



The background of religion based on the beliefs and its impact on the Tamil community: Sociological study in Mulathiv District

Samarakoon MT

Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

Abstract

It is a universal occurrence that spreading major and minor religions within all manners of social segments across-the-board of countries in the world and those communities worship varied nature of religions based on mixed creeds and beliefs. In that respect, the religious leaders had disclosed assorted customs and limits in pertinent to different religions. Accordingly, a person who becomes a follower of a religion, used to practice self-actions within the limits of his/her religion. In this context, this research focused on varied beliefs and creeds imposed into the religious background, the doctrines of the followers and the influences of religious leaders, and in what nature the causes of above affects the personal and social contexts of Tamil community living in the Northern area of Sri Lanka. Also, to study the ideologies they follow and due to the influences of religious leaders what nature of disparities the followers need to undergo and the impact of such occurrences too were asserted through this study. This study was focused in Pudukuruippu police domain in the Mullaithivu district under random sampling method having selected 167 informants for the sample. Information collected through a questionnaire also joining focused group discussions (FGDs), and observations. Furthermore, information were shared on the relationship between followers and the religious leaders, deviant behavior of some religious leaders, limits based on religions imposed on followers and also the independence of devotees within the religion were other topics emerged during the studies.

Keywords: deviant behavior, followers, freedom, religious leaders, spiritual abuse

1. Introduction

In this Research the term 'spiritual abuse' is defined as the oppressive circumstances emerging within the background of the religion and finally affecting the followers of particular religion in a distressful manner. Accordingly, the said oppressive occurrences influence negatively the physical, mental and also the social, cultural and political elements. Globally, there are hundred thousands of religions existing and depending on the volume of followers as well as the extent of living areas those religions are branded as major religions as well as minor religions. Nevertheless, when the Asian setup is concerned there are broadly established structure of religion exists in comparison to the surrounded continents, and it is an acceptable fact that these religions perform a mammoth task to maintain the identity and the civilization of civil communities living in these regions. In reference to this research, the focused civil community represents Tamil civilians in Mullaithivu District in the Northern Province are followers of Hindu religion except Christian minorities. In this context, the research will perform broader analysis on the influences of religions and the directions of religious leaders and in which ways the said religious backgrounds affecting other religions including related concerned areas.

2. Research problem

In the instance of reaching normalized living pattern during the post-war context and what nature of tasks and responsibilities predictable and be anticipated through the

religious setting and what nature of influence and ascendancy caused on the devotees across the religions in the study area.

3. Objectives

Main Objective: To study the effects of the religious background on the Tamil community which was influential through the religious believes and the trust.

4. Literature Review

According to Jeannie Cochrane – 2016, explain Spiritual abuse is a relatively new term but the practice it defines is probably as old as civilization. All the definitions of spiritual abuse in the literature involve the use of *power* or *authority* to *manipulate* and *control*. The authority is often a leader but may be, for example, from a church board towards a leader, or a system such as a set of beliefs or a way of doing things which doesn't allow for individual freedom. And Richard Gula uses Rollo May's continuum of power to illustrate how power can be used to control and dominate but it can also be used to liberate and empower others. "The moral challenge is to see that in our interactions with others, the right use of power moves away from dominating others through exploitation and manipulation, and that it moves towards liberating others through nutrient and integrative acts of power." In spiritual abuse, power is exercised in ways which restrict rather than develop another's freedom. Juanita and Dale Ryan say "Spiritual abuse is the kind of abuse which damages the central core of who we are." Several respondents expressed their ongoing difficulty in trusting their own reality. One said

"It challenges all that you are and all that you know. It destabilizes the very foundation of your life." Consequently, every area of a person's life can be affected.

