



COMMUNITY BELONGING, CULTURAL IDENTITY, AND CHRISTIAN MISSION AMONG THE DEVANGA *COMMUNITY OF THE KONGU REGION: TOWARDS CONTEXTUAL MISSIOLOGY*

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Abstract: This study investigates the nexus between community belonging, cultural identity, and Christian mission within the Devanga community of the Kongu region in Tamil Nadu. Although existing scholarship has predominantly examined the community's historical antecedents, weaving heritage, and socio-cultural traditions, scant attention has been accorded to the manner in which communal belonging and cultural identity shape responses to Christian mission. Employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study draws upon ten focus group discussions involving sixty-three participants, including Devanga community members, Devanga Christians, pastors, and Christian leaders. It explores how identity is articulated, preserved, and reconstituted amidst the forces of globalization, migration, urbanization, educational mobility, and occupational diversification.

The findings indicate that community belonging remains the fulcrum of Devanga identity and cultural continuity. Responses to Christian mission are shaped less by doctrinal contestation than by concerns of communal cohesion, cultural preservation, and social legitimacy. Consequently, conversion is often experienced not merely as an individual act of faith but as a profound renegotiation of collective identity and communal relationships.

By elucidating the intricate interplay between belonging, identity, and faith, this study contributes to contemporary missiological discourse and advances a more nuanced understanding of religious change within culturally plural societies. The research advocates contextually informed, culturally attuned approaches to Christian mission that meaningfully engage with the lived realities of community and identity.

Index Terms - Devanga Community; Community Belonging; Cultural Identity; Identity Negotiation; Christian Mission; Contextual Missiology; Kongu Region; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

Christian mission has long wrestled with the relationship between the gospel and culture. Although the gospel transcends cultural boundaries, it is always encountered within particular social and cultural worlds. In many traditional communities, religious identity is closely tied to communal belonging, cultural practices, and social relationships. Consequently, responses to Christian mission are shaped not only by theological conviction but also by communal belonging, cultural identity, and social relationships.

Individuals often find themselves navigating the intersection of faith, identity, and belonging, where commitment to the gospel may carry implications for their place within the community. Understanding

this relationship is essential for interpreting how communities receive, negotiate, or resist the Christian message.

The Devanga (weaving) community of the Kongu region in Tamil Nadu provides a significant context for examining this missiological challenge. Historically identified with the weaving profession, the community has cultivated a strong collective identity rooted in kinship networks, religious traditions, community institutions, and a shared historical consciousness. While processes such as urbanisation, migration, educational mobility, and occupational diversification have reshaped many aspects of traditional community life, they have not diminished the significance of communal belonging. For many Devanga, community identity continues to serve as an important source of cultural continuity, social cohesion, and self-understanding within an increasingly changing social environment.

Christian mission among the Devanga community has a long history. Catholic and Protestant missions have worked among them for centuries, yet the response has remained limited. Existing missiological interpretations have frequently attributed limited Christian engagement among the Devanga community to factors such as religious conservatism, caste consciousness, and concerns regarding conversion. However, these factors alone do not fully explain the situation. Despite its long presence within the community, Christianity has not produced a proportionate level of religious affiliation or social transformation. A deeper understanding requires examining the historical, cultural, and social forces that have shaped the Devangas' engagement with Christian mission.

This paper argues that one of the main challenges lies in the strong bond between community belonging and cultural identity. Community belonging functions much like the warp and weft of traditional weaving, shaped by family ties, shared traditions, and collective memories. As a result, embracing Christianity may be seen not merely as changing one's faith but as loosening the threads that connect a person to the wider community. This helps explain why the response to Christian mission has often been limited despite its long presence among the Devanga.

Drawing on qualitative research among the Devanga community in the Kongu region, this paper examines how community belonging and cultural identity shape responses to Christian mission. Faith, culture, and community life are closely interconnected for many Devanga. The study suggests that responses to Christianity are influenced less by theological disagreement than by concerns about maintaining community ties and cultural identity. It argues that an effective mission must engage these deeper social and cultural realities that give people a sense of belonging.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Previous studies of the Devanga community have focused primarily on their history, migration, weaving traditions, caste structures, and socio-cultural practices. While these studies provide valuable historical and ethnographic insights, limited attention has been given to the relationship between community belonging, cultural identity, and responses to Christian mission. This article addresses that gap by examining how Devanga identity is negotiated within changing social contexts and how these dynamics shape engagement with Christian mission.

