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## Book Review: "Gandhi's Pilgrimage of Faith: From Darkness to Light"

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on the reports of others and not directly from the texts of the local people. Ziegenbalg is remembered also for his work on Tamil grammar and his translation of the Bible into Tamil.

This book has to be placed in the context of intercultural encounter. One of the contributions of the missionaries in South India for example, like Ziegenbalg, later on Karl Graul, Schomerus, Amos Lehmann and others, is their translation of major Tamil works into German, which established in Europe the independent cultural identity of the literature and culture of the Tamil people on a par with Sanskrit tradition as presented by the Western Indologists, and thus it shaped the European

consciousness in understanding and appreciating the South Indian culture. In a way such an approach also supported the Dravidian movement in the South against the process of Sanskritisation with all its implications.

Daniel Jeyaraj has done a great service in making the works of Ziegenbalg known to the English speaking world, which creates a new awareness of this phenomenon and also places the missionary contribution in a different light than merely identifying the Christian mission as Western hegemony or colonial heritage.

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***Gandhi's Pilgrimage of Faith: From Darkness to Light.*** Uma Majmudar. Foreword by Rajmohan Gandhi. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, 280 + xv pages.

**MOST** visitors to Chennai will likely remember a very striking bronze image of Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948) along Marina Beach. This statue captures Gandhi mid-stride, with staff in hand and head down, clearly intent on the journey ahead. This is also, in a way, the basic portrait offered by Uma Majmudar in *Gandhi's Pilgrimage of Faith*. Gandhi emerges in its pages as a kind of pilgrim, whose "outer achievements" as an Indian nationalist followed from a much more fundamental "interior journey to Truth" (233). Majmudar characterizes this journey in psychological and spiritual terms as a lifelong process of faith development which began in Gandhi's infancy and reached its climax shortly before his assassination. By offering such a portrait, she attempts to cut behind the various hagiographical and Freudian "myths and misconceptions" that have accumulated around the memory of "the Mahatma" (13), as well as to "finish that unfinished story" that Gandhi himself initiated with his *Story of My Experiments with Truth* (233).

Given the nature and boldness of Majmudar's objective, it comes as no surprise that the majority of her book consists of an extended re-telling of Gandhi's life story from his childhood (chs. 2-5) through his studies in London (ch. 6), early experiments with *satyagraha* in South Africa (chs. 7-9), and eventual leadership in the Indian independence movement (chs. 10-11). In constructing this narrative, Majmudar depends heavily upon existing treatments of Gandhi's life and thought, especially the contributions of Bondurant, Chatterjee, Erikson, Fischer, Pyarelal, Radhakrishnan and Woodcock. In interpreting it, however, she looks to a rather different source: the six "stages of faith" enumerated in James W. Fowler's theory of faith development. Hence, Gandhi's journey becomes not only a pilgrimage but also a kind of ascent, beginning with "intuitive-projective faith" and maturing, step-by-step and stage-by-stage, into "universalizing faith," the apex of Fowler's schema. This approach, Majmudar claims, is intended to render Gandhi accessible as a

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“believable man of faith” (234), whose extraordinary journey followed the same “invariant sequence” prescribed for any other human being (238). Tracing Gandhi’s “stages of faith,” in other words, is intended to return our attention to the flesh-and-blood humanity that lay beneath and behind the remembered image of this larger-than-life saint.

At the same time, Majmudar also believes that Fowler’s theory can help explain otherwise puzzling features of her subject’s life and personality. In chapters 5 through 7, for example, she attempts to illustrate how the experimentation of Gandhi’s London years, far from representing wasted time, actually effected a vital transition from the “synthetic-conventional faith” of his adolescence to the “individuating-reflective faith” that flourished in South Africa. And, in chapter ten, she further argues that the many apparent contradictions and paradoxes of Gandhi’s later life revealed precisely that “coincidence of opposites” that Fowler discerns in stage five, labelled “conjunctive faith” (188-95). Throughout, Fowler’s theory is employed as a “heuristic guide” to offer explanations and draw out the most salient features of the primary subject of the study (237). Gandhi illustrates and exemplifies Fowler’s theory, but it is Gandhi’s own journey that remains at the center of attention.

From the perspective of Hindu-Christian studies, Majmudar’s otherwise commendable focus leaves many questions about her methodology unanswered. Unlike Gandhi’s life story, for example, Fowler’s theory is not situated within an interpretive context. It does not seem to matter, for example, that James Fowler is an ordained minister of the United Methodist Church, who developed his theory—at least in part—as a tool for Christian spiritual formation. Though Majmudar is at points sharply critical of Eric Erikson’s social-psychological reading of Gandhi’s relationships to parents and friends (e.g. 40-

41, 64-65), moreover, she does not explore the influence of such theorists as Piaget, Kohlberg and even Erikson himself on Fowler’s understanding of maturation and identity-formation. Finally, while Majmudar quite rightly draws attention to Fowler and Gandhi’s shared, inclusive approach to “faith” as an intrinsic feature of human existence (12, 238), the debt of the former to Paul Tillich and H. Richard Niebuhr in this regard remains largely implicit. No doubt such inquiry would have taken Majmudar a bit beyond her stated topic. Without it, however, she risks doing to Fowler’s *theory* precisely what she wishes to avoid in Gandhi’s legacy: in place of an abstracted portrait of “the Mahatma,” free from conflict, contradictions and complexity, we may find ourselves faced with a theory of faith formation similarly abstracted from any context that might limit its normative value . . . notwithstanding Majmudar’s claim that “not all figures of faith go through this developmental process” (238). One implicit suggestion of this study is that it is precisely by his progress through Fowler’s stages that Gandhi’s full humanity becomes most evident.

There are myths and there are myths, after all. Behind Gandhi’s legendary status, as Majmudar very nicely illustrates, there is indeed a story of spiritual pilgrimage and interior faith development; behind any vision of progress from one stage of a generic “faith” to another, we might add, there is also the irreducible uniqueness of each such spiritual journey. Majmudar has not “finished” Gandhi’s story, as she claims, and for this we should be grateful. What she *has* accomplished is, nevertheless, very important, for *Gandhi’s Pilgrimage of Faith* offers a highly original and valuable point of entry to this unique spiritual journey. I, for one, will never view that statue in Chennai quite the same way after reading her book.

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