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Book Review: "South Asian Christian Diaspora"

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who came to the US in 1920 to "teach yoga and the harmony between Krishna and Christ," and in the interpretative frameworks brought to these movements by people raised in Christian (and Jewish) families. But these do not accumulate into a sustained investigation into that interplay. In large part, this is because Williamson's main methodological concerns lie elsewhere.

One of the most thought-provoking aspects of the book is its engagement with insider/outsider questions in the study of religion. Williamson announces from the start her own involvement with TM for ten years and Siddha Yoga for twenty-two years. When she began research for the book as a Ph.D. student she was a devout disciple of Gurumayi. But when her fieldwork among current and ex-members of Siddha Yoga turned up mounting evidence of manipulation and abuse by leaders within the movement, including the supposedly enlightened founder-guru, Sri Muktananda, her idealism turned to bitterness. A recurring theme in the book is her effort to reconcile an appreciation for the manifold benefits she, and many other people, have experienced through meditation, and gratitude for the teachers who act as guides on the way, with evidence of widespread and recurring abuse within these movements. While Williamson is to be commended for her great empathy for her subjects, I was left ultimately disappointed by her reluctance or inability to go more deeply into one of the central questions of her book: Why is the phenomenon of abuse "endemic to many of these groups"?

The absence of a more critical methodology is also felt in her investigations of extraordinary mind-body states achieved through meditation practices. The chapter on "Mystical Experiences" consists mostly of lengthy first-

person accounts of unusual physical, emotional and cognitive phenomena people experienced while meditating or receiving *shaktipat* (the transmission of spiritual energy from gurus to disciples). William James, Abraham Maslow and other practitioners of various hermeneutics of appreciation are recruited to help make sense of these. Theorists inclined to interpret these experiences as effects of other, sociological or material causes (i.e. "reductionists," or "skeptics"), however, are entirely neglected. Williamson's reluctance to use more robust hermeneutics of suspicion in her analysis of mystical phenomena is connected, in my view, to her inability to generate a convincing explanation for the phenomena of abuse found in these, and I hasten to note, many, many other religious communities. Perhaps the cause of these highly valued experiences is tremendous social pressure and heightened psychological expectations. The authority granted to people whom one thinks are responsible for inducing them may lead a person to doubt his or her own feelings of being mistreated, and to deny the testimonies of others. It is not hard to see how this package could foster an unhealthy environment that suppresses dissent in a community, whatever its religious or ideological worldview.

In spite of my reservations, I actually would recommend this book for inclusion in a course on diaspora Hinduism, or living Hinduism. Given its lively use of sources and the author's positionality, the book raises important questions about authority, religious experience and abuse, even if the answers it gives are not ultimately satisfying.

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South Asian Christian Diaspora. Edited by Knut Jacobsen and Selva Raj. Cornwall: Ashgate, 2008, 267 pp.

Within the field of diaspora studies, one area which has received remarkably little attention is that of South Asian Christian diaspora. In the introduction to this volume, which has so far

received little attention, is that of South Asian Christian diaspora. In the introduction to this volume, Selva Raj and Knut Jacobson, the editors, reflect at some length on the reasons for

68 Book Reviews

this neglect: lesser interest in Christianity on the part of Western scholars of South Asian religions, presumption of compatibility of Indian and Western Christianity, numeric insignificance, etc. However, the increasing presence of South Asian Christians in various countries of Europe as well as the United States raises numerous questions of interest: how do communities negotiate their distinct cultural identities in new contexts in which they become part of a religious majority? How do they relate to fellow South Asians and to other religions in the diaspora context? How do they preserve and transmit their religious and cultural identity to new generations? These questions and more are addressed in this volume through careful studies of South Asian Christian diaspora communities in the UK, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Portugal, the Netherlands and North America. They provide a wealth of information on the history of the immigration of particular South Asian Christian communities to the West, and on the forms of religious and institutional adaptation which have taken place in particular contexts. One conclusion which the editors draw from the articles is the fact that "South Asian Christians do not have the sense of comprising a single society" (p. 8). Not only do the Indian Christian immigrants to Europe and North America belong to different Christian Churches, from Syrian Christian to Western Christian and from Roman Catholic to Evangelical Protestant, but they also come from different cultural and linguistic contexts (Goa, Kerala, Sri Lanka) and they develop different strategies of adaptation to their new cultural contexts. While some seek to assimilate with the new context and worship with local communities, others seek to define their distinct identity and culture even more sharply than was the case in their native land. And the institutional and spiritual needs of Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Catholics will be naturally different from those of Sri Lankan Tamil Catholics. The contributions to this volume shed light on different dimensions of the life and strategies of adaptation of South Asians in the West: on the development of a new popular pilgrimage for Tamils to the Madonna of Kevelaer (by Brigitte Luchesi), the marriage

patterns among Indian Christians (Farha Ternikar), on the particular situation of Goans migrating to Portugal (Helena Maria Mauricio C. Sant'ana) or of Evangelical Hindustani Christians to the Netherlands (Freek Bakker), and on the role of caste and the place of Dalits among Indian Christians in the West (Rachel McDermott).