This study is informed by an interdisciplinary framework that draws upon Cultural Identity Theory, Identity Negotiation Theory, and Contextual Missiology. Together, these perspectives provide a basis for examining community belonging, cultural continuity, and Christian mission within the Devanga community.

Culture is a system of beliefs rooted in symbols, practices, values and social behaviour in which communities organize and interpret their collective life. It provides an integrated framework that shapes how individuals perceive reality, relate to others and position themselves in a shared moral and symbolic universe. Thus, culture is simultaneously a structuring framework and a dynamic process that allows for historical continuity while being sensitive to historical change.¹ This understanding of culture provides an important foundation for examining the relationship between community belonging, cultural identity, and Christian mission within the Devanga community.

Stuart Hall's understanding of cultural identity forms an important foundation for the study. Hall maintains that cultural identity is not a fixed inheritance but is continually shaped by history, memory, culture, and social interaction. Identity is therefore understood as both continuity and change.² This

¹Yea-Wen Chen and Marion G. Mendy, "Cultural Identity," *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780199756841-0254>.

² Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222–237.

perspective is particularly relevant to the Devanga community, whose identity continues to be influenced by migration, urbanisation, educational mobility, and occupational transformation. Hall further argues that identities are sustained through shared narratives, symbols, rituals, and collective memory.³ Within the Devanga community, weaving traditions, religious festivals, kinship networks, and historical narratives remain important expressions of cultural identity and communal belonging.

The study also draws on Identity Negotiation Theory, which understands identity as an ongoing process through which individuals and communities maintain, reinterpret, and adapt their sense of self within changing social environments.⁴ The theory provides a useful framework for examining how members of the Devanga community respond to the tensions between inherited traditions and contemporary social realities.

The third component of the framework is Contextual Missiology. Missiologists such as David Bosch, Timothy Tennent and Paul Hiebert have emphasised that the gospel is always communicated within particular cultural settings and must therefore engage local identities, values, and social structures. While the gospel transcends culture, its communication and reception are shaped by cultural forms and patterns of understanding. Contextualisation seeks to communicate the Christian faith in ways that are meaningful within specific cultural contexts while remaining faithful to the gospel.⁵ This perspective is particularly relevant to the Devanga community, where cultural identity, community belonging, and religious life are closely interconnected.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a framework for examining the relationship between cultural identity, community belonging, and Christian mission among the Devanga community of the Kongu region.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative methodology that seeks to understand how individuals interpret and make meaning of their lived experiences within specific social and cultural contexts.⁶ Rather than testing hypotheses, IPA seeks to explore how participants understand and construct meaning to significant aspects of their lives. Developed within the field of psychology and grounded in an idiographic approach,⁷ IPA is particularly suited to examining lived experience and process of meaning-making.⁸ Drawing on the traditions of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, the methodology facilitates a detailed examination of how individuals interpret their experiences and the social realities in which those experiences are situated.

IPA was selected because the study sought to understand how participants interpret and negotiate questions of cultural identity and belonging, rather than to produce a descriptive ethnography of the Devanga community. The methodology was particularly appropriate for examining how individuals understand their experiences within the broader social and cultural contexts that shape their lives. It enabled an exploration of the ways in which personal experience, cultural identity, community relationships, and religious engagement intersect in the lived realities of the Devanga community. As such, IPA provided a suitable framework for examining how community members understand and respond to Christian mission within their particular cultural and social setting.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), which provided an appropriate method for examining shared perceptions and experiences relating to community belonging,

³ Stuart Hall, "Who Needs Identity?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 4–5.

⁴ Stella Ting-Toomey, "Identity Negotiation Theory," in *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Intercultural Competence*, vol. 1, ed. Janet M. Bennett (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2015), 418–422.

⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 420–432.

