

# Preface

The superlatives about India are many. It is expected to surpass China as the world's most populated nation in the year 2022. It is the world's largest democracy. It is a top ten nation according to area size. It has the second most English speakers in the world after the USA, and is probably the most ethnically diverse country. It is a top ten nation in its Gross Domestic Product and in Purchasing Power Parity. It is among the fastest-growing economies with a steadily increasing population. Its biodiversity is one of the richest on the planet. Its northern border views the largest mountains in the world. It contains the rainiest, most fertile land on earth. It can easily feed hundreds of millions of people, perhaps even billions. Its huge film industry rivals Hollywood. Its business culture is robust and increasingly powerful. It is one of only a handful of nations with nuclear capabilities.

So why do people often think of religion when they think of India? There are many reasons, but an obvious one is that India treasures its religious heritage. Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Bahai Faith . . . they all have substantive histories in India. India is the birthplace of numerous

religions, and its religious culture is truly impressive, arguably more so than any other nation. Religiosity in India is palpable and complex, both practical and extremely philosophical. Attached to nearly every landmark is a religious idea, whether a monument, a story, an explanation, or a gathering of pilgrims. Religion exudes out of India, out of its temples, mountains, waters, and people.

One of the lesser-known stories is India's long and ancient relationship with Christianity. It is a fascinating history that begins far earlier than most Christians would think. Indians hold that the gospel entered their nation through the missionary work of the Apostle Thomas in the year AD 52. Thomas is revered by Indians for his missionary work. "Thomas Christians" take their name from him, and have done so for many centuries.

India's Christian population is as diverse as Christianity itself. Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Protestants of all stripes are anchored deeply in the nation. The Thomas Christians (Orthodox) of Malabar are among the world's oldest Christian communities. The largest national Jesuit population is in India, where they have had a presence since 1541. Indeed Francis Xavier himself—the Jesuit co-founder—worked in India and still rests there. Protestantism has deep roots in India, as missionaries arrived to its shores in 1706. William Carey, one of the most famous Protestant missionaries of all time, landed at Kolkata in 1793. A burgeoning Pentecostal culture has been alive and active there at least since Pandita Ramabai's Mukti revival in 1905. The Church of South India—one of the world's first officially ecumenical churches—was inaugurated in 1947, just a month after Indian independence from Britain was achieved.

Indian Christianity, like India itself, is vast, vibrant, and

fascinating. No one knows for sure how many Christians are in India. Educated guesses range anywhere between 30–80 million, depending on who is counting. Whatever the case, one thing is clear: Indian Christianity is worth studying. Tens of millions of Christians call this land home. Indeed Christianity is India's third largest religion after Hinduism and Islam. There are more Christians in India than there are Sikhs, Buddhists, or Jains. When university courses offer courses on the "Religions of India" they should have no excuse for excluding Christianity. But alas, that mistake is often made.

This book is a journey into Christian India. We invite you to join our exploration of the Indianness of Christianity. And while we travel, let us not forget that Christianity is a profoundly Indian religion.