When considering the lived experience of spiritual abuse - David J. Ward – 2011 argued that Over the years there has been considerable research investigating the controversial issues of cult recruitment, "mind control" and post-group difficulties of ex-members from a variety of religious groups. However, the less-well-defined phenomenon of "spiritual abuse" is still under-researched as a specific phenomenon. This is particularly evident in the lack of studies exploring the subjective, internal experience. This study reports on the lived experiences of six individuals who left five different religious groups that were essentially Judeo-Christian in their orientation. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) revealed six core themes throughout the participant narratives. They consist of "Leadership representing God," "Spiritual bullying," "Acceptance via performance," "Spiritual neglect," "Manifestation of internal states," and "Expanding external/internal tension." These are offered as a foundation to answer the question what can be described as the lived experience of spiritual abuse? The findings suggest that spiritual abuse is a multi-faceted and multi-layered experience that is both process and event, affecting the bio/psycho/social and spiritual domains of an individual.

According to Jayne Ozanne – 2017, The concept of 'spiritual abuse' is in the preliminary stages of being understood and recognized as a significant form of abuse that can cause lasting damage to victims, particularly in relation to their sense of identity, wellbeing and mental health. For many years, this has been regarded by the government as an 'internal' affair for religious organizations, who have been left to self-regulate their own practices. However, there is now growing concern that this is ineffective in ensuring that appropriate safeguarding measures are in place to protect vulnerable adults and children. This issue is particularly pertinent to those who struggle – due to their religious beliefs - with questions of sexual or gender identity. Sadly, these individuals are subjected to the worst forms of spiritual abuse by groups of individuals at the time that they require unconditional support and affirmation.

In 2017, the Oasis Foundation published a report 'In the Name of Love – the Church, Exclusion and LGB Mental Health Issues' that highlighted what a wide range of health care professionals and academics now agree:

'LGB problems with mental health are as a result of discrimination and a sense of societal inferiority...arising from explicit statements or implicit assumptions that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality or bisexuality' In particular, it sought to lay a large part of the blame at the door of the Church: 'The Church and local churches are one of the biggest sources of direct discrimination against LGB people and the biggest contributor of negative views to debates about same-sex relationships in society and the media.' Until the

specific issue of Spiritual Abuse against LGBTI Christians is recognized and addressed, particularly the 'Group Model' outlined above, then the high rate of suicide, self-harm and depression amongst LGBTI Christians will continue to go unabated. It is imperative that professional organizations external to the religious institutions call for better safeguarding measures against spiritual abuse. Indeed, they should look to recognize it as a key form of abuse at a national level so as to ensure that some of the most vulnerable in our society are afforded the same protection as those facing other forms of abuse. Apart from those studies several studies has conducted in Sri Lanka related to past war Period. Wijewardhana BVN, Samarakoon MT (2018) ^[5] have studied, Emerged challenges against Gender in the context of war: According to this study focused on the status of women, their role and encountered challenges during the time of war and further in the post war context in Sri Lanka and emphasize very few details about the religion and culture. But in Sri Lankan society there is a shortage of research knowledge related to minor communities and their beliefs rituals and religious activities. This study basically focused spiritual activities related to Tamil communities and their impacts of community and society.

5. Methodology

5.1 Study area and the sampling

Mullaihiyu district in the Northern Province was officially established in 1979 and currently it comes under the Vanni electoral district. One of the divisional secretarial divisions of Mullaihiyu district named Pudukuruippu DS's division is designated as the study area which is also an exceptional administrative area subjected for confesses during the time of ethnic conflicts. The data collection in accordance with objectives of the study was proceeded through a sample represented by 167 informants selected on arbitrary basis to address the questionnaires.

5.1.1 Data collection

A questionnaire was utilized to collect data from the sample of 167 selectees and in addition the needed information were gathered through focused group discussions (FGDs), and observations as well. Furthermore, besides the targeted interviewees data gathering was proceeded through institutional data providers such as police officials, officials attached to the divisional secretariats. Added series of information were gathered through primary sources. Also a literature review too was accomplished in par with the study by evolving secondary sources of information.

5.2 Data Analysis

In reference to the analysis of quantifiable data, information were displayed by means of Graphs, Tables etc., applying - SPSS *yd Excel* software while analysis of qualitative data was addressed through a descriptive approach.

