

Proposal for IAMS 2020

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The Changing Dimensions of Reception Narratives from Bombay to Mumbai

Abstract

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began missionary activity in India in the 1850s. Seventeen missionaries were sent from England, Scotland and the United