

## BOOK REVIEW AND NOTE

***Christianity Remade: The Rise of Indian-Initiated Churches.* By Paul Joshua. Edited by Joel A. Carpenter. Studies in World Christianity. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2022. xiv + 249 pp. \$54.99 cloth.**

This pioneering study is based on Paul Joshua's 2013 doctoral dissertation at the Free University of Amsterdam (x). Unfortunately, Joshua died in 2016, without revising the manuscript for publication, and Joel Carpenter agreed to take on the difficult task of editing it for publication, a task he has accomplished with great skill. Thus, although this work was published in 2022, it was essentially completed in 2013. Much of the rich scholarly literature having to do with Indian Christianity that has been published in the last decade was not available to the author when he wrote his dissertation.

The monograph contains the mostly neglected stories of several Indian "grassroots Christian movements" (3) from the nineteenth century to the contemporary era. The basic argument is that just as Africa has its African Initiated Churches (AICs) which arose in distinction to and as critiques of western missionary initiated churches, so too in India there have been Indian Initiated Churches (IICs) which arose in contrast to and as critiques of churches started by western missions. Interestingly, the author counts the Syrian Orthodox tradition in India as among the "mission churches," because it was started by missionaries from Mesopotamia in the first three centuries of the Common Era. The author describes IICs as "churches initiated by Indian Christians as their own spiritual home, constructed according to local needs, by local people expressing local hopes and dreams and sharing local concerns and struggles." They can be seen as "an Indian incarnation of the Christian faith" (4).

The Introduction provides the basic theoretical framework and rationale for the author's work on IICs. Chapter 1 begins by giving an overview of the history of Christianity in India, and the historiography of Indian Christianity. The present study purportedly goes beyond current historical approaches to Indian Christianity because "it focuses even more profoundly on the creativity of Indian agency, including subaltern agency, and how this agency renders Christianity relevant to Indian contexts" (24). The chapter tells the story of two nineteenth century Indian initiated Christian movements, which are seen as the forebears of the twentieth and twenty-first century IICs. The first was a Pentecostal revival led by J. C. Arulappan (1810–1867) of Kerala in 1860–1865. The second was a Pentecostal revival initiated in 1905 in an institution built by Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922) in Maharashtra. Chapter 2, titled "Revivals and the Reframing of Indian Christianity," emphasizes the importance of revivals in the formation of Indian Christianity. Indeed, revivals are generally overlooked in most histories of Indian Christianity. The chapter explores the revivals associated with Arulappan and Ramabai. While both revivals were a response to revivals occurring in, and encouraged by Western Christian circles, the author concludes that they "could be seen, among other things, as home-grown and self-directed subaltern efforts to appropriate the message of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit for their

own contexts” (64). It should be noted that neither Arulappan nor Ramabai can be counted among the Indian “subaltern.”

Chapters 3 through 7 each provide excellent descriptions of Indian initiated evangelical movements in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Chapter 3 describes the history of the Indian Pentecostal Church of God, with its origins in Kerala, during the Indian Independence movement in the first decades of the twentieth century. Chapter 4 tells the story of the congregations called the Bakht Singh Assemblies started by the Punjabi Sikh convert, Bakht Singh (1903–2000). Chapter 5 relates the birth in 1938 and the growth of the India Bible Mission, founded by Mungamuri Devadas, who was inspired by the Indian religious devotional movements called *bhakti*. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with two contemporary Indian Initiated Churches, the Yesu Darbar in the city of Allahabad and the New Life Fellowship in Mumbai.

The great strength of this study is the light it throws on Indian Christian movements that have so far been situated on the periphery of the study of Indian Christianity. While figures such as Ramabai and Arulappan have received significant scholarly attention, other figures and the movements they founded have been the subject of rather specialized study. Joshua’s work is therefore groundbreaking, bringing together Indian Christian movements that were started by Indians themselves. It must be noted that there are numerous Christian movements throughout the subcontinent, and so Joshua has pointed us in a direction for further study of indigenous Indian Christianity.

There are two criticisms I would raise of this study. The first is that the framework of “mission/European/top-down” Christianity vs. “indigenous/Indian/subaltern” Christianity is ahistorical, and does not fit the contemporary movements described in the study. At various points throughout the book, the author admits as much (193–94). The framework does a disservice to the almost two millennia of Christian presence and life in India, and it does not even account for all the data that the author presents. All the founders of the IICs had significant positive interactions with missionaries and western trained Indian Christians. Similarly, all the “mission churches” have been deeply affected by Indian religion and society. Long decades before the crowds at the Yesu Darbar were shouting “Yesu Masih ki Jai” or “Victory to Jesus” (148), the Indian (and Western!) Christians in mission churches were singing indigenous praise songs called *bhajans* such as “Jai! Jai! Yesu!”. Rather than adopting a “western vs. Indian” or “elite vs. subaltern” framework, it would be better to consider how various forms of Indian Christianity have adopted and adapted differing degrees of Indian and foreign influences at various times in their respective histories.

A second problem is that Joshua completely avoids dealing with the reality that Indians are quite comfortable going to different sources of spiritual or sacral power to have their desires and needs fulfilled. Indians – like many people around the world – can be quite catholic in their religious choices. The very people who attend evangelical revivals such as the Yesu Darbar may visit the tomb of a Muslim saint, consult a Hindu guru and worship at various shrines of deities and spirits. Rather than the Triune God infiltrating and transforming the Hindu religious cosmos (164), for a significant number of Indians the Triune God is absorbed as one more spiritual source in the Hindu religious cosmos.

These criticisms demonstrate that important and interesting theoretical issues arise when critically engaging Joshua’s highly provocative and path-breaking book. As an evangelical scholar, Joshua represents a growing and significant sector of Indian Christianity. Moreover, Indian revivalism is not restricted to evangelicals. Roman Catholic and Syrian Orthodox branches of Indian Christianity have large groups of

charismatics who are changing those historic traditions. As scholars continue to grapple with the complexity of Indian Christianity, Joshua's work needs to be seriously considered, even (and especially) if one may disagree with certain aspects of it.

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