

Rakesh Peter-Dass. *Hindi Christian Literature in Contemporary India*. London and New York: Routledge, 2019. 236 Pages. \$119.29. ISBN 9780367322236.

Hindi is not only the official national language of India but also the lingua franca of Christians in India. Although English continues to enjoy the position of dominance as the language of learning and communications, Hindi has prominently been the language of life, worship, and mission of the north Indian church at large. Hindi has thus been the lifeline of Christianity in the North and yet its potential and significance have remained unnoticed, unrecognized, or neglected for quite so long, especially in academia. This unfortunate neglect has come to an end with the present pioneering and scholarly study by Rakesh Peter-Dass.

In its six meticulous chapters, the book engages with the following themes and issues: (1) Politics of Religion, (2) The Making of a Genre, (3) Linguistic Choices, (4) Shaping Identity, (5) Christians in India, and (6) Message Matters. The first chapter deals with the background, emergence, and definition of Hindi Christian literature and its religio-political significance, especially in the cultural context of the resurgent Hindu nationalism. It is argued that “Hindi Christian works counter the politics of religion and language prevalent in independent India.” (p. 5). The second chapter reflects on the forms and types of Hindi Christian literature with illustrations from prominent Hindi Christian authors. Here the reader is introduced to two types of works, doctrinal (by Bishop Din Dayal, Shivraj Kumar Mahendra, and John Anand) and narrative (by Komal Masih, Christopher Peter, Sarojini Arya, Udit Sona, and Benjamin Khan).

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 explore several crucial questions: (1) What linguistic choices do the Indian Christians have? (2) How best can the Indian Christians use Hindi to express their ideas without aligning with Hindu and or Western ideas? (3) How have Christian missionaries, such as William Carey, and key Hindu thinkers used Hindi to understand, articulate, and express Christian terms and concepts? (4) What image and identity does Hindi Christian authors and literature claim in the context of a multi-religious or plural fabric of Indian society? (5) How do Christians best represent and witness their faith in the wake of mass media revolutions such as, television, and religious programs such as the *Ramayana*? Rakesh Peter-Dass skillfully engages various Hindi scholars such as Dayal, Khan, and Richard Howell, among others, to sum up the challenges of Christian representation and interfaith engagement in contemporary India. He points out to the significance of doing theology and ethics in the pattern and paradigm of the values of the Kingdom of God promoting justice, peace, and fellowship. (p. 179).

The final chapter critically reckons not only the set of forces – (1) history of Christian missions, (2) Indian Christianity of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, and (3) the Indian cultural contexts – that have shaped (and continue to reshape) Hindi Christian literature, but also prophetically underlines the role of institutions (such as, the ISPCK, HTLC, etc.) as well as individuals (indigenous authors and translators in particular) in the ongoing and challenging journey of Hindi Christian literature. The author also touches upon religion-politico-linguistic challenges to Christian theologizing in Hindi and also highlights the contesting relationship between English, Hindi, and Urdu/Hindustani. Finally, the efforts of Hindi Christians to be “Hindi, Indian, and Christian” (p. 192) has been bravely interpreted as an attempt to reconfigure the politics of language and religion in the nation.

While some readers may feel uncomfortable with Peter-Dass’ treatment of the subject as overly politicizing the nature and function of Hindi Christian literature, they will surely appreciate his ground breaking study of a much needed yet neglected area of exploration in

Indian Christianity. Yes this is an uncomfortable book! It boldly exposes the religious politics of language and challenges the Hindi Christians to get out of their comfort zones and ensure their contribution to Hindi Christian literature. This book distinctly represents a well researched historical-theological investigation that duly voices the identity and significance of Hindi as a powerful missiological tool for a strategic Christian witness in India in our time.

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