In spite of the particularity of background and context of South Asian Christian diaspora communities, there are some interesting similarities or common tendencies which, though not entirely unpredictable or unique for diaspora communities, are very well documented in this volume. One tendency is the need to mark and preserve one's distinct identity by reinforcing traditional ritual patterns or creating new ones which separate one from the rest of the surrounding culture. In her contribution, Brigitte Sebastia points to the fact that Pondicherrians in Paris implement various aspects of the inculturation of the liturgy in India (use of arati etc.) which in India are often dismissed. Whereas in India, it is their (Western) Christianity which sets Christians apart from the dominant Hindu context, in Paris, it is the Indian form of the liturgy which offers a sense of distinctiveness. The development of the Tamil pilgrimage to the Madonna of Kevelaer is another example of ritual identity building of South Asians in Europe. The similarity between this Madonna and the one worshipped in Madhu in Sri Lanka has led to a mass gathering of Tamils every year at this pilgrimage site. Other traditional Indian customs which continue to be practiced, at times with a vengeance, in the West are purity regulations regarding food and menstruation, caste distinctions and of all marriage customs. While the caste identities of Christians in the West are less evident than in India, the diaspora Christian community still operates on the basis of "good" versus "low" caste, and Dalits continue to be looked down upon in the West. The volume points to the intricate relationships between culture and religion, where the idea of a shared religious faith may at times be experienced as a threat to one's cultural identity, and where one's own distinct religious and cultural practices are reinforced in a new cultural

environment in order to preserve the contours of one's identity and tradition. This would suggest that religious identity is shaped not only, or maybe even not primarily by the contents of one's beliefs, but by the details of ritual practice and symbolic expression, including the particularity of language, history and culture.

For many South Asian Christians, participation in religious life depends on the presence of clergy who can preside in their own native tongue and in their familiar rites. This is particularly the case with the Syro-Malabar Catholics (about 70,000 in the US alone) whose liturgy is very central to their faith and different from the Roman rite. Elisabeth Calmeron Galbraith and Selva Raj both discuss the situation and challenges of this community in the United States. While a bishop has been appointed to tend to their particular community needs, some of the challenges include vocations to the priesthood and a greater participation of lay people in the governance of the Church. While this is a particular issue for the Syrian Christians, Knut Jacobsen also states that Church attendance of Tamil Catholics in Norway also depends largely on the presence of a Tamil priest.

One of the primary concerns of first generation diaspora Christians is that of maintaining their cultural identity and values through endogamy. While there are an increasing number of love marriages among more highly educated immigrants, the practice of arranged or semi-arranged marriages is still most prevalent among South Asian Christians in the West, as Farha Ternikar points out. According to her, "Indian immigrants have the lowest rate of inter-marriage" (p. 204), and inter-racial marriages occur less frequently than inter-ethnic or inter-faith marriages (p. 206). It remains to be seen whether that continues in future generations.

One of the more surprising elements of the Indian Christian Diaspora is its missionary orientation, especially among fellow Indians. Whereas the religious situation in India allows for very little Christian evangelization, religious freedom in the West, combined with the existence of intimate Indian diaspora communities of Christians and non-Christians,

opens the opportunity for active promulgation of the faith. Eleanor Nesbitt points out that the attitude of Indian Christians in the UK toward other religions is on the whole negative, although Rachel McDermott's contribution also suggests some changes. Many Indian Christians, unlike their Western counterparts, therefore seize the opportunity to evangelize, which has led to a distinct group of Indian converts to Christianity in the West. In his contribution, Nori Henk discusses the strategies used in the process of proselytizing among fellow Indians as "doing friendships". One group which continues to preserve its marginal status, even in the United States, are the Dalits who fled discrimination in India. While this group of Indian Christians often join local communities, where their caste identity is not an issue, Rachel McDermott points out that they are still subject to forms of what she calls a "hidden apartheid." Ethnic Indian Churches appear to be the "least accepting" of Dalits, pointing again to the typical conservatism of immigrants and their need to maintain external as well as internal boundaries.

Even though the contributions may be seen as snapshots of the historical reality of Indian Christian diaspora in the United States and in Europe, the volume contains a wealth of information which paints an interesting picture of the forms of religious adaptation which take place among Indian Christians in the West. It clearly illustrates the various forces which are taking place in the process of the globalization of ethnic and religious communities, with new ethnic religious practices developing in traditional monocultural Western contexts, and communities attempting to preserve their own religious and cultural identity in new forms of minority situations.

South Asian Christian Diaspora is not only an important contribution to diaspora studies, but also a fitting tribute to one of its editors, Selva Raj, whose untimely death has shocked the whole community of scholars of South Asian Christianity and whose own work has left an indelible mark on the field.

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