⁶ Jonathan A. Smith & Isabella E. Nizza, *Essentials of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2021), 3.

⁷ Love, Beverly and et al., "Should Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis be used with focus groups? Navigating the bumpy road of "Iterative Loops," Idiographic journeys, and "Phenomenological Bridges" in *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* (May, 2020), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1609406920921600> accessed on 30.9.2021.

⁸ Ireneusz Pietkiewicz and Jonathan A. Smith, "A Practical Guide to Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Qualitative Research Psychology," *Psychological Journal* 20, no. 1 (2014): 361-369.

cultural identity, and Christian mission within the Devanga community. Although Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is commonly associated with small-scale idiographic research, focus groups were considered suitable for this study because questions of identity and belonging are shaped within social and communal contexts. The group discussions enabled participants to reflect upon shared experiences articulate meanings that may not emerge in individual interviews.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants with knowledge of Devanga cultural life and community dynamics. The study consisted of ten focus group discussions conducted across the districts of Coimbatore, Erode, Salem, and Tirupur in the Kongu region of Tamil Nadu. A total of sixty-three participants were involved, including members of the Devanga community, Devanga Christians, pastors, and Christian leaders.

The discussions were guided by semi-structured, open-ended questions focusing on community belonging, cultural identity, social change, and engagement with Christianity. With the informed consent of participants, all discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Analysis involved repeated reading of the transcripts, thematic coding, and interpretative examination of participants' accounts. Through this process, key themes relating to cultural continuity, identity negotiation, and responses to Christian mission were identified and interpreted within their socio-cultural context.

4. THE DEVANGA COMMUNITY: BELONGING, IDENTITY, AND MISSION IN A CHANGING CONTEXT

The findings of this study emerge from the lived experiences of members of the Devanga community, Devanga Christians, pastors, and Christian leaders from the Kongu region. The data reveal that community belonging, cultural identity, and religious engagement are deeply interconnected dimensions of Devanga social life. While rapid social transformation has introduced significant changes, participants consistently expressed a strong desire to preserve communal relationships, cultural continuity, and social belonging.

4.1 Community Belonging as a Source of Social Identity

The findings reveal that community belonging remains a central dimension of Devanga identity. Across all focus groups, participants described the community as a closely knit social network sustained through kinship ties, mutual support, shared responsibilities, and collective memory. Belonging is expressed through family relationships, clan structures, festivals, community organisations, and social gatherings, all of which continue to reinforce communal harmony.

A pastor from Salem described the Devanga community as “very unique and loving people” who readily welcome others and make them feel at home (Group A, Participant #5, male, aged 45, Salem). Similarly, another participant observed that community members often relate to one another “as part of their family” (Group C, Participant #2, Male, aged 54, Tirupur). These accounts underscore the significance of kinship, hospitality, and social cohesion within Devanga communal life.

Participants frequently compared community life to the weaving process itself, where warp and weft are interwoven to create a strong and unified fabric. The imagery reflects the interconnected nature of social life, where mutual support, cooperation, and collective responsibility sustain communal bonds. Festivals, family ceremonies, and community association meetings continue to serve as important occasions for maintaining relationships, transmitting cultural values, and reinforcing communal identity.

Participants also acknowledged that migration, urbanisation, and occupational mobility have altered traditional patterns of social interaction. Younger generations increasingly relocate for education and employment, resulting in reduced participation in community activities. Although such changes were generally regarded as inevitable, many participants expressed concern about the gradual weakening of communal ties and the transmission of cultural values across generations.

One pastor described the Devanga community as “soft-spoken, loving, proud of their culture, and deeply committed to their traditions” (Group B, Participant #1). These observations indicate that community belonging remains an important source of identity and continuity. Consistent with Hall's understanding of cultural identity, belonging is sustained through social interaction, shared memory, and collective cultural practices.

The findings suggest that community belonging continues to play a central role in the maintenance and transmission of Devanga identity. Despite changing social conditions, kinship networks, community gatherings, and collective memory remain important sources of social cohesion and cultural continuity.

