

On-site Education of Practical Languages for Area Studies

Report in 2012

-Tamil, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2 Jul. 2012-1 Oct. 2012-

Year of Enrollment: 2012

Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies

Mami Abe

Research Theme and/or Language Training

My research topic is “The conversion of Dalits to Christianity in contemporary India.” “Dalit” is a term used to represent the “Untouchable” or “Harijan”, who have the lowest status in the traditional Indian caste system. The present study has two purposes. One is to investigate the context of their conversion and the other is to understand the significance of this phenomenon.

Dalits’ conversion to Christianity in the 20th century has been explained by the following two reasons. One is to improve their social status against discrimination from dominant castes, and the other is to adopt the Western education provided by the missionaries. Most of the studies on this topic have focused on how western education has uplifted Dalits from social and economic backwardness.

However, it is not possible to understand the contemporary conversion of Dalits in these ways since the socio-economic contexts have changed in recent years. Factors such as decrease in their role as daily wage laborers due to modernization of agriculture, increasing labor migration, connection with urban areas, introduction of wide-ranging preferential treatment for SC/ST, the global expansion of Pentecostal churches, the spread of various kinds of media, and growing disparities contribute the changing conditions of Dalits. Thus this research aims to inquire into the context and the significance of the Dalits’ conversion taking into account these contemporary factors.

I studied written and spoken Tamil language for 3 months in Tamil Nadu. First, I learned the grammar of written Tamil in Chennai from 2nd July to 31st October. During the last month of my stay, I moved from place to place, spending 4 or 5 days in 4 agricultural villages and practiced spoken Tamil and conducted field work.