

Indian Journal of Theology

Volume 65:1, 2023

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Editorial

Collecting articles for an academic journal is often a formidable task. I, on behalf of the editorial board, apologize for the inadvertent delay in bringing out this issue. I thank all the contributors for their articles despite their busy schedules. In this issue, there are seven articles and two book reviews. Each of these articles is written from a different perspective. The first article in this issue is a featured article contributed by Ivan M. Satyavrata. It was written for the Bishop John W. Sadiq Memorial Lecture delivered on the 13th of February 2023 at Bishop's College, Kolkata. In his article, "Bhakti Mysticism in Sadhu Sundar Singh's Journey to Christ," Satyavrata provides a detailed analysis of the influence of Sadhu Sundar Singh's pre-conversion religious impulses on his journey to Christ. He highlights the relevance of Sundar Singh's conversion experience in the current discourse on religious conversion. In his thorough analysis, Satyavrata concluded that the background and sources of Sundar Singh's pre-Christian *bhakti* mystical consciousness and understanding of his religious upbringing and influences prepared him for his journey to the experience of the Christian faith.

The second essay provides an in-depth exploration of various modern Christian theologies, focusing on liberal theology and conservative Protestant theology. In her article, "A Critical Analysis of the Development of Modern Christian Theologies," Vanlalhrui highlights various scholars' views on what constitutes modern theology with their differing opinions on the relationship between modernity and theology. In the development of modern theologies, her study shows that modern theologies can be classified into two trends, namely liberal and evangelical and they emphasize the different contextual issues and realities of

society. Among these two trends, evangelical theology impacted India, as she opines, because “this is the underlying theology held by the different denominations in India.” She concludes that though “theologies are formulated to meet the needs of the hour” no single theological method can adequately address or answer various contextual issues of society, hence, “theologies are open-ended.” Chenijan Patton, in his essay, “Indigenous Theology on Gender Justice in North East India: A Dialogue with Tribal Kitchen,” deals with a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by women in achieving gender justice in the Naga society of North East India. He highlights the significance of the “Naga kitchen” as a crucial space for societal conversations and explores its potential to foster gender equality. The essay is divided into three sections - the reinforcing factors of patriarchal structures, liberative elements from the tribal kitchen, and a call for an inclusive and just community. Patton concludes that it is this place, “the Naga kitchen, an epitome of love, care, and concern,” that the dream for “an ecclesia of justice, integrity, and inclusivity in the hills’ churches of Nagaland and beyond” can be realized.

In the following essay, “Social Change or Conversion? A Historical Analysis of the Serampore Mission from 1800-1858: A Critique,” Michael Chatterjee presents an analysis of the Serampore Mission in Bengal from 1800-1858, focusing on the tension between social change and conversion in the missionary activities of William Carey, Joshua Marshman, and William Ward. The essay highlights how the Trio’s mission was influenced by their belief in social responsibility and the desire to bring about a transformation in society. They worked towards empowering marginalized groups, such as women, and addressing social evils like the caste system, Sati, and infanticide. The missionaries aimed to provide education, translate texts, establish printing facilities, advocate against social injustices, and promote social reformation. They believed that Western education and their social activism would ultimately lead to conversion but that

did not happen. Chatterjee concludes that the modern scientific education, thinking, and social reform promoted by missionaries helped the native reformers to reform Hinduism rather than embracing Christianity.