6. Data analysis and findings

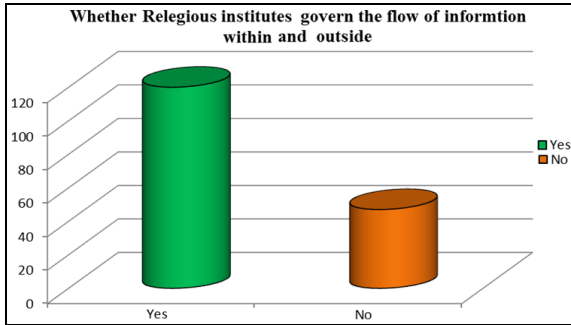


Fig 1: Status of the flow of information within the religious traditions

Effort made through the sample in this aspect was to assess whether the movement of information related to the religious institutions is strictly controlled by the religious institutions. Herein, 72% of the sample articulated that the flow of information within the religious institutions is sternly controlled. Yet the balance selectees of 28% uttered that no such control is happening. However, based on the opinion of the majority there is a limit on the outflow of information within religious institutions.

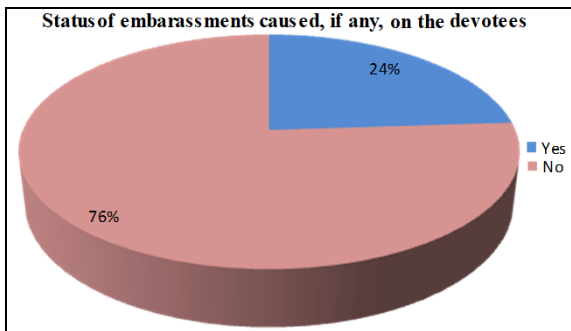


Fig 2: Whether the devotees are made to be embarrass by the spiritual leaders

Out of 76% of informants refused to accept the fact that there are depressions caused by the spiritual leaders of religious places to create some pressure on the disciples in order to gain their consents. Yet, 24 % of candidates expressed their opinion saying that there is an unnecessary pressure comes on them.

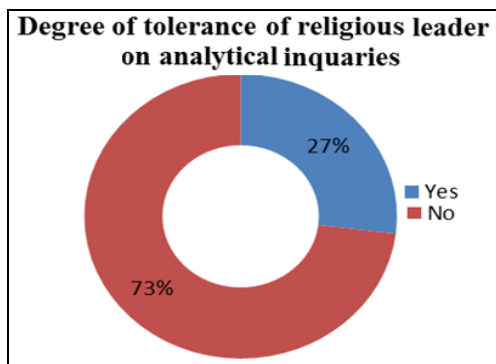


Fig 3: Whether supportive environment is ascertained to share critical views on religious practices.

In respect to the findings of above and in reference to the inquest on to which extent the chieftains of religious sites facilitate questioning on religions related quarries or to allow critics on certain religious practices, a majority 73% of the sample expressed their views mentioning that no such avenues made available by the religious leaders. Whereas, 23% of informants shared views to say that there are no such problems exist.

Table 1: Limitations

Spiritual Leader is the Limited Means of Knowing "Truth" or Receiving Validation	Frequency	Percentage
(1)YES	93	56%
(2)NO	74	44%
Total	167	100%

In peruse of the freedom to know the realistic ideologies and dogmas, 56% of the research sample expressed that their religious leaders have imposed limitations on questioning on the religion, and on issues related to it and also to know the validity or the enforcement of certain matters related to religions. Nevertheless, 44% of candidates refused above expressions.

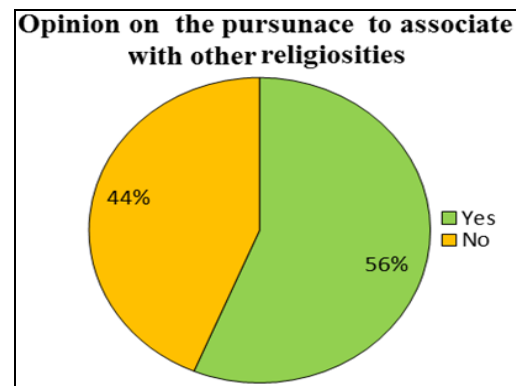


Fig 4: Expressions on the association with other religions

Majority of the sample, in representation of 56% expressed that some religious chieftains and the religious background itself influence to maintain relationships with other religions, while 44% of the sample rejected same.

