

International Conference
on
Indian Christianity and its Transformative Potentials:
A Multidisciplinary Exploration
6 & 7 December 2021
(Blended Mode—Online / Offline)

Christianity dawned on Indian soil with the arrival of Apostle Thomas in the early centuries of the common era. The bequests of Christianity experienced by the people of the subcontinent since then are analogous to their multifarious contexts in respect of education, language, and literature besides Indian social reformation (Firth 1968). Nita Kumar (1993)'s observation that the central contribution of Christian missionaries has not been so much conversion to Christianity as it has been conversion to modernity points to Indian Christianity's transformative potentials, which provoked both positive and negative reactions among the Indian common public. Taking cue from existing works on Indian Christianity, this conference seeks to look at the transformation journey of Indian Christianity, and the influences and reactions it produced subsequently. Transformative potentials of Indian Christianity encompassed twin processes of transforming and being transformed by its presence in the culture and history of India. Not only did Indian Christianity transform Indian society in terms of education, culture and language but it also stood to gain by the very transformation it underwent by adopting local art, architecture, music, literatures and philosophy, a transformation that significantly and profoundly impacted the very character of Christianity itself in this part of Asia.

An abridgment of Christianity in India could unravel a few significant 'moments' that occurred across different geographical locations and historical time periods in India. In this regard, this conference identifies at least four key moments in the process of uncovering the dynamics of Indian Christianity from the view point of transformation.

The first moment known as the '*Adoptive moment*' of Indian Christianity embodies a complex set of initiatives taken by the missionaries like *Robert De Nobili, Constanzio Beschi, Bishop Robert Caldwell, Vedanayagam Pillai, Francis Mary of Toure, S. H. Kellogg, Theophilus Appavu* etc., to establish Christianity in the Indian milieu and to articulate Christian faith in Indian categories such as *vedic, vedantic, folk and tribal* traditions of India by engaging with local cultural and religious traditions positively. In this regard, scholars like Susan Bayly, Rowena Robinson, David Mose and others show how local Christians (Syrian, Tamil and Goan Christians) received their Christian faith and embodied it in their respective socio-cultural idioms and expressed it through local ritual, music, literature, art and architectural forms and styles. The second moment known as the '*Expansionist moment*' of Indian Christianity encompasses not only multiple proselytizing strategies (including direct and indirect methods of evangelization) undertaken by Christian missionaries but also the agency of the local people who embraced Christianity for various reasons. The works of Pickett, Forrester, Wesley, Oddie and others have well documented people's agency in the mass conversion movements which occurred mainly among the Dalit and tribal communities across India in the late 19th and early 20th century.

The third moment rightly called the '*Contributive moment*' of Indian Christianity attempts to locate different articulations of Christian faith that evolved in the process of nation building and the social changes it entailed as found in the works of Arockiaswamy and Chathanatt (2000), Binu John (2001) and Thumma and Sahayam (2003). There were a number of Christians involved with nationalistic movements including *K.T. Paul, V. Chakkarai, Paul Appaswamy, Pickett, E. Stanley Jones, V.Z. Azariah* and in the framing of Indian Constitution as noted by Sebastian C.H. Kim (2003), Rudolf C. Heredia (2014, 2012 2007). The fourth moment called as '*Identity or Unity moment*' of

Indian Christianity draws our attention to Indian Christianity's attempts towards unity and identity formation—past (as in the case of emergence NCCI, CBCI, CSI, EFI, CNI through the efforts of leaders like *P.D. Devanandan, M. M. Thomas, Paulose Mar Gregories, K.T. Paul, S.K. George, E.V. Matthew, Russel Chandran, Rev. V. Santiago, Bishop Azariah*) and on-going (All India Christian Council, All India Catholic Union) especially in the changing context of India as seen in the initiatives taken by John Dayal, Cedrick Prakash and Ajaya Singh, to name a few.

While diversity apparently remains as the permanent legacy of Indian Christianity, its transformative role, as an ongoing project has to invent new pathways to register its distinctive presence in contemporary India. Viewed from this vantage point, Indian Christianity's march towards the future certainly faces not only some promising prospects but also a fusillade of challenges — such as growing religious fundamentalism, undermining of democratic institutions, suppression of voices of dissent, the unbridled growth of global markets, destruction of ecological balance and the sufferings of migrants/refugees, to name a few. These challenges that the people of India encounter have to be addressed by Indian Christianity if it has to remain a people's religion. Thus, the transformative potential of Indian Christianity is a continuing process. The idea of Indian Christianity as a transforming agent and a transformed entity makes the exploration imperative, urgent and multi-disciplinary on various aforementioned aspects, challenges and opportunities outlined in the four moments of Indian Christianity.

Against this background, this conference aims to undertake a multi-disciplinary inquiry into and critical assessment of Indian Christianity and its transformative potentials. The conference welcomes original presentations, based on research including but not limited to the following sub-themes:

- The Indian 'ness' of Indian Christianity
- Christianity as a Colonial/Post-Colonial religion in India
- Ecumenism and Christian unity in India
- Christianity and human rights in India
- Women and Gender Politics in Indian Christianity
- The Differently-abled and Indian Christianity
- Ecological crisis and Indian Christian Engagement
- Tribal Christian history and traditions in India
- Natural Disasters, Pandemic and Indian Christianity
- Digital/social media and Indian Christianity
- The Nation State, Constitutional provisions, legal frameworks and Indian Christians
- Competing Religious Interests, Electoral Policies and Indian Christianity
- Civil society, Indian Christians and Public engagement

A brief proposal not exceeding 300 words needs to reach iccs2021unom@gmail.com and xtianstudies@gmail.com on or before **30 October 2021**. Results on the selected papers will be made known by **15 November 2021**. Selected paper presenters need to send in their final **paper by 30 November 2021**. Papers with clarity of thought, cogency of ideas and critical reflections will be considered for publication in an edited volume/peer reviewed journal post-seminar.

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