The next two essays are written to demonstrate contrary religious beliefs and practices of Hinduism in contemporary India. Chumbeni Humtsoe, in her essay “Discerning the Concept of Religious Tolerance: A Perspective from the Hindu Religious Tradition,” aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the concept of religious tolerance within Hinduism, particularly in contrast to the rise of Hindutva ideologies in contemporary India. The author delves into the various ideologies and activities of Hindutva groups that are seen as a threat to religious tolerance. These include the promotion of an exclusive Hindu ideology, the quest for an undivided Hindu nation, cow vigilantism, criticism of secularism, attempts to saffronize education, the temple issue of Ram Janmbhoomi, and the issue of forced conversions through Ghar Wapsi. Based on Hindu Scriptures and philosophy, Hinduism has a tradition of acceptance, respect, and the freedom to choose different paths to salvation. However, Humtsoe presenting a thorough analysis of the topic, concludes that there is a clash between the true essence of religious tolerance in Hinduism and the ideologies propagated by Hindutva groups in contemporary India. This brand of Hindutva ideology must be challenged to “reignite the true essence of Hinduism for better living as humans bonded by the common ties of humanity.”

Prakash Pal in “An Appraisal of Samartha’s Dialogue in the Context of Hindutva Ideology,” provides an in-depth analysis of the theological and ideological perspective of Stanley J. Samartha, a prominent figure in Indian Christian theology. The essay explores Samartha’s approach to interfaith dialogue and contextualizes it within the pluralistic framework of India. The author emphasizes Samartha’s sensitivity to the Indian context and his desire for interfaith dialogue. It is argued that Samartha’s

engagement with different faith traditions led him to stress the importance of understanding the Hindu majority and fostering interfaith relationships. The author highlights Samartha's respect for other faiths and desires to avoid exclusivity. However, in the context of hostile, volatile, and dangerous political situations, a dialogue with the people of other faith traditions appears to be impractical. Pal concludes, "Dialogue as a Mission is irrelevant in the context of Hindutva ideology and practically not feasible and viable in the contemporary context of India especially after 2014."

In the last essay, "Unraveling the Mind's Tapestry: An Assessment of Cognitive Science of Religion for Insights and Challenges in the Study of Religion," Rodinmawia Ralte presents a comprehensive overview of the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR), starting with the origins of cognitive science and moving into its application in the study of religion. It explains how cognitive science views the mind as an information-processing system and describes how various disciplines, such as psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy, contribute to this field of study, including its emphasis on understanding religious beliefs and practices from a cognitive perspective. Further, the essay emphasizes CSR's incremental approach to religion, and methodological pluralism, and focuses on recurrent cognitive patterns underlying religious beliefs and practices. However, numerous inquiries were raised regarding the feasibility and credibility of the Cognitive Science of Religion, including the reliability of evolutionary theory. Hence, Ralte concludes that even though "the cognitive science of religion has made important contributions to our understanding of religious beliefs and practices, it is important to be aware of these criticisms and limitations."

Subhro Sekhar Sircar
Editor

Bhakti Mysticism in Sadhu Sundar Singh's Journey to Christ

*Ivan Satyavrata**

I opened the door to see where it came from, but it was dark outside. I returned inside, and the light increased in intensity and took the form of a globe of light above the ground, and in the light there appeared, not the form I expected, but the living Christ I had counted as dead. To all eternity, I shall never forget his glorious and loving face, nor the few words which he spoke: 'Why do you persecute me? See, I have died on the cross for you and for the whole world.' These words were burned into my heart as if by lightning, and I fell on the ground before him. My heart was filled with inexpressible joy and peace, and my whole life was entirely changed. Then the old Sundar Singh died and a new Sundar Singh, to serve the living Christ, was born.

Introduction

This is the personal testimony of his conversion to Christ of one of India's most famous and enigmatic followers of Christ, Sadhu Sundar Singh. There has been a revival of interest in Sundar Singh in recent years [Most recently, the International Webinar at the end of 2022, sponsored by the Sadhu Sundar Singh Global Forum,

* Revd. Dr. Ivan M. Satyavrata is the former President of the Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore, the Emeritus Senior Pastor of the Kolkata A. G. Mission, and a Theologian and Author. Originally, this essay was written for the Bishop John W. Sadiq Memorial Lecture delivered on 13th of February 2023 at Bishop's College, Kolkata. Revd. Dr. Satyavrata has agreed to allow it to be published in the *Indian Journal of Theology*.