Table 2: Differences of conceptual thinking on religions

Changing religious rites from usual Kovil /church to a new site means to change the God or the religion?	Frequency	Percentage
(1)YES	48	29%
(2)NO	119	71%
Total	167	100%

The sample of informants were invited to share their views on possible impact when the customary religious rites are changed into a new religious place. 29 % of the sample illustrated that when the regular religious rights are shifted to a new site it is equal to move away from the particular religious leader or the God. But the majority of 71% were commented in opposite expressing that such illusions are not in their religion.

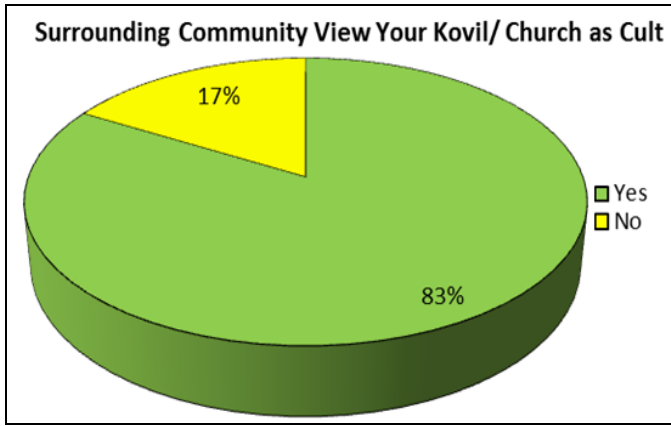


Fig 5: Identity of religion

The large majority of the sample (83%) was in the opinion that the surrounding community feels all in the research sample are belong to one religion. In contrary, the balance 17% was in the opinion that the nearby community can straightforwardly differentiate us because we have kept pictures of gods with statues and images of our own religious leaders in our houses, which exhibits our religion.

Table 3

Spiritual Leader Consider It Evil Torture When Criticized Or Questioned	Frequency	Percentage
(1)YES	27	16%
(2)NO	140	84%
Total	167	100%

Whether spiritual leaders will take revenge when the devotees make criticisms or statements against their spiritual advancements. A marginal segment of 16% expressed their views saying that, when such critics are made severe punishments will be imposed. However, the balance 84% acclaimed saying that the said opinion cannot be accepted affirming that critical assessments are permitted

Table 4: Personal determinations of religious leaders

Do the Goals of Spiritual Leader Seems to Overtake Any Personal Goals or Individual Benefits	Frequency	Percentage
(1)YES	26	16%
(2)NO	141	84%
Total	167	100%

One other aspect needed Responses of informants was to check to which degree the religious leaders maintain dispassionate and intellectual environment. In this respect, 16% of the

sample shared their analytical overview stating that there are religious leaders proceeding with selfish needs. Yet, large majority of 84% commented differently saying that those leaders devote their concerns more on religious actions.

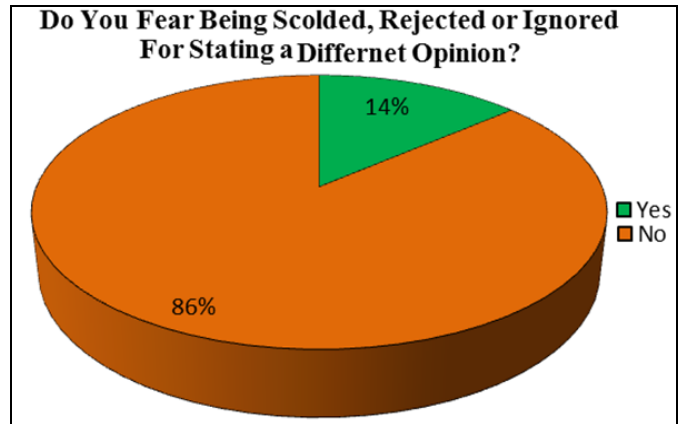


Fig 6: Do the devotees feel free to rely on own ideologies?

Minimal segment of informants (14%) stated that there is an anxiety to hold independent religious opinion within the society. In contrary, 86% of the sample mentioned that there is no reason to feel fear on the said matter.

