



## Book Review

Paul Joshua. (2022). *Christianity Remade: The Rise of Indian-Initiated Churches*. Edited by Joel A. Carpenter. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press. Pp. xiv + 249. Price: \$ 54.99. ISBN: 978-1-4813-0405-4. (Hardcover.)

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Central to Paul Joshua's study, *Christianity Remade: The Rise of Indian-Initiated Churches*, is the notion that Indian Christianity stands on its own ground, a unique formation that blends elements of South Asian culture with the tenets and practices of Christianity. This understanding of Indian Christianity runs counter to what Joshua succinctly describes as the "dominant impression...of Christianity in India...that it is a foreign religion, imposed by European colonizers" (p. 3). Joshua's assertion is meant to be not an abjuration of Christianity's roots outside the South Asian subcontinent, but a call to scholars to engage with Indian Christianity as an *Indian* tradition. Joshua's argument here builds not only on Christianity's historically deep roots in India (extant as early as the beginnings of the Christian era, and invigorated by the arrival of Catholic missionaries in the 16th century, and the entrance into India of European Protestant missionaries as India came under British colonial rule at the end of the 18th century), but also on the many ways in which Indian Christianity has absorbed elements of Indian religiosity in its development. To underscore the "Indianness" of Indian Christianity, Joshua adopts the term "Indian-initiated church" or "IIC," which, as Joshua declares, "is Christianity made in India" (p. 4). (Here, Joshua draws on the now long-established terminology used to describe African-founded Christian churches, "AIC," albeit without engaging the various meanings of the "I" of "AIC"—"initiated"; "indigenous"; "independent"; and "instituted.") Joshua's concern here, however, is not to give a precise meaning to "IIC," but rather to use it to draw our attention to the deep influence of Indian religious and cultural elements in the constitution of the Indian Christian churches. Moreover, as Joshua correctly notes, previous scholarship has tended to ignore this aspect of Indian Christianity, favouring in its stead discussions of theology and conversion. (Whereas this point remains largely true today, it was perhaps more pronounced when Joshua completed this study in 2013, based on research conducted in the early 2000s. [N.B., Joshua passed away in 2016, and the volume here under review was published posthumously under the direction of Joel Carpenter, the editor of Baylor University Press's Studies in World Christianity Series.]

*Christianity Remade* consists of seven main chapters, each of which explores distinct (and distinctly Indic) movements within the Indian Christian tradition. While acknowledging the long history of Indian Christianity, Joshua's focus here is largely on the communities that trace their origins to the Protestant missionaries whose arrival in India coincided with the late 18th century rise of European colonialism on the subcontinent. In part, Joshua's interest here reflects his own personal history; thus, he notes that he is himself a member of the Indian Brethren church, and that his family was long involved with the ministry of Bakht Singh (1903 - 2000), whose movement is discussed in this volume. More broadly, however, this focus on the Indian Protestant communities also holds a significant place in Joshua's argument that Indian Christianity is misconstrued in India as a "foreign" religion. Thus, as Joshua notes, in "India's collective psyche" (p. 21), Indian Protestant Christianity tends to be conflated with the historical memory of the European colonial presence in India (despite frequent conflicts between the Protestant missionaries and the colonial powers, Protestantism itself stood as a

significant element of colonialism's imposed cultural hegemony in India). This perception, however, masks the reality of the diffuse nature of the European Protestant mission in India, as individual missionaries willingly tailored their ministries to meet the needs of India's diverse population (differentiated as well as stratified through elements of gender, caste, language, locale, and so forth). Whether intended or not, the diffuse nature of these early missions opened a path for the later assimilation of traditional elements of Indian religiosity in the development of Indian Christianity, a pattern that Joshua argues became more pronounced as Indian Christians gradually replaced the European missionaries in leading the various Protestant churches in India. As Joshua's work shows, this can be seen early in the history of Indian Christianity, as evidenced in the life and work of the Indian Christian missionary J. C. Arulappan (1810-67), who attended one of the first Protestant seminaries in India. A decade after beginning his ministry as an assistant to the British missionary A. N. Groves, Arulappan set out on his own, founding an independent, self-governed Indian Christian settlement, "an example of a homegrown Christian community in a predominantly Hindu context" (p. 31). That Arulappan attended to this context in developing a truly *Indian* Christianity is exemplified in his mission activities that included creating unique materials for fostering Christianity among the local population. However, as Joshua points out, rather than viewing Arulappan's work as the beginnings of a "genuinely Indian movement," there has been a tendency to depict it, because it was Christian, as standing apart from its Indian context. For Joshua, however, the movements founded by Arulappan and those that followed him must be seen as no less Indian than they are seen as Christian. This point is reiterated in Joshua's discussion (which follows his discussion of Arulappan) of the figure of Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), who, not unlike Arulappan, founded her own Christian settlement in India, the Mukti Mission. Here, Joshua points out that despite its Christian element, Ramabai's settlement was at its base an *ashram*, a place which drew upon models of Indian religiosity, but to which Ramabai had added the "gospel virtue of loving one's neighbour, particularly the disadvantaged and the vulnerable" (p. 41).

In subsequent chapters, Joshua continues to expose these strains of Indian religiosity within the Indian Christian churches, presenting detailed discussions of the Indian Christian revivalist movement (chapter 2); the Indian Pentecostal Church (chapter 3); the Bakht Singh evangelical movement (chapter 4); the devotionalist Indian Bible Mission in Andhra Pradesh (chapter 5); the Yesu Darbar, a faith healing tradition based in Allahabad (chapter 6); and the New Life Fellowship, a decentralized Christian movement (chapter 7). Along with exposing elements of Indian religiosity within these movements (as, for example engaging with the Christian evangelist Bakht Singh as a *guru* or the Indian Bible Mission as a *bhakti* tradition), Joshua also emphasizes the Indianness of these movements by delving into their relationship with the Indian independence movement. Here, as revealed in Joshua's discussions of the Bakht Singh Assemblies and the Indian Pentecostal Church, the development of Indian Christianity paralleled (as well as often overtly supported) the ideology of an independent India, eschewing foreign control of its missions just as it did foreign governance. In this, despite the fact that Indian Christianity may have had non-Indian origins, on Indian soil, Indian Christianity showed itself to be both politically as well as religiously Indian above all else.

In a similar vein, Joshua argues that even those Indian Christian movements that may have had contemporary parallels outside India, such as the revivalist movements that became prominent worldwide in the early 20th century, were built on elements that were uniquely Indian, or, as Joshua states, "rooted in the soil of India" (p. 58). In supporting his argument for an *Indian* Christianity, Joshua delves deeply into India's rich cultural history, from its casteism (and, in particular, the broad division between Brahmins and Dalits), to the cultural differences engendered by its regional divisions, to the elements of "traditional" Indian religiosity, including (but not limited to) devotion (*bhakti*), the figure of the *guru*; the Indian gods; ritual; and India's

“holy” geography. Here, Joshua’s work emphatically distinguishes itself from other related studies (nearly all the movements Joshua discusses have been discussed elsewhere) by exposing the Indian cultural background of these several, varied Indian Christian movements. Here, as Joshua states, rather than maintaining the long-held notion that Christianity as it developed over the centuries in India is in some sense a “foreign” tradition, it is time to acknowledge the essential “Indianness” of Indian Christianity: “an Indocentric taxonomy of Indian churches is long overdue...[and] older models need replacement with fresh ones that are true to contemporary, grounded reality” (p. 195).

In brief, Paul Joshua’s study, *Christianity Remade: The Rise of Indian-Initiated Churches*, is a work of substantial scholarship, standing both as a significant contribution to our understanding of Indian Christianity, and a corrective to the long-held view of this tradition as in some sense non-Indic. Throughout, Joshua presents his arguments with great clarity of thought, narrating them in well-crafted prose and substantiating them with a detailed scholarly apparatus. In exposing the structural elements that reveal the essential *Indianness* of Indian Christianity, Joshua has provided a path forward for scholars in exploring what he shows us to be the rich and varied cultural and religious landscape of Indian Christianity.