, and provide a recommended pastoral approach for the Church's response to this crisis.

**Schmalz, Mathew (2016)** in his study titled “*Authority, Representation, and Offense: Dalit Catholics, Foot Washing, and the Study of Global Catholicism*”, explored Christian missionaries who came to India had used the same kind of tropes and images in their preaching and proselytism. Delivered remarks against the backdrop of a picture of a Dalit woman washing the feet of a priest: the image was projected onto a screen, which was being used

**S. Yesu Suresh Raj (2015)** in his study titled “*An Investigation of Dalit Christians Reservation Scheme in Dindigul District - Tamil Nadu*”, explored the strengths and weaknesses of the Dalit Catholics, educational status of the Dalit Catholics, employment status, and critical consciousness among the Dalit youth on developmental aspects, existing discrimination and exploitation. Especially Scheduled caste converted Christian in India more suffering in the way of socially segregated, economically helpless and politically powerless. In this study main objective is to Analysis of Dalit Christians Reservation Scheme in Dindigul District and to suggest a suitable action plan for their sustainable development. Total sample selected for the study are 3104 respondents, in this study would used family census method. The researcher was selected three parish in Dindigul District based on village, urban, semi – urban in this method were selected areas. Design of the Study here, descriptive design will be used to describe the data. Dalit Christians are socially, financially and religiously separates by others. Dalit Christians requesting reservation not to get into IITs or to land positions in Government workplaces. They have changed over to Christianity to escape from fortified work. Then again they are still regarded as untouchables by the upper positions in own towns. Non Dalit assaults Dalit individuals for as little a reason as drinking water from an open well, Dalit can't get assurance from the police, for they decline to try and document.

**Jose, Justin. (2013).**In his study titled “*Dalit Life in Catholic Church of South India: Dimensions of Discrimination*”, examined the Caste induced discrimination of Dalit Christians with a special emphasis on the social position of Dalit women. Using multi-stage probability sampling procedure, 210 Catholic Christians of Dalit origin were selected from rural areas of Tamil Nadu in South India. First, an increasing gender gap against women was observed when educational grades went up in lower educational grades with a sudden fall from higher secondary level onwards. Most Dalit Catholics were unskilled daily wage earners irrespective of gender while it was further increased for women. Extremely limited numbers of Dalits were self-employed while it was further limited for women. Second, Dalit Christians were faced with high level of perceived and actual discriminations, religious distancing and restricted social interaction with dominant Caste Christians.

**Lefebure, Leo D. (2013).** In his study titled “*Catholics on the Margins in India: Dalits and Adivasis*”, discussed the lives of the Catholic Dalit and adivasi communities in India and surveys recent theologies developed in this context. These communities constitute the majority of Catholics in India today, but they have frequently been neglected in theological discussions, and they continue to suffer discrimination both in Indian society and in the Catholic Church. The research concludes with reflections of the author on his

experiences among the Warli tribe in the northern part of the state of Maharashtra, including local examples of contextualization of Catholic faith.

## RESEARCH GAP

More and more studies has bene identified related to Dalits people and their social behaviour. The present study investigating the role of catholic churches in reforming the life of Dalits in the southern region of India. Those social teaching laid down by the catholic churches helps the Dalit community in enhancing their livelihood. It not only enhances their livelihood but also bring social justice and equality to them in terms of Education, Agitate, and organise. It helps in overcoming the dominance from socio cultural norms laid down by the upper caste through bringing self-reliance and equality in the society. The catholic church helps through conducting regular classes and give imperative training on skills development. The district of Chengalpattu has been selected as it consist of larger section of churches and presence of Dailt community,

## NEED OF THE STUDY

Dalit people are suffering due to poor guidance from upper caste and socio cultural norms. Though they have significant quantity of land and other resources, they are lacking in properly utilising and over come the problems of caste problem. The role of catholic church is esteem in enhancing the living condition of the Dalit people, it give not the basic amenities to Dalit people but also provide skills and education for enchaining the livelihood of them. The establishment of schools, colleges, and technical institutions by the Church permitted many Dalit Christians to go beyond manual labor and secure better employment. Missionaries played the role as agents for social change by challenging, the rigid hierarchy of the Hindu caste system and offering a new identity based on human dignity. Hence, there is need for interrogating the social teaching of the Catholic Church in enhancing the day today life of the Dalit Christian.

## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

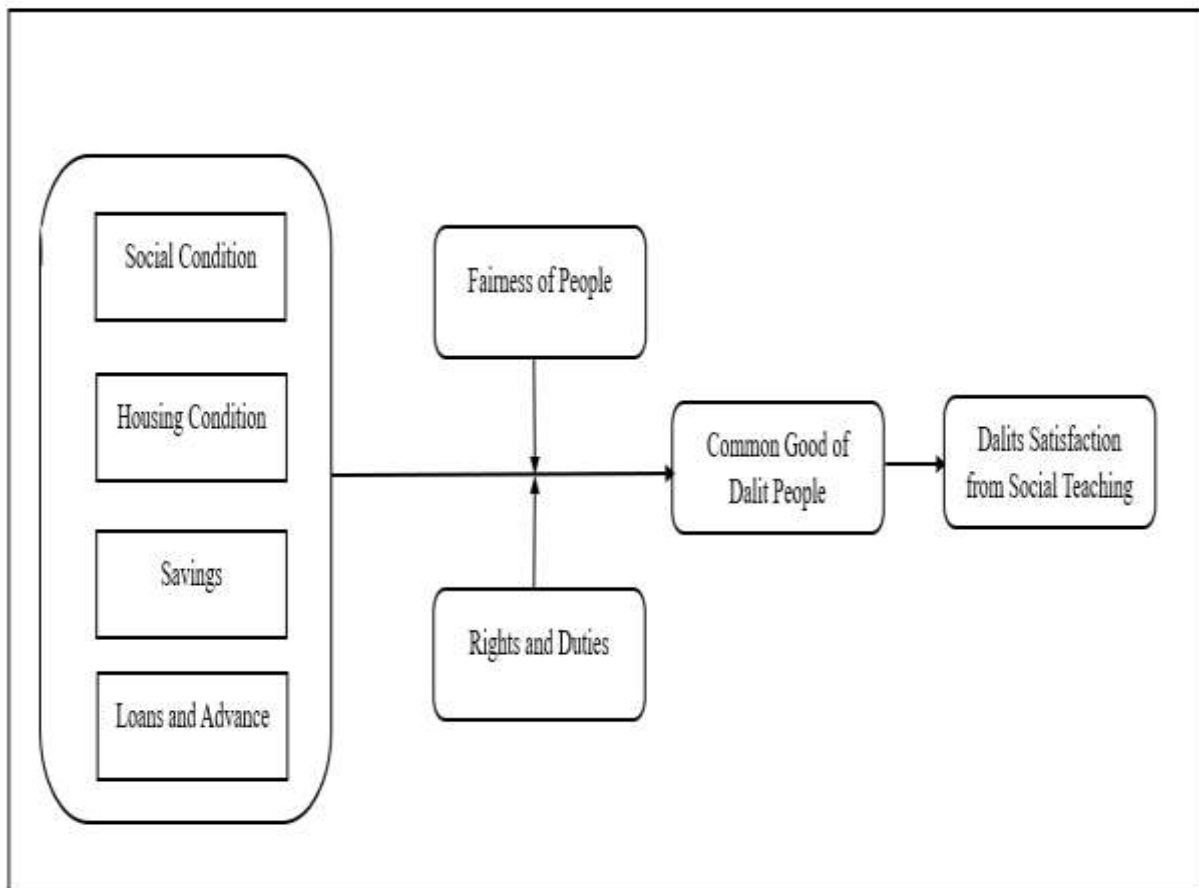
The scope for the Catholic Church in the social teaching regarding Dalits in India is centered on a "preferential option for the poor," aimed at eliminating deep-rooted caste-based discrimination both within the Church and in broader society. The Church has adopted the "Policy of Dalit Empowerment" (2016) to abolish caste-based discrimination in parishes, schools, and institutions, including removing segregated seating, cemeteries, and unequal treatment in rituals. Using the vast network of Catholic schools to provide quality education, scholarships, and bridge programs for Dalit children. Equipping Dalit youth with skills to reduce reliance on daily wage labor and improve their economic standing. Focusing on the specific challenges faced by Dalit women, who face double marginalization due to both caste and gender. Therefore, the present study significantly look after the social teaching of Dalit Christians through Catholic churches. It focus on the social behaviour of the Dalit Christians in terms of their housing condition, availability of loan for startups, land holding partens, their rights and duties, common goods of Dalit community and solidarity of Dalit community.

