

each of the mentioned works is performed and would have appreciated a glossary of the many Indian terms; nobody can command so many diverse languages.

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RAJ, SELVA J., and CORINNE G. DEMPSEY. *Popular Christianity in India: Riting Between the Lines*. SUNY Series in Hindu Studies. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002. xix + 284 pages. Figures, index. Hardcover US\$75.50; ISBN 0-7914-5519-x. Paper US\$25.95; ISBN 0-7914-5520-3.

In her foreword to this collection of ten articles examining different aspects of the practice of Christianity in India, Wendy Doniger describes the individual contributions as forming “a postpostcolonial historiography, one that views the Indians who were subject to Christian missions neither simply as victims nor simply as resisters (against Hinduism or Islam [...]), but rather as active agents [...]. This is the converts’-eye-view, the view from (in terms of political power) the bottom up” (xii–xiii). Further positioning the volume vis-à-vis an older tradition of writings on Christianity in India, in their own introduction to the collection the editors Selva Raj and Corinne Dempsey describe the territory which the contributors survey as the “‘messy’ terrain in which religious identities, borders, and authority are not concrete and absolute, but often fluid and subject to negotiation” (2). This central problematic of the shifting and merging nuances of religious affiliation and identity will be one that is familiar to anyone interested in popular religion in India. The chief value of the essays contained in this volume is therefore their ability to re-frame an old problem from an unfamiliar perspective: the position of India’s twenty million Christians. By examining aspects of Indian Christian ritual life, saint cults, and constructions of religious authority, the contributors help bring the study of Christianity in India out of the missionary archive and into the more multivocal realm of what the editors describe as a “dialogue on the streets” (3).

Like other works on the subject in recent years (DEMPSEY 2001, VISVANATHAN 1993), *Popular Christianity in India* claims a position for the study of Indian Christianity within the

mainstream of academic scholarship on religion in South Asia. In contrast to an older (and still current) tradition of mission and clergy-centered historical accounts of Christianity in India, here is a series of broadly ethnographic accounts of both India's Christians and those Indians who attend "Christian" sites without undergoing formal conversion. Less India Christianized than Christianity Indianized, what emerges from these essays is a Christianity of holy men and saints comparable to the Muslim *pīrs* in India whose own shrines are no less enmeshed in local religious forms and family/caste traditions. No less than in the cases of popular Islam and Hinduism in India, Christianity is also seen to occupy a zone that defies the neat conceptual boundaries dividing the "World Religions" into distinct realms. In one of his two contributions on popular Christian ritual practices, Selva Raj interviews Tamil pilgrims to the shrine of the Portuguese missionary John de Britto (1696) who describe the saint as "our family patron, our *ḷula teyvam* (family deity)" (94), an affiliation affirmed by Christian and Hindu pilgrims alike (87). The hair-shaving rituals and goat sacrifices that Raj also describes at John de Britto's and other Catholic shrines in the region, and the notion of fertility to which they are related, reflect similar practices at Hindu and Muslim shrines throughout India.

Similarities of religious practice and the shared nature of cultic space and custom also feature in Joanne Waghorne's article on Tamil chariot processions and Margaret Meibohm's account of pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Health at Velankanni. In the latter, Meibohm adopts a diachronic reading of Hindu references in the pilgrimage as references to the pre-conversion self of the Christian pilgrim: "Hindu practices are not only of the Other, and of the religious majority, but also of the past Self" (69). Such an approach is suggestive of the complexity and multiple layers of affiliation that exist within individual identities, pointing the researcher towards the use of the tightly focussed individual life-history to investigate the workings of "syncretism" in place of the more common collective study favored by so many social anthropologists. One such life-history does feature in the volume, in which Mathew Schmalz describes the activities of a contemporary North Indian Catholic healer. As is so regularly the case with the use of biographical data, Schmalz uncovers accounts of sexual transgression and rape that, as so often in South Asia, are articulated in terms of spirit possession. Other social transgressions—alcoholic, magical, or violent—form the background to Richard MacPhail's study of the *cepaḷulam* possession ritual among Tamil Christians and the tension its practice engenders with Church authorities. As the editors promise in their introduction, this is "messy" terrain indeed. Yet since real lives do so frequently encompass the vile and disorderly, the contributors' attempts to contextualize Christianity within real Indian lives makes the appeal and functions of its ministers and saints all the more convincing.

The three final studies in the volume address questions of institutional authority. Here we see how India's Protestants have been least receptive to the kinds of hybrid practice seen among other Indian Christian groups. In her fascinating response to this observation, Eliza Kent examines strategies of reading and the role of female literacy as a class and cultic boundary marker. Elsewhere, in their respective accounts of aspects of British missionary endeavor and the evolution of a Dalit liturgy, John Webster and Zoe Sherinian explore other elements of the interface between Christianity, class, and power.

A notable weakness of the collection is the absence of material on Christian interaction with Muslims in India. Given the political equation of Muslims and Christians in the rhetoric of the Hindu Right this seems a regrettable omission. Certainly, the many theological and historical continuities between Islam and Christianity offer innumerable avenues to explore their interaction (or lack of it) in India as compared with the long tradition of Christian-Muslim interchange in the Middle East. Fortunately, other scholars (ASSAYAG and TARABOUT 1997) have begun to address this issue. Some readers might also find the occasional collision of

anthropological and theological vocabulary jarring. Yet these criticisms should not detract from what is for the most part a fascinating volume and one that offers rich new insights into religious practice in India and into the study of postcolonial societies more generally.

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