

# Kanarese Caste Hindus



## Quick Facts

**Population:** 22,000,000

India: 21,500,000

Malaysia: 50,000

USA: 24,000

Singapore: 15,000

**Religion:** Hindu

**Believers:** 0.068%

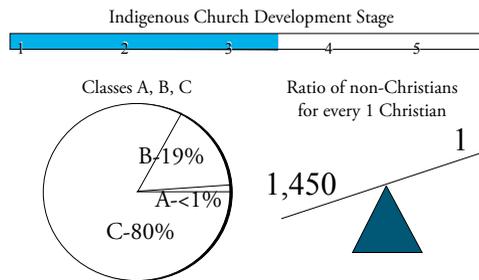
**Scriptures:** NT, OT

**Ministry Tools:** JRGT

**Church Status:** 3

**Mission Status:** 2

**MS Subgroups:** 100+



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:** The Kanarese Caste Hindus are the descendents of Dravidian tribes which embraced certain elements of Hinduism while retaining much of their original customs, such as ancestor worship, burial of the dead, and sacrifice to local deities. The Kanarese dialect, Kannada, is a Dravidian language related to Tamil and Malayalam.

**Lifestyle:** The state of Karnataka, home of the Kanarese peoples, has an incredibly robust economy driven by strong agricultural exports, a booming IT industry and high levels of tourism. The Kanarese produce most of India's coffee, floral, and Sandalwood products. Their capital Bangalore hosts 50% of India's IT companies, and is regarded as the Silicon Valley of Asia. The state's 21 wildlife sanctuaries make it a popular tourist destination.

**Customs:** Traditionally, the parents of boys initiate marriage proposal. Girls for whom no marriage match can be

found are taken by their parents to the community guru who brands them with a stamp and ties a necklace around their neck. They are then brought to the local temple to serve as a prostitute. Today, there are over 50,000 such child prostitutes in Karnataka temples.

**Religion:** The Kanarese are known for their many Hindu reform movements throughout history, many of which have been anti-Brahman in origin. One of these reform movements became a large community known as the Lingayat. They are monotheists, worshiping only Shiva, and they have established their own priesthood which serves other Kanarese peoples as well. Their founder, Basava, proclaimed that all men are created equal by the Great Spirit and every human being is his temple.

**Christian Outreach:** The Kanarese peoples are the least-evangelized of all the Dravidian ethno-linguistic clusters, even though Bangalore is the home to

many mission agency headquarters. Christians have become a wealthy prestigious caste within the larger Kanarese population, and are concentrated in coastal areas where Catholic missionaries first came centuries ago. Over 80% of Kanarese communities are without a disciple-making movement.

## How to Pray:

✞ Pray for revival to come to the Kanarese Church and for a desire to be birthed within believers to break out of the cultural isolation that has walled them off from impacting Hindu society.

✞ Pray for the influential Lingayat community that a movement to Christ would begin among their leaders and gurus to impact all of Kanarese society.

✞ Tens of thousands of Church planters are needed to pioneer the gospel in rural areas. Pray for effective training programs and sending strategies.

✞ The protestant Church in Bangalore is in-grown, multi-lingual and multi-cultural. Pray for the birth of a truly Kanarese Church in this strategic city, with indigenous leadership, caste sensitivity, and worship in the Kannada language.

**Every year 200,000 Kanarese Hindus die without Christ.**

# Kanarese Caste Hindus (cont.)

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

Lingayat	10,000,000	0.01%	BC	Kumhar	395,000	0.00%	SC
Vakkaliga	6,500,000	0.05%	BC	Sali	380,000	0.01%	BC
Kuruba	4,000,000	0.07%	BC	Boya	350,000	0.00%	BC
Adi Karnataka	2,700,000	0.02%	SC	Nai	320,000	0.00%	BC
Bedar	2,400,000	0.00%	SC	Kunbi	320,000	0.00%	BC
Brahman	2,200,000	0.00%	FC	Bhoi	300,000	0.00%	SC
Gangakula	1,200,000	0.00%	BC	Teli	240,000	0.00%	BC
Ahir	1,000,000	0.00%	BC	Sonar	200,000	0.00%	BC
Balija	840,000	0.00%	BC	Darzi	190,000	0.00%	BC
Banajiga	670,000	0.00%	BC	Chalvadi	160,000	0.01%	SC
Beldar	620,000	0.00%	SC	Halwakkii	120,000	0.00%	BC
Koshti	600,000	0.06%	BC	Gondaru	110,000	0.00%	ST
Holar	600,000	0.00%	SC	Raddi	110,000	0.00%	BC
Chamar	520,000	0.00%	SC	Kadia	80,000	0.00%	BC
Kunchatigadug	400,000	0.00%	BC	Hanabar	70,000	0.00%	BC
Somvanshi	400,000	0.00%	SC	Kattunayakan	65,000	0.02%	ST

### LINGAYAT

The Lingayat are a heterogenous ethno-religious group that originated from a reform movement started in the 13th century. The movement is part of a larger “Bhakti tradition” in India, which are characterized by reformers that denounce the caste system and polytheism, encouraging devotion to one supreme god (Shiva, in this case), and emphasizing that all are equal under this god. Ironically, the Lingayats over time recreated their own social hierarchy with a priestly class (Jangam), traders (Banajiga, Wani), artisans (Badigar, Devanga, Kumbara), service castes (Hadapad), and peasants (Sadar, Panchamsali). The founder of the movement was himself a Brahmin, and like the Brahmins, his followers are strict vegeterians. The name Lingayat literally means “one who wears the linga” and refers to a sacred ornament, consisting of a slate stone covered with a paste of cow dung. The stone is said to be a representation of Shiva, and is worshipped. Loss of this emblem is a serious offense and equated with losing one’s faith and spiritual death. Repentance of this sin involves fasting and hosting a dinner for caste members, going through a cleansing ritual, and then receiving a new linga from the community guru.

### VAKKALIGA

The Vakkaliga (also known as the Vokkaliga and Okkiliyan) are a prosperous caste of land-owning cultivators. Their name comes from the word “okkalu” which means farming. Due to the fact that most of their clans are non-vegeterian, they occupy a middle position in the Kanarese Hindu caste system, just below the Lingayats. Unlike other Hindu groups, the Vakkaliga bury their dead, usually on their own land. Each year they have a special day for worshipping their ancestors. Their affluence has afforded them the ability, through the advanced education of their childeren, to branch out into other occupations, such as engineers, doctors and professors.

### KURUBA

The Kuruba are a caste of sheep herders, living primarily in Karnataka. Their name comes from the Kannada word “kuru,” which means sheep. Today, a large number are moving into cultivation or pursuing agricultural labor as their primary source of income. Through a government program some families are receiving loans to continue their traditional occupation as sheep herders and producers of wollen blankets.