4.2 Cultural Identity and Continuity under Social Change

Participants identified several cultural markers that continue to shape Devanga communal life, including weaving traditions, marriage customs, language, religious festivals, family structures, ritual practices, and historical narratives. These cultural resources provide a framework through which the community understands itself and maintains a distinct collective identity.

The oral traditions concerning the divine origin of the Devanga community also remain an important source of cultural identity and collective memory. Among these markers, weaving occupies a particularly significant place. Participants consistently described weaving not merely as an occupation but as a valued inheritance associated with community history, dignity, and collective memory. One participant referred to weaving as “a divinely entrusted craft passed down from Devala Munivar” (Group B, Participant #2, female, aged 24, Salem), while another emphasised that every member has a responsibility to preserve both the craft and the cultural heritage of the community (Group A, Participant #7, Male, aged 65, Nangavalli)

These accounts indicate that weaving functions as far more than an economic activity. It serves as a symbolic thread running through Devanga history, connecting past generations with the present and reinforcing a shared sense of belonging. Even where direct participation in weaving has declined, its symbolic significance continues to shape communal identity.

Participants also recognised that cultural continuity requires adaptation. One participant argued that “traditional skills must be preserved while embracing new technologies and economic opportunities.” Rather than viewing change as a threat, many participants regarded adaptation as necessary for sustaining both livelihood and cultural heritage (Group E, Participant #1, Male, aged 65, Tirupur).

One participant noted that while traditional handloom weaving may no longer provide sufficient income, engagement in related occupations could enable families to maintain their connection to the weaving tradition while responding to contemporary realities (Group D, Participant #3, Male, aged 60, Doddampalayam)

These accounts reveal that participants do not perceive cultural continuity and adaptation as mutually exclusive. Rather, they seek to preserve the cultural meaning of weaving while adjusting its practice to contemporary economic realities. Such perspectives reflect Hall’s understanding of identity as both “being” and “becoming,” where continuity is maintained through ongoing reinterpretation rather than static preservation.

The findings also reveal that educational mobility, industrialisation, globalisation, migration, and urbanisation have transformed occupational patterns, family structures, language use, and community participation. Nevertheless, participants generally interpreted these developments as opportunities for adaptation rather than evidence of cultural disappearance. One participant remarked: “Globalisation and urbanisation are inevitable, as these processes provide opportunities for survival and growth.” (Group D, Participant #3, Male, aged 65)

A younger participant similarly stated: “Though we are in urban centres ... we continue to hold on to our cultural values and customs.” (Group F, Participant #3, Male, aged 25, Coimbatore. An elderly participant whose children had migrated abroad observed: “Although my children are settled abroad, they still hold on to major Devanga cultural practices.” (Group B, Participant #1, Male, aged 80, Salem)

These perspectives suggest that continuity and change are not viewed as opposing forces. Instead, participants seek to hold on to the cultural meaning of weaving while adapting its practice to new circumstances. Such responses reflect Hall’s understanding of identity as both “being” and “becoming,” where continuity is maintained not through rigid preservation but through ongoing reinterpretation.

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Consistent with Identity Negotiation Theory, Devanga identity emerges as a dynamic and adaptive process rather than a fixed condition. Participants described identity as something that is continually worked out, maintained, and reinterpreted in response to changing social realities. The findings, therefore, indicate that Devanga cultural identity is not disappearing but is being reshaped through ongoing processes of adaptation and renewal. Core cultural markers continue to provide meaning, belonging, and continuity even as their forms of expression evolve.

The findings support the view that Devanga identity is characterised by continuity amid change, as inherited cultural traditions are maintained and reinterpreted in response to changing social circumstances.

4.3 Community Belonging, Conversion, and Christian Mission

The findings indicate that responses to Christian mission cannot be understood apart from questions of community belonging and cultural identity. Participants consistently described conversion to Christianity as extending beyond personal religious conviction. Within the Devanga community, conversion is often perceived as a public act with implications for family relationships, community participation, and social identity.

Many participants acknowledged openness to Christian prayer, friendship, and pastoral engagement while simultaneously expressing hesitation toward public Christian identification. A pastor from Erode observed that, individuals readily seek prayer but are reluctant to participate in visible Christian fellowship because of concerns regarding relatives and neighbours. (Group B, Participant #6, Male, aged 60, Pastor, Erode)

Similarly, a Devanga evangelist from Tirupur noted many attend prayer meetings and Christmas and Easter celebrations yet refrain from making a public commitment to the faith. (Group C, Participant #3, Male, aged 54, Devanga Evangelist, Tirupur). These accounts suggest that receptivity to Christian faith exists within the community. However, public identification with Christianity is often constrained by concerns relating to family expectations, social acceptance, and communal belonging. While Christian faith may be explored in private settings, public commitment is frequently associated with wider social consequences.

These findings resonate with Dasan Jeyaraj's study of followers of Christ outside formal church structures in Chennai. Jeyaraj argues that Christian faith is not always expressed through visible institutional affiliation, particularly in contexts where caste identity, communal belonging, and social relationships exert significant influence on personal religious choices. He observes that while individuals may profess faith in Christ, public association with the institutional church can carry substantial social consequences, including family tensions, altered social status, and disruption of communal belonging.⁹ This perspective helps illuminate why many Devanga participants expressed openness to Christian prayer and fellowship while remaining hesitant toward baptism or public church identification.

Participants repeatedly associated visible Christian commitment with social risk. A Devanga Christian woman explained: "There are many secret Christians within the community. Women, in particular, are often afraid of societal pressure and therefore hesitate to confess their faith publicly." (Group B, Participant #4, Female, aged 65, Devanga Christian, Erode)

The tension becomes most visible in relation to baptism. One participant observed:

"Initially they are ready to be part of the church, but when it comes to baptism, they withdraw themselves." (Group A, Participant #5, Salem)

Another Devanga Christian similarly remarked: "When we invite them for cottage prayer meeting in our residence, they love to come and asking pastors to pray for their family, but baptism or consistent church participation remains very rare." (Group B, Participant #7, Female, aged 49, Devanga Christian, Erode)

This tension is particularly evident in relation to baptism. Participants noted that individuals may participate in Christian activities and seek pastoral support, yet hesitate when confronted with the prospect of baptism. In this context, baptism functions not only as a religious rite but also as a public expression of identity. Concerns regarding social exclusion, family relationships, and community acceptance continue to influence responses to Christian commitment.

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Participants also expressed reservations regarding forms of mission perceived to require the abandonment of cultural identity. Approaches that appear dismissive of local customs, cultural symbols, or community relationships may reinforce the perception that Christian faith is incompatible with Devanga identity. By

⁹ Dasan Jeyaraj, *Followers of Christ Outside the Church in Chennai, India* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Academic, 2010), 22–39, 419–431.

contrast, mission approaches characterised by respect, friendship, and meaningful engagement with community life were generally viewed more favourably.

From a missiological perspective, the findings suggest that conversion is not experienced solely as an individual religious decision but as a process shaped by community relationships, social identity, and cultural belonging. Christian mission among the Devanga community must therefore take seriously the social and cultural contexts within which individuals understand themselves and negotiate questions of faith and belonging.

Conversion is therefore experienced not merely as a theological decision but as a social and relational negotiation involving identity, belonging, and communal recognition.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEXTUAL MISSIOLOGY

The findings indicate that the primary challenges to Christian mission among the Devanga community arise not from theological disagreement but from concerns surrounding community belonging, cultural continuity, and communal recognition. Effective missiological engagement, therefore, requires a contextual approach that takes seriously the social and cultural realities through which identity and belonging are experienced and maintained.

5.1 Community Belonging as a Missional Reality

The findings reveal that community belonging remains a defining feature of Devanga social life and identity. Kinship structures, communal participation, occupational heritage, and cultural traditions continue to shape how individuals understand themselves and their relationship to the wider community. As a result, responses to Christian mission are often influenced by concerns about belonging and communal participation as much as by matters of religious belief. These findings highlight the need for mission approaches that engage sensitively with existing social relationships and cultural realities, recognising that decisions concerning faith are frequently made within a broader communal context.

5.2. Prayer and Relational Engagement in Christian Witness

Participants consistently expressed openness to prayer, pastoral care, friendship, and informal Christian interactions. Although public identification with Christianity often remained cautious, prayer-centred relationships were generally welcomed. These findings suggest that personal relationships, pastoral presence, and acts of Christian care are significant avenues through which the Christian faith is encountered within the Devanga community. Christian witness appears to gain greater acceptance when communicated through relationships of trust and mutual regard rather than through formal institutional structures alone.

5.3 Baptism as a Social and Relational Threshold

One of the most significant findings of the study concerns the social significance attached to baptism. Participants consistently distinguished between openness to Christian prayer and reservation towards baptism or public association with the church. Baptism is understood not merely as a religious rite but as a public affirmation of identity with implications for family relationships, communal acceptance, and social belonging. For many participants, baptism represents the point at which personal faith becomes publicly visible and therefore subject to communal scrutiny. The findings suggest that missional practice must recognise the social implications of baptism and address them with pastoral discernment and cultural understanding.

5.4 Contextual Discipleship and Identity Negotiation

The findings indicate that engagement with Christianity frequently occurs alongside continuing commitments to cultural identity and communal belonging. Participants generally did not regard these realities as inherently incompatible; rather, they described an ongoing process of relating Christian faith to existing cultural affiliations. Faith formation within the Devanga context is therefore best understood as a gradual process through which religious commitment is incorporated into established social and cultural frameworks. Effective discipleship requires an appreciation of how Christian commitment develops within family relationships, community networks, and inherited cultural traditions.

5.5 Cultural Symbols and Christian Identity

Participants also raised concerns regarding church practices that discourage the use of cultural symbols such as the *thali*, *pottu*, flowers, traditional attire, and other markers of social identity. Within the Devanga community, these symbols are generally understood as expressions of cultural heritage and communal belonging rather than as explicit affirmations of religious belief. The findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between cultural expression and theological conviction. Failure to maintain this distinction may strengthen the perception that Christian faith necessitates the abandonment of cultural identity. From a missiological standpoint, discipleship requires careful theological discernment

regarding those cultural practices that are incompatible with the gospel and those that may continue as legitimate expressions of cultural belonging.

5.6 Home Fellowship as Contextual Ecclesial Space

The findings suggest that home fellowships provide an important setting for Christian fellowship and discipleship within the Devanga community. Participants frequently expressed a willingness to attend prayer gatherings in homes while remaining hesitant about public participation in church life. Such settings offer opportunities for spiritual enquiry, fellowship, and Christian nurture within familiar social environments. Home fellowships should therefore be viewed not as substitutes for the church but as complementary expressions of Christian community. They provide space for individuals to explore and practise the Christian faith within existing family and community relationships and may serve an important role in nurturing those who remain cautious about public church affiliation.

5.7 Toward a Devanga Contextual Missiology

The findings demonstrate that Devanga identity continues to be shaped through the interplay of cultural continuity and social change. Community belonging remains central to the formation of identity, while responses to Christian mission are influenced by considerations of honour, social acceptance, communal participation, and relational obligation. These findings underscore the need for a contextual approach to mission that moves beyond exclusively individual understandings of conversion and attends to the communal dimensions of social life. Mission among the Devanga community must therefore take seriously the relationship between faith, identity, and belonging. Such an approach enables the Christian message to be communicated in a manner that is both culturally intelligible and socially meaningful.

CONCLUSION

This study is limited to the Devanga community of the Kongu region and is based on qualitative data derived from focus group discussions. Consequently, the findings are not intended to be statistically representative of all Devanga communities in India.

The study demonstrates that Devanga identity is shaped not by cultural decline but by ongoing processes of adaptation and continuity. Community belonging remains a primary source of social identity, while responses to Christian mission are mediated through concerns of belonging, recognition, and relational continuity. These findings suggest that contextual missiology must move beyond approaches that separate faith from culture and instead engage the social and cultural worlds within which people construct meaning and identity.

The study contributes to missiological scholarship by showing that responses to Christian mission among the Devanga community arise less from theological resistance than from the intricate relationship between cultural identity, community belonging, and social recognition. As cultural memory and communal life continue to shape the horizons of belonging, Christian mission must learn to speak within these realities rather than merely alongside them.

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