

Arun W. Jones. *Missionary Christianity and Local Religion: American Evangelicalism in North India, 1836-1870*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017. 344 pages. \$59.99, ISBN 9781602584327.

This is an exciting study on the history of Christian missions and their encounter with local religious sects in North India. It explores the relationship between American evangelical Christianity and the Hindu *bhakti* traditions in the Uttar Pradesh region during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It compares the social and ideological expressions within the two movements and highlights their similarities. Thus, the central thesis of the book is that the vital similarities between an emerging Protestantism and the deep-rooted yet downgraded *bhakti* sects led the missionaries to build Christianity on the religious spaces created by these sects. Jones persuasively argues that far from replacing Hinduism and Islam, Christianity had to settle in the margins, in the “Thirdspaces” of the *bhakti*-inspired movements.

A notable feature of this study is the use of the term “Hindi North India” for the territories the British had named the North-Western Provinces of Agra and Oudh. This renaming seems to be a deliberate attempt to ascribe a whole new identity to the region. The issue of identity, of both the missionaries and the locals, remains a central theme in this study meticulously framed within the methodical framework of the Thirdspaces perspective. Also, the comparison of similarities (and differences) between *bhakti* and evangelicalism is utilized to set the thesis in context.

The religious context of North India during the arrival of American missionaries is described in Chapter 1. Here the key characteristics of Hinduism and Islam with a focus to show how they appeared to the missionaries have been highlighted. The chapter briefly outlines Hinduism from its philosophical to popular expressions (*bhakti*) and Islam from its political to reform-oriented trends (*sufi*) respectively. Continuing with the theme of chapter 1, the second chapter focuses on the emergence of American Evangelicalism as the new religious movement within Hindi North India. It primarily discusses the work of pioneering Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries.

Chapter 3 identifies Christian missionaries as religious and social innovators. They are seen as the agents of change, religious specialists, people with zeal and compassion to serve God and the people. Missionaries are also identified as the pioneers in medical and educational services as well as the critics of economic, socio-religious and political conditions.

The life, the works, and thoughts of prominent Christians of Hindi North India is the subject matter of Chapter 4. Here we meet with native leaders such as Gopi Nanth Nundi, Zahur-al-Haqq, Joel Janvier, and Ishwari Dass. Each of them has been duly recognized as the “fighter for racial equality,” “interreligious interpreter,” “loyal mission worker,” and “Indian Christian intellectual” respectively. A section on the work of Indian Christian women briefly reflects on their roles in assisting the missionary wives as Bible Women and companions in the Zenanas. The critical issue of missionary authority over native Christians is touched upon insightfully.

With an attempt to explore indigenous theology, Chapter 5 undertakes a critical analysis of the *Lectures on Theology* of Ishwari Dass. Jones argues that Dass’ theological ideas were liberally borrowed from Princeton Theology (p. 191). However, Dass adapted it to his interreligious context by emphasizing the common foundations of God’s power and significance of human reason, and by re-forming Reformed theology under the themes of the Karmic moral economy, problem of suffering, the nature of the divine savior, etc. Jones looks at Dass’ work as a Thirdspace theology.

The last chapter describes the emergence of Indian Christian community, experience of converts from various backgrounds, and the establishment of Christian villages. It is argued that Evangelical Christianity constructed its communities in the marginal Thirdspace created by *bhakti* groups. A final argument is that the traditional Christianity, frustrated with denominationalism and other challenges, is creating its own Thirdspace in the independent movements such as the *Yesu Darbar* of Allahabad.

Overall, this is a people's history, well researched and well presented. Some readers might find an over emphasis on the Thirdspace allegedly provided by the *bhakti* groups. However, the author deserves appreciation for providing us with a candid analysis of Christian endeavors and experiences in Hindi North India. This book can serve as a definite model for doing history of missions with special attention to native Christian biography and theology, among other things. It will make an inevitable resource for both historians and missiologists, emerging or established, and occupy a CentralSpace in their bookshelf.

Shivraj K. Mahendra