

BOOK REVIEW

Mahimai Dass A., *A Short History of Christianity in Karnataka*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2025, Pages: xvi+243. ISBN: 978-81-992858-8-0.

The book under review, *A Short History of Christianity in Karnataka*, is a commendable work by Mahimai Dass A. It is an expanded version of three research papers presented by Mahimai at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, as part of the Fr Mundadan Lectures on the History of Christianity in Karnataka. The book, comprising twenty-six chapters, explores the various stages of Christianity's history in Karnataka and includes a General Introduction and a General Conclusion. The Foreword by Joby Jose emphasises the significance of the work as "a thorough, evidence-based analysis that powerfully advocates for the faith's significant and positive impact on the region" (p. xi).

The General Introduction itself is a valuable resource for those seeking a concise overview of the theme, outlining the fundamental aspects of Christianity in Karnataka. The author states that the aim of the work is to explore the positive contributions of Christianity to the social, cultural, and educational progress of Karnataka (p. 6). The work aims to counteract vested political and religious interests by providing a clear understanding of Christianity's role in the comprehensive development of the people and society in Karnataka. It highlights the dedicated service and contributions of notable figures such as Ferdinand Kittel, Dewan Thumboochetty, B. L. Rice, and A. M. Tabard, along with the lasting legacy of institutions such as St. Aloysius College Mangalore, St. Joseph's College Bangalore, St. Martha's Hospital Bangalore, Fr. Muller's Hospital Bangalore, the Bible Society of India, and the mission hospitals established in Mysore, Udupi, Hassan, and other regions of the state.

The work has three parts. The first part discusses the history of Christianity in Coastal Karnataka, outlining the origins of Christianity in the Canara Coast, the Padroado-Propaganda conflicts in Canara, persecution by Tipu Sultan, and the Canara Christians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Canara Coast refers to the

320-kilometre-long coastal region of Karnataka, comprising the districts of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, and Uttara Kannada (p. 11). The five chapters in this section trace a historical journey from 1521 to 1982 in the twentieth century. At the end of the first part, an assessment of the Canara Christian community is provided, emphasising their resilience even during severe adversities; from which several distinguished public figures emerged. However, they achieved only limited success in evangelising the local people of other faiths. The Basel Mission, by contrast, recorded notable success in this regard by engaging the local populace (p. 70-73).

The second part covers the history of Christianity in the interior of Karnataka; it discusses the Jesuit Mysore mission in the seventeenth century, persecutions during the same period, the Jesuit Mysore mission in the eighteenth century, the Jesuit Carnatic Mission in Karnataka, and the North Karnataka Missions. It also examines the revival of the Mysore mission under the MEPs in the nineteenth century, along with the developments in interior Karnataka during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This section concludes with an assessment of Christianity in interior Karnataka. Christianity faced significant obstacles in making inroads into the Mysore kingdom due to the Hindu community's resistance to Christianity (p. 151). Other contributing factors included the caste system among Hindus, the suppression of the Society of Jesus, the absence of pastoral care until the arrival of MEP missionaries, the anti-Christian stance of Tipu, and the reluctance to promote local Christians to priesthood – factors that limited the mission's progress. However, the later efforts of the MEP missionaries to make the Church in India self-sufficient through the formation of local clergy yielded positive results (p. 153).

The third part discusses the history of the Protestant Churches in Karnataka and covers the Basel Mission in general, its contributions to Kannada literature and social change, as well as the Wesleyan Methodist mission, and the Methodist and London Missions in Karnataka. As with the previous sections, this part concludes with an assessment of the significant and enduring Protestant Missions in Karnataka. Several eminent scholarly missionaries made notable contributions to literary and cultural spheres; furthermore, the Protestant mission overall contributed substantially to education, medicine, social service, and spiritual care.

It is observed that the Catholic and Protestant Churches preferred to pursue their missions independently, and the two traditions often

found themselves in open conflict, resulting in the weakening of the Christian witness in Karnataka. Consequently, two divergent models of mission strategies developed in Karnataka, and both approaches continue to influence the identity and structures of Christianity there (p. 224).

This book offers an invaluable and comprehensive guide to understanding the history of Christianity in Karnataka from the correct perspective. It serves as a handy resource and is an engaging read for all interested in history, and is truly worth exploring. The bibliography, which includes details of archival materials, relevant books, articles, and websites; as well as the index provided at the end, are very useful. Although it is not a comprehensive or exhaustive study, one limitation of the work could be its reliance solely on secondary sources. The mission by the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate in Mysore and surrounding areas, along with their educational ministry through two Deemed-to-be Universities, could also have been explored. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that this work is one of the best reference materials for libraries, teachers, and students in seminaries and theological faculties. I recommend this book, and I hope many will make use of it and benefit from this enlightening work.

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