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Socio condition of Dalit community in south India has been significantly enhanced due to prominent steps taken by catholic churches. Catholic churches plays an indispensable role in enhancing the quality of social life of Dalits over the period time. They overcome the problem of caste discrimination, bondage and poverty. The life of Dalit was miserable and pathetic, even though the constitution was framed to stop cast discrimination and exploitation. Reservation has been provided to pull up the downtrodden Dalit people into main stream of the economy. Catholic churches and their social teaching pawed the way to enhance the pathetic condition of the Dalit. It enhances their living condition, helps them to save pocket of money for future uncertainty, gave free education, providing loan and advance for small startups. In long run it brings mammoth changes in Dalit Christians. The above importance of catholic churches raises the following questions:

1. What is the role of Catholic churches in enhancing the socio-economic condition of Dalit Christian.
2. What is the fairness level of Dalit Christian people in participating at main stream of society.
3. What is the level of Awareness of Human rights among the Dalit Christian in Chengalpattu.
4. How Dalit people are influenced by the caste-based society in Chengalpattu district.
5. What is level of common good of the Dalit community in Chengalpattu district.
6. What is level of Solidarity among Dalit people in Chengalpattu district.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objectives of the study consist of impact of social teaching of Catholic Church among Dalit Christian in Chengalpattu District.

- I. To study the socio-economic condition of Dalit, Christian.
- II. To understand fairness of Dalit people in terms of their participation in social activities and other groups.
- III. To understand awareness of Human rights and duties among Dalit people.
- IV. To check the identity level of Dalit people in terms of influence and supports from other caste.
- V. To assess availability of common good to the Dalit community.
- VI. To check the level of solidarity of Dalit Christian from Chengalpattu district.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study has used descriptive research to determine a systematic approach used to collect, analyze, and present data about real-life phenomena to describe the socio-economic status of the respondents in a natural context. The primary focus of the study is focusing the socio economic condition of the Dalit Christian, fairness of Dalit people in terms of their participation in social activities, understand awareness of Human rights and duties among Dalit people, identity level of Dalit people in terms of influence and supports from other caste, availability of common good to the Dalit community and level of solidarity of Dalit Christian. The study adopted determined amount of sample for examining the impact of social teaching of Catholic churches among Dalit Christian in Chengalpattu diocese. Structured questionnaire has been used as a research tool to collected data from the Dalit Christian in Chengalpattu diocese. As a part of the research, secondary data has been collected from the various publications, articles, research journals and related newspapers.

## SAMPLE AND PRIMARY DATA

The study includes perception of the Dalits Christians on Socio economic condition of the parish church, fairness of Dalit people in terms of their participation in social activities, understand awareness of Human rights and duties among Dalit people, identity level of Dalit people in terms of influence and supports from other caste, availability of common good to the Dalit community and level of solidarity of Dalit Christian. The study used stratified sampling method to collect the required data from Dalits Christian from the various churches in and around taluks of Chengalpattu and Kancheepuram districts. The sample are classified into number of cluster groups based on the number of churches and missionaries present in Chengalpattu and Kanchipuram district. A maximum of 800 questionnaires has been distributed to the Dalit peoples in those clusters. On scrutiny 640 response has been collected back, due to poor response and fear against the dominant classes and the response with extreme values of 40 data were removed and 600 samples has been finalised for the study. Thus, a total of 600 samples has been finalised for the statistical test and interpreted statistically.

## SECONDARY DATA

The secondary data were collected from the research publications, articles, journals and relative newspapers. Major part of the secondary research part is obtained from the research publication available at various missionaries and churches.

## SCALING PATTERN

The self-constructed questionnaire consists of two type of scale which supports in determining the perception of the Dalit Christians towards social teaching from catholic churches in Chengalpattu and Kancheepuram district.

**I.Nominal scale:**The socio economic condition of the Dalit catholic namely their economic background, Housing condition, Availability of household amenities, saving at various financial institution (Post office, Insurance Companies, Banks and CSSO), Loan availability from private finance, Christian social service organisation, non-Christian social service organisation and Government organisation. Land holdings of the Dalits has been measured in appropriate nominal scale.

**II.5 Point Likert Scale:** The opinion on fairness of Dalit people in terms of their participation in social activities and other groups, Awareness of Human rights and duties among Dalit people, Identity level of Dalit people in terms of influence and supports from other caste, Availability of common good to the Dalit community and level of solidarity of Dalit Christian has been measured in appropriate Five point Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree with a weightage of 5,4,3,2 and 1 respectively.

## STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES

The collected data from the Dalit Christian towards social teachings from catholic churches. A number of statistical test has been used for both Univariate statistics and Multivariate Statistics using SPSS and AMOS software.

1. **Percentage Analysis:** has been used to assess the proportionate distribution of socio economic condition of the Dalit catholic namely their economic background, Housing condition, Availability of household amenities, saving at various financial institution (Post office, Insurance Companies, Banks and CSSO), Loan availability from private finance, Christian social service organisation, non-Christian social service organisation and Government organisation. Land holdings of the Dalits.

2. **t-test:** has been used to examine the significant difference between socio economic background of Dalit Christians in opinion on fairness of Dalit people in terms of their participation in social activities and other groups, Awareness of Human rights and duties among Dalit people, Identity level of Dalit people in terms of influence and supports from other caste, Availability of common good to the Dalit community and level of solidarity of Dalit Christian.

3. **ANOVA:** has been used to examine the significant difference among socio economic condition of Dalit Christians in opinion on fairness of Dalit people in terms of their participation in social activities and

other groups, Awareness of Human rights and duties among Dalit people, Identity level of Dalit people in terms of influence and supports from other caste, Availability of common good to the Dalit community and level of solidarity of Dalit Christian.

4. **Factor Analysis:** has been applied to identify the underlying dominant dimensions of opinion on fairness of Dalit people in terms of their participation in social activities and other groups, Awareness of Human rights and duties among Dalit people, Identity level of Dalit people in terms of influence and supports from other caste, Availability of common good to the Dalit community and level of solidarity of Dalit Christian.

5. **Multiple Linear Regression:** Has been used to determine the significant impact of socio-economic condition of the Dalit catholic namely their economic background, Housing condition, Availability of household amenities, saving at various financial institution, Loan availability from private finance, Christian social service organisation, non-Christian social service organisation and Government organisation. Land holdings of the Dalits, opinion on fairness of Dalit people in terms of their participation in social activities and other groups, Awareness of Human rights and duties among Dalit people, Identity level of Dalit people in terms of influence and supports from other caste and level of solidarity of Dalit Christian on Availability of common good to the Dalit community.

6. **SEM Model:** has been used to construct hypothetical model in order to identify the relationship between opinion on fairness of Dalit people in terms of their participation in social activities and other groups, Awareness of Human rights and duties among Dalit people, Identity level of Dalit people in terms of influence and supports from other caste, Availability of common good to the Dalit community and level of solidarity of Dalit Christian.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Majority of the Dalit Christians participating the survey are male in the age of 36 to 50 years.
2. Sizable number of the respondent are arranged marriage in the same caste.
3. Sizable number of the respondent are with higher school educational qualification and working as coolies.
4. Majority of the respondent are living in nuclear family earning an annual income of 1.8 to 3.5 lakhs.
5. Sizable number of the Dalit Christian are the registered member of Christian SHG and availing Christian hospital for medical treatments.
6. Significant number of Dalit Christian are living in pakka house with minimum of 1 to 2 rooms. Significant number of them have taken Individual pipe line connection for water supply at home.
7. Majority of the respondent have toilet Facilities at home, with cooking gas connections.
8. Sizable number of the respondent have no savings at post office, nor have insurance polices and no saving at Christian Social Service Organisation.
9. 15 Variables relating to Fairness of Dalit people in terms of their participation in social activities has been factorised into two dominant factors, which explaining 91.362% of the variance in Fairness of Dalit

people in terms of their participation in social activities. The two dominant factors are F1 and F2 which further renamed with new names namely Donation and Responsiveness Factor (DRF) and Reservation and Social Order Factor (RSOF).

10. 13 variables relating to Awareness of Human rights and duties among Dalit people has been factorised into two dominant and latent factors, which explaining 94.026% of variance in Awareness of Human rights and duties among Dalit people. The two dominant factor are F1 and F2 which further renamed with new names namely Freedom and Church Leadership Factor (FCLF) and Confrontation and Basic Rights Factor (CBRF).

11. Twenty Identity level of Dalit people in terms of influence and supports from other caste has been factorised into two latent dominant factors, which together explaining 58% of variance in Identity level of Dalit people in terms of influence and supports from other caste. The dominant factors are F1 and F2 which further renamed with new names namely Seminaries and Work Place Impact Factor (SWPIF) and Political Relationship and Conversion Awareness Factor (PRCAF).

12. 14 variables relating to Availability of common good to the Dalit community has been factorised into two latent dominant factors, which together explaining 51.591% of variance in Availability of common good to the Dalit community. The determined two dominant factors are F1 and F2 which further renamed with new names namely Fees Concession and Motivational Activities Factor (FCMAF) and Welfare Schemes Satisfaction and Availability Factor (WSSAF).

13. 15 variables relating to Level of solidarity of Dalit Christian has been factorised into two latent dominant factor, which together explaining 51.726% of variance in Level of solidarity of Dalit Christian. The identified two dominant factors are termed as F1 and F2 which is further renamed with new names namely Festival Participation and Inter caste Marriage Factor (FPICMF) and Cultural Practice Integration and Decision-Making Factor (CPIDMF).

14. Festival Participation and Inter caste Marriage Factor (FPICMF) followed by Cultural Practice Integration and Decision-Making Factor (CPIDMF), Seminaries and Work Place Impact Factor (SWPIF), Reservation and Social Order Factor (RSOF), Availability of Mixer, Donation and Responsiveness Factor (DRF) and Annual Income of the respondent have significant and positive influence on overall Availability of common good to the Dalit community.

15. Availability of Table and Chair, Availability of Fan, Availability of Grinder, Loan from private fiancé companies, Insurance polices, Marital Status and Political Relationship and Conversion Awareness Factor (PRCAF) have significant and negative influence on Availability of common good to the Dalit community.

16. The results of the SEM analysis shows significant impact of Fairness of Dalit people in terms of their participation in social activities followed by Awareness of Human rights and duties among Dalit people, Identity level of Dalit people in terms of influence and supports from other caste and Level of solidarity of Dalit Christian on Availability of common good to the Dalit community.

17. There is significant difference among educational level of Dalit Christian, Occupation and Annual income in Availability of common good to the Dalit community.

18. There is significant difference between membership in SHG organisation of Christian social service group in Availability of common good to the Dalit community.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The sample is restricted to Chengalpattu district, as availability of Dalit people in Chengalpattu district is higher in comparison to another district of Tamil Nadu.
2. The perception of the respondent may vary over the period of time; therefore, the outcome of the study can be generalised over the period of time.
3. The study is limited to perception of Dalit Christian; hence the results cannot be compared with higher caste belonging to Christian community.
4. The study is only consider the significant influence of social teaching through catholic churches in Chengalpattu district, hence, influence of other self-help groups or government organisation can not be taken as end results.

## CONCLUSION

Sizable number of the Dalit Christian are the registered member of Christian SHG and availing Christian hospital for medical treatments. Significant number of Dalit Christian are living in pakka house with minimum of 1 to 2 rooms. Significant number of them have taken Individual pipe line connection for water supply at home. 15 Variables relating to Fairness of Dalit people in terms of their participation in social activities has been factorised into two dominant factors, namely Donation and Responsiveness Factor (DRF) and Reservation and Social Order Factor (RSOF). 13 variables relating to Awareness of Human rights and duties among Dalit people has been factorised into two factors namely Freedom and Church Leadership Factor (FCLF) and Confrontation and Basic Rights Factor (CBRF). 20 Identity level of Dalit people in terms of influence and supports from other caste has been factorised into two latent dominant factors namely Seminaries and Work Place Impact Factor (SWPIF) and Political Relationship and Conversion Awareness Factor (PRCAF). 14 variables relating to Availability of common good to the Dalit community has been factorised into two latent dominant factors namely Fees Concession and Motivational Activities Factor (FCMAF) and Welfare Schemes Satisfaction and Availability Factor (WSSAF). 15 variables relating to Level of solidarity of Dalit Christian has been factorised into two latent dominant factors namely Festival Participation and Inter caste Marriage Factor (FPICMF) and Cultural Practice Integration and Decision-Making Factor (CPIDMF).

Festival Participation and Inter caste Marriage Factor (FPICMF) followed by Cultural Practice Integration and Decision-Making Factor (CPIDMF), Seminaries and Work Place Impact Factor (SWPIF), Reservation and Social Order Factor (RSOF), Availability of Mixer, Donation and Responsiveness Factor (DRF) and Annual Income of the respondent have significant and positive influence on overall Availability of common good to the Dalit community. Availability of Table and Chair, Availability of Fan, Availability of Grinder, Loan from private fiancé companies, Insurance policies, Marital Status and Political Relationship and Conversion Awareness Factor (PRCAF) have significant and negative influence on Availability of common good to the Dalit community.

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