Table 5: Nature of grievances

Do Former Members Often Relate The Same Stories Of Abuse And Reflect a Similar Pattern Of Grievances	Frequency	Percentage
(1)YES	24	14%
(2)NO	143	86%
Total	167	100%

Table 6: Fear and Anxiety

Are You In Anyway Fearful Of Your Leaders?	Frequency	Percentage
(1)YES	43	26%
(2)NO	124	74%
Total	167	100%

As illustrated through Tables No. 05 and 06 above, an effort is made to diagnose whether the devotees live with a fear on their religious chieftains which can be a specific feature within the relationship between devotees and the religious leaders. This also reflects the achievement of both religious and social freedom through the religion. In this respect 74% of informants said that no such fear in exist yet, 26% seemed suffering due to some fearsome mentality on religious leaders.

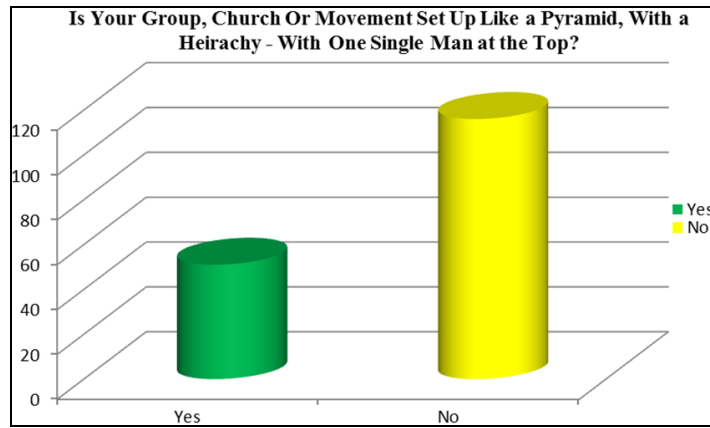


Fig 7: Are there hierarchical powers exist in the religious system?

In summary, 31 % of the sample mentioned that there is an hierarchical structure similar to a pyramid of which, a group, church or a movement is headed by a person, nevertheless, 69% of the sample stated that there is no such hierarchy in exist.

In this regard, 83% of the respondents stated that no complaints reported on such criminal acts or incidences, to the best of their knowledge. Yet 17% asserted that there are such events.

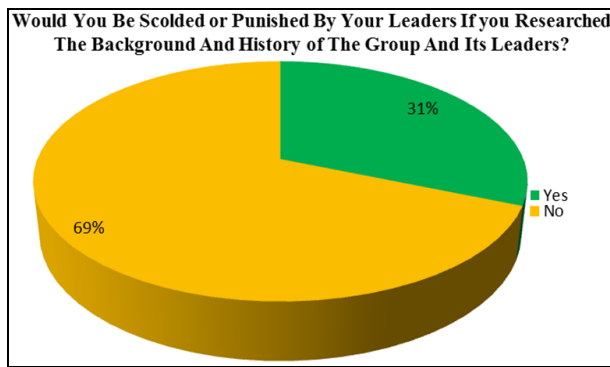


Fig 8: Are you all secure in assessing the relationship between you all and the leaders?

Would you be scolded or punished by your groups or leaders if you do research on their background and history? In response to the question whether anyone has deplored yourself or another party by the religious leaders when an effort is made to find out their status, background or the history, 31% admitted the fact that they had faced regressions due to such cases, yet 69% stated no such incidences faced by them.



Fig 10

In search of whether religious leaders are offended on criminal acts and whether it is possible to search for such reports by the followers within the religious background, 44% or half of the sample expressed their opinions saying that there are limitations on same. Yet the 56% of the sample uttered that no such barriers.

Table 7: Results of such declaration.

If such findings on abusive crimes are brought up what will be the response of the religious leaders?	Frequency	Percentage
(1)YES	66	40%
(2)NO	101	60%
Total	167	100%

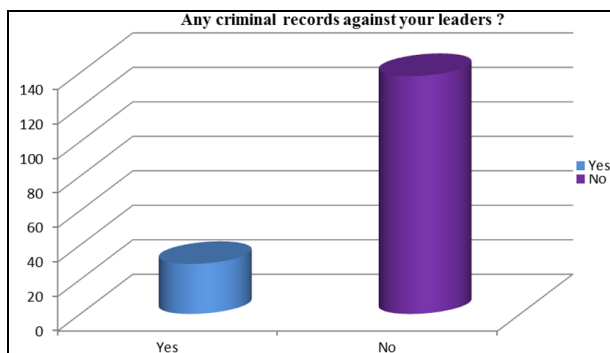


Fig 9: Expressions on criminalities

40% of the sample had been advised by the religious leaders that in an incident that had strained a person, he might have not faced such a distressful incident if the victimized party had sharpened the attachment to the religion. The balance 60% expressed their views to say that religious leaders haven't told them what the other respondents said.

Table 8: Any religious policies which can affect the social setting

Does Your Religious Group Have Any Policies That You Would Consider Harmful to Children, The Family or Society in General?	Frequency	Percentage
(1)YES	36	22%
(2)NO	131	78%
Total	167	100%

As per the findings emerged in Table 08, 22% of the sample shared views to illustrate that there are certain harmful policies within the religion which could affect negatively the self, children, and family as a whole or the society. The balance 78% of the sample rejected the said statement.

7. Discussion

The study performed within the desired area of Pudukuruippu police domain in Mullaithivu district so as to research in which manner the influence of religious theories and policies structured within the religious background could affect the day to day community living. In this respect, the research team identified a research sample consisted by 167 inhabitants within the study area. In this context, the informants within the sample expressed their views on the religious independence and the circumscriptions of the religion as follows.

- *“Because of the religion we could live harmoniously at least to an extent. Under whatever circumstance, we attend the ceremonial observances unitedly, whenever the ceremonies are held in the Kovil..”* - A 56 year old Businessman.

Majority of those who expressed their views uttering that no religious discriminations happening further affirmed that through religious rituals the solidarity within their nationals has been developed. However, there were different views and opinions among certain groups of women.

- *“Even inside Kovils there are disparities. We are not allowed to visit the section reserved for men. All of us are supposed to be seated separately as male and female. Why such practices are in place? Isn't it the teaching of religion that equality is vital irrespective of male or female?”* - A 33 year old Tamil Teacher,
- *“There are no problems being faced by us through religion. But the sole problem is the religious festivals. When the festivals are there in the Kovil we used to attend same leaving our houses isolate. Then we face problems of burglary. By all means, we dress ourselves brilliantly with jewelries too, when we attend the Kovil festivals but there are thieves who grab away our jewelries. These are the problems we face during the Kovil festival season. In some incidences even police cannot held up the thieves.* - A 51 year old woman.
- *“Some priests are extremely selfish. They are in the impression that they belong to the divine life. Treatment for rich persons is different to the ways how they adopt for the poor. Are there any more differences than these?”* - A 62 year old person.

The above articulations depict the ideologies and varied ideas affiliated with the religion. Their belief was that no initiatives taken to teach ordinary community on Equality, Asceticism which are part and parcel of the religion. The belief is there that though they anticipate security through religion, it is not coming into existence.

8. Conclusion

This study is accomplished through a sample which is accompanied by 167 persons with Hindu religion background which is the main religion in the study area. The study outcomes revealed that within the religious background there are limitations to be adhered on permitted and un-permitted actions yet, as per the public opinion there is no specific displeasure on such limitations. In spite of the fact that positive relationship is there between religious leaders and the followers, the study outcome disclosed that there are limiting factors in the proceedings of inquiries of the personal backgrounds of religious leaders in the past and the history related to the religion.

9. Recommendations

- Religious leaders need to shed light on and elucidate through teachings based on the religion along with the needed background to realize the goodness of social and religious life style by the followers in relation to the particular religion.
- It is also imperative that followers be entitled to believe and to worship within the area of religion, in an independent manner.
- There should not be an unnecessary oppression affecting a person through a religion. In that it is meant not to put undesired pressure on day to day living pattern.
- It is also necessary that religious leaders in particular religion should not perform actions inconsistently to the religion and also without exceeding the limits of its teachings.

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