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BOOK REVIEW

Joseph, Clara A.B. *India's Nonviolent Freedom Struggle: The Thomas Christians (1599 - 1799)*, London and New York: Routledge, 2024, Pages: xv +164. ISBN: 978-1-032-83576-1

India's Nonviolent Freedom Struggle is a seminal work by Clara A. B. Joseph that reinterprets the Indian freedom movement, focusing on the Thomas Christians, a South Indian Christian community that engaged in nonviolent resistance against European colonization from 1599 to 1799. This book has five chapters, and it pursues three main objectives: providing an in-depth analysis of primary sources rarely studied by scholars, challenging existing discourses in canonical and postcolonial studies about the Indian nation, and reconceptualizing the postcolonial nation by exploring the nonviolent resistance of the Thomas Christians. Highlighting their significant yet often overlooked contributions to India's nonviolent struggle for independence, Joseph, a Professor of English and Religious Studies at the University of Calgary, reveals the complex dynamics between colonizers and the colonized, encouraging a reimagining of their relationship. This essential text for scholars of colonialism, anticolonial movements, and Indian history offers a unique perspective on a lesser-known aspect of India's freedom struggle.

The author uses a letter from Francis Xavier in 1545 to illustrate the foundational characteristics of colonialism: power, theft, injustice, and exploitative discourse. She demonstrates how the Thomas Christians, tracing their lineage to St. Thomas, combined martial and nonviolent resistance, notably through the Coonen Cross Oath of 1653, which showcased their preference for non-cooperation over subjugation. Joseph draws comparisons between their methods and Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha, showing that nonviolent resistance was part of Indian culture long before Gandhi's time.

A significant portion of the book focuses on the Thomas Christians' struggle against the Portuguese, who used religious reforms as tools of colonial control. The Synod of Diamper (1599), led by Archbishop

Alexis de Meneses, is examined as a colonial tool enforcing Latinization and suppressing local Christian traditions. The book also critiques postcolonial scholarship for often neglecting the anti-colonial efforts of Indian Christians in the sixteenth century.

The author illustrates how ecclesiastical policies intertwined with colonial ambitions, revealing that the Thomas Christians maintained their traditions and resisted colonial influences through non-cooperation and strategic use of their liturgical texts. Figures like Archdeacon George of Christ exemplified this resistance by refusing ordination under the Latin rite. The author argues that the Thomas Christians' theological stance was both canonical and anticolonial, and their resistance strategies necessitate a broader understanding of colonial resistance in India.

The narrative also delves into the Synod of Diamper's impact on the Thomas Christians, describing the Machiavellian tactics used by the Portuguese to enforce compliance, such as prohibiting clergy from trade and enforcing clerical celibacy to ensure dependence on the Portuguese. These measures were colonial strategies rather than purely religious reforms. The resistance of the Thomas Christians, including migration and direct opposition, is portrayed as part of a broader anticolonial struggle.

The book also explores the Coonen Cross Oath of 1653 as a pivotal act of resistance against Jesuit control and Portuguese economic exploitation, emphasizing the intertwining of religious and anti-colonial sentiments. Joseph discusses the schism within the Thomas Christians and the broader socio-political dynamics, highlighting their strategic non-cooperation and ecclesiastical self-determination.

In the eighteenth century, the narrative shifts to European colonial competition and internal divisions among the Thomas Christians. Joseph uses *The Varthamanappusthakam*, India's first modern travelogue, to shed light on the community's struggles and resistance against Portuguese interference. The book critiques the European missionaries' exploitation of the Thomas Christians and their economic resources, arguing that this exploitation was part of the broader colonial project.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2022 statement about India's long struggle for freedom serves as a modern reflection on the enduring resistance against colonial powers. Joseph's work underscores the importance of recognizing the Thomas Christians' contributions to

India's freedom struggle, challenging the misconception that Indian Christians were passive supporters of European colonization.

To summarize, *India's Nonviolent Freedom Struggle* emphasizes the need to revisit and include minority narratives in the broader history of India's independence movement. This brings to light the intricate relationships that exist between religion, colonialism, and resistance.. This book provides the reader with a historical treat about the history of the Indian Church, particularly the Thomas Christians, as well as the legacy of the Indian nonviolent freedom struggle. The book challenges the misconception that traditional Christians did not lead the freedom struggle against European colonization in India. It argues that Thomas Christians were actively involved in anti-colonial efforts, enduring and resisting oppressive measures of their times. Historical narratives have often misrepresented their struggle as solely ecclesiastical or spiritual, overlooking their broader socio-political impact. The text highlights the importance of re-examining colonial documents and policies, such as mandatory clerical celibacy, as products of colonization that need decolonization. It emphasizes the need for ecumenical dialogue to include decolonial perspectives, replacing colonial interpretations of resistance with decolonial critiques. By studying the nonviolent resistance of Thomas Christians, the book seeks to redefine India's freedom struggle, highlighting the unity of religion and state during colonialism and the persistent socio-economic inequalities in postcolonial societies. This scholarly and scientific work is deserving of special appreciation and I strongly recommend this book to all who have a passion for history, particularly those who are scholars of Indian History, World Religions, and Postcolonial Studies. May people benefit from this edifying work of Joseph.

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