Minority group is one which has less power and influence than the dominant group. A minority group is a subordinate group whose members have significantly less control over their lives than the members of a dominant group.

Wide differences are hence seen between the so-called ‘minorities’ and ‘dominant’ groups. Conscious of this gap based on the power and influence-wielding capacity of minorities, especially in the context of the events of the nationalist struggle leading up to independence, the Constitution Fathers ensured a special position to the minorities. Sociologists have identified five basic properties of a minority group such as physical or cultural traits, unequal treatment, ascribed status, solidarity and in-group marriage. All these properties can be seen in the Christian minority in India.

India is a plural society as a result of many religions, languages castes, ethnic groupings and regions. This status of pluralism is recognized in the Constitution. Pluralism involves a commitment on the part of the dominant group to maintain diversity among minority groups. It also involves willingness to permit the diversity. This sociological reality has given shape to legal pluralism in that it involves legal protection of differences and a guarantee of autonomy to minority groups. The government can take necessary legal measures to protect the interests and rights of the minorities. The preamble of the Constitution declares that all citizens are assured of liberty, equality and justice. Articles 29 and 30 of the Indian Constitution protect the religion, educational, linguistic literary and other interests of the minorities. Inspite of the special position to minorities in the Constitution the term ‘minority’ has not been defined anywhere.

Though the majority of people living in India are Hindus (82.41%), people belonging to other religion communities such as Muslims (11.67%), Christians (2.32%), Sikhs (2%), Buddhists (0.77%), Jains (0.4%) and others (0.43%) are living within the plural framework.
Christians and more specifically the Christians residing in the Punjab are the focus of this study. We have traced the origin of Christianity in India, the relevance and role played by this community in the nationalist struggle, the position and status granted to them by the Constitution. Bearing a close affinity with the British rulers, the Christians and more specifically the elitist Anglo-Indian Christians, who were dominant at that time, chose not to press for special rights that were granted to other minorities. But in the post-independent period, as the Anglo-Indian community slowly departed from the Indian soil in favour of their ‘homeland’, Britain, the scenario in India underwent a seachange too. Slowly as the massification process reached the grass-root level in India the Christians (who were converted from among the poorer segments of society) became conscious of their position which lacked any special rights, opportunities and privileges that were granted to other minorities.

The position of Christians in the prosperous state of Punjab is no better. The empirical data from the three segments of Punjab (Malwa, Majha and Doaba) reveal the position of Christians employed as labour. The data based on a questionnaire has resulted in locating the profile of the respondents and series of related issues such as perception attitudes, levels of participation and patterns of interaction with other communities. The dependence of labour force on the landlords is evident even in the decisions made by the former in political matters including making a choice during elections. The Christians face a situation of unequals. Consequent political powerlessness has meant exclusion from state activity.

Christianity in India, dates back to “Apostle’s time” which first century (A.D.). In Punjab, however, the advent of Christianity more or less coincides with the expansion of the British East India Company, which occurred in the nineteenth century. The Christian faith spread in Punjab virtually through conversion by the missionaries. Practically, all of them were foreign missionaries, who were greatly successful among the lower, deprived and depressed classes of the Punjab Society.

Conversion from the upper classes and castes was very rare. Those who embraced the liberating faith of Christianity from Punjab were menial workers and rural
labourers and similar other deprived or rejected sections of society. Inspite of their conversion to Christianity, they have suffered a serious discrimination and degradation in society and conversion has not brought a big change in the social status of the community.

Today, the Christians in India constitute more than two percent of the total population. In the state of Punjab, the Christians constitute about two percent of the total population of the Punjab. In the context of the state under review, the scope and area of investigation encompasses the districts of Gurdaspur, (Malwa) Jallandhar (Doaba) and Ludhiana, (Malwa) which have the largest concentration of Christians. However, there also exist sizable pockets of Christians in the districts of Amritsar, Ferozepur and Rupnagar. The Christian community in state of Punjab is poor. in general, but there is much difference between the urban and rural Christians. The rural Christians are either landless agricultural labourers or holders of small pieces of land. On the whole, the economic condition of this community is quite poor. After India’s independence, Christian community in Punjab has not gained either politically or socially and their development has remained stunted. They are ignored by state and administrative set up and suffer from ‘structural violence’. They stand nowhere in comparison to other religious communities. They have lost their self identity. They have even been neglected throughout on the basis of religion and suffer from what is called ‘symbolic violence’. They have been treated merely as “objects” rather than as subjects. In that sense it is a violation of the Constitution of India and as well as the gross violation of human rights. This study attempts to collect various facts of socio-economic and political problems of Christian community of Punjab. On the other hand, the socio-economic hierarchy of the landlords and Jat Sikhs of Punjab in the political institutions like panchayats, Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha are the principle means through which the dominant class deprives the dalits of the fruits of their labours. Secondly socio-economic backwardness has certainly altered their political aspirations and often denied their opportunities of entering into active political life.
Keeping in mind, the socio-economic and political problems of minority community i.e. Christian Community in general and Christian community of Punjab in particular, has been studied in its full perspective. The relevant constitutional provisions relating to religious minorities, some specific provision of Constitution and centre and state policies and programmes towards minorities have been analytically examined in this study. At the same time the operational aspect of the various safeguards have been asserted in detail. The analysis is based on a detailed study of the primary source, i.e. the relevant official documents, mission records, field investigation, data collection, interviews and observations. Actually, this study is in the nature of an essay in the political culture and political behaviour of Christian Community in general and the Christian Community of Punjab in particular. So the, participation, political achievements and involvement in politics before and after India independent has been carefully studied. The issues concerning the political participation of community in Punjab electoral politics have been evaluated. This study has analysed the position of a well defined, cohesive group in the political environment and politics of state which is characterized by plurality and prosperity. It has also traced historical background of Christian community and the role played by the foreign missionaries.

This study has been divided into seven chapters covering the following areas and aspects:

I. The first and the introductory chapter deals with minority as a concept with special reference to the Christian religious minority. It articulates the problems for the study including research and methodology to be employed.

II. The second chapter traces the trajectory of Christian religion and also highlights the diversified role of missionaries in India with particular reference the Punjab State.

III. The third chapter evaluates the socio-economic and political profile of the Christian Community of Punjab.
IV. This chapter examines the political, the socio-economic and religious problems of Christians in general and the problems of Christian community of Punjab in particular.

V. Fifth chapter analyses the political participation of the community at local, district and state level. The analysis is based on and also the studies already conducted and availability to the researcher. The survey which carried out in various districts of Punjab.

VI. Sixth chapter examines the various facilities and benefits that are implemented by the centre and state governments for the upliftment of the community.

VII. At the end, the study contains a brief summary, finding or observation and suggestions for making the Christian community a fully participative minority within the democracy of India.

This study has a special relevance in the context of India’s political democracy which seems to be becoming more and inclusive (since the seventies) due to the widening base of democracy. But the dalit Christians have remained stigmatized and disempowered as the conditions of poverty do not enable them the freedom to think for themselves.

This attempt may help the community to understand the need for an effective political participation and the problems related to such participation. This study will also help the leaders of the community by providing the useful information which can contribute towards the greater participation of the community in politics of the Punjab State.