‘An Analysis of Gender Practice of Tamil Christian Women with particular reference to women of Kodambakkam Church of South India Risen Redeemer’s Church in Chennai’

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at the gender practice of Tamil Christian women in Chennai. The self-perceptions and self-constructions of the women of the sample from the Church of South India in Kodambakkam, Chennai, provide material to answer the research question, ‘Who is a Tamil Christian woman at the turn of the millennium?’ Focus groups and interview methods are used to collect the data. A feminist narrative methodology is adopted. For the narrative analysis, categories from relevant Indian family studies and those emerging from the fieldwork are used. This use of the narrative method enables the researcher to elicit the self-perceptions and self-constructions of the women, unlike some studies employing methods which produce perceptions and definitions about women by others and not perceptions by and of the women about themselves.

The analysis of the narratives reveals that the women neither perceive themselves nor construct their self-identities according to the usual rhetoric found in secular and theological gender studies. Religion plays an important role in shaping their self-perception and self-construction but according to their own understanding and interpretation, not as an oppressive doctrinal machine. Further the various narratives show that the perception and identity construction of these women are complex and multifarious. However it also emerges that the identity construction is a performance within the context of the narration adopted by the narrators to fit their common sense understanding of a ‘tellable story’ by the use of various strategies, tools and mechanisms of storytelling. Thus the answer to the question who a Tamil
Christian woman is at the turn of the millennium is achieved through the collective, complex, multifaceted stories of the narrators emplotting their lived experiences of gender practice.