

PRESS RELEASE

Reservations must for Dalit Muslims & Dalit Christians: NCM Study

NEW DELHI – April 3, 2008 – An independent research study commissioned by the National Commission for Minorities finds that there is a strong case for offering Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians the same constitutional safeguards already available to Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist Dalits.

After a comprehensive survey of the available social scientific literature on the status of Muslim and Christian Dalits, the study concludes that they continue to be subjected to discriminatory and exclusionary practices, including untouchability, even though such prejudice receives no doctrinal support in either Islam or Christianity. However, the forms and intensity of the social humiliation they suffer differ from those faced by their counterparts in other religions.

The study was conducted by Professor Satish Despande of the Sociology Department, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi over an eight month period.

The study breaks new ground in analysing the latest available statistical data from the National Sample Survey Organisation's 61st Round survey of 2004-05. The data shows that Muslim Dalits are generally the worst off among all Dalits by most economic and educational criteria. Christian Dalits, too, lag far behind non-Dalit and specially upper caste Christians.

Despite their small population and hence relatively low representation in the sample survey, the data unambiguously establish the backwardness of Muslim and Christian Dalits by the common criteria of human development. In fact, the statistical analysis demonstrates that religious affiliation makes no difference for the poorest 75% of all Dalits, with only the top 25% showing some differentiation.

This study is specially relevant in the context of the judiciary's frequent demand for objective evidence when deciding petitions seeking extension of constitutional protections to Muslim and Christian Dalits. It makes it amply clear that there are no good reasons – moral, logical, empirical or practical to keep Muslim and Christian Dalits out of the Scheduled Castes category.
