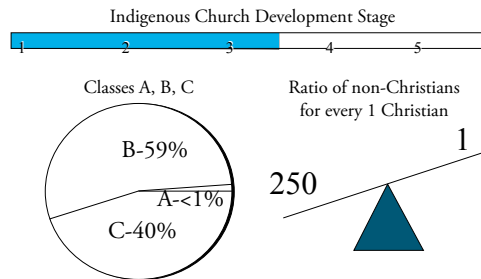


# Tamil Caste Hindus



## Quick Facts

**Population:** 50,000,000  
 India: 47,500,000  
 Malaysia: 1,000,000  
 Sri Lanka: 500,000  
 Singapore: 100,000  
**Religion:** Hinduism  
**Believers:** 0.4%  
**Scriptures:** NT, OT  
**Ministry Tools:** JRGT  
**Church Status:** 4  
**Mission Status:** 2  
**MS Subgroups:** 200+



Class A- Are members of a Culturally Relevant Church  
 Class B- Have close access to a CRC, but have not yet joined  
 Class C- Have no reasonable or close access to a CRC

**Identity:** Over 130 Hindu peoples use the Tamil language as their mother-tongue. They are concentrated in the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, as well as on the island country of Sri Lanka. Many large Hindu groups speak Tamil such as the Vanniyan (10.4m) and the Viswakarmaala (3.4m). Tamil is a Dravidian language related to Kannada and Malayalam.

**Lifestyle:** The state of Tamil Nadu, which literally means Tamil country, is the most heavily urbanized state in India (47%). It is also the most economically advanced southern state, with a booming IT industry, and producing 55% of India's wind-generated electricity. Well watered from South India's perennial Monsoons, Tamil Nadu is India's second largest rice producer.

**Customs:** Traditionally among the Tamil, girls cannot marry without the consent of their maternal uncle. Some families practice infant marriage, in

which the arrangement is made at birth. However, most of these traditional practices are changing as the Tamil become more urbanized. Restrictions against inter-caste marriages are breaking down, though marrying within one's caste is still the general rule.

**Religion:** The Vanniyan worship demons and other destructive forces known as *Sakti*. The art of appeasement is important to Tamil peoples in order to avoid calamities, especially in a region so prone to heavy rains and flooding. Not all Tamil peoples make use of Brahman services and choose their own traditional priests to preform sacrifices and rituals, a tradition which pre-dates the Indo-Aryan influence in South India.

**Christian Outreach:** Twenty-six Tamil peoples have disciple-making movements among them. As a macro-people, the Tamil have the highest percentage of evangelicals in India. However, the reached Tamil peoples are also the least

influenced by Hinduism, and most of the believers are now second and third generation. The result is that reaching the remaining 100+ frontier Tamil peoples will require significant cross-cultural effort even from within the Tamil cluster.

## How to Pray:

☞ Praise God for the 60,000 Tamil churches that have been established! Ask God to give them a spirit of unity to impact all of India, including their own ethnolinguistic group.

☞ Around 55% of the communities in Tamil Nadu are without a gospel witness. Ask God that church planters be sent to each, and for special effort to win the upper-castes in urban areas such as Chennai.

☞ Pray that each of the 110 industrial parks in Tamil Nadu would be penetrated with a gospel witness, and that every industry would have a vocal Christian witness.

☞ Intercede for the Tamil church, that their rising affluence would not lead to materialism and spiritual decline, but to generosity and mission financing.

☞ Pray that God would

**Every year 450,000 Tamil Hindus die without Christ.**

# Tamil Caste Hindus (cont.)

## 30 Least-Evangelized Tamil Hindu Peoples People, Population, % Evangelical, Caste Type

Vanniyan	10,400,000	0.11%	BC	Rajput	215,000	0.00%	FC
Viswakarmaala	3,400,000	0.29%	BC	Teli	200,000	0.00%	BC
Ahir	2,900,000	0.00%	BC	Kumhar	175,000	0.00%	SC
Brahman	2,200,000	0.09%	FC	Velama	165,000	0.00%	BC
Kallan	1,200,000	0.04%	BC	Panan	120,000	0.00%	SC
Dhobi	770,000	0.00%	SC	Kudumban	110,000	0.03%	BC
Agamudaiyan	700,000	0.00%	BC	Valluvan	105,000	0.00%	SC
Bania	625,000	0.00%	BC	Kudumi	100,000	0.00%	BC
Kunbi	600,000	0.00%	BC	Arwa Mala	100,000	0.00%	SC
Navithan	560,000	0.00%	BC	Lohar	100,000	0.00%	SC
Nai	520,000	0.00%	BC	Pulayan	100,000	0.05%	BC
Kaikolan	350,000	0.12%	BC	Darzi	100,000	0.00%	BC
Malayali	310,000	0.02%	ST	Samban	75,000	0.06%	SC
Sonar	295,000	0.00%	FC	Veluthadanayar	75,000	0.00%	BC
Beldar	215,000	0.00%	SC	Mannan	56,000	0.03%	ST
Rajput	215,000	0.00%	FC	Idayan	52,000	0.00%	BC

### VANNIYAN

The Vanniyan are primarily a Tamil speaking caste whose major occupation is serving as day-laborers in the agricultural industry. An increasing number are beginning to acquire their own land for cultivation. Their name derives from the Sanskrit word for fire and is related to the fire god Agni, who is associated with royalty. Thus it is common for the Vanniyan to claim royal descent. They are devotees of Shiva and Vishnu. They also make blood sacrifices to destructive powers known as Sakti in order to assuage their wrath. Maternal uncles play an important and prominent role in society and in family decisions. A bride cannot be married without his consent, and he holds the power to interrupt a wedding ceremony at any time. The entire community is governed by a caste council with an elected headman called "Nattamaikkaran." His decisions and judgements regarding caste rules, as well as sanctions for violating them, are binding.

### DHOBBI

The Dhobi are a caste of laundry washers found all throughout India and numbering over 11 million. Unlike other castes, the Dhobi have largely retained their traditional occupation, which is run as a family business with full participation from all its members. Though their literacy rate is low, it is gradually increasing among the younger generation, which is being encouraged by the community to complete their education. They are devotees of the god Ghatoia, who is the deity associated with the river where they wash their clothes. Before beginning their laundry work, they typically bow in reverence to the washing stone they will use throughout the day.

### SONAR

The Sonars are a caste of gold and silversmiths. They are considered a Forward Caste in the Vaisya varna, and are ranked just below the Bania. Besides rare metal-smithing, they also engage in ear and nose piercing, engraving and moneylending. Their most important social role is in the manufacture of jewelry for weddings, which act as security bonds for the match. There are two major divisions among them, Med-Sonars and Bamania Sonars, which will neither inter-marry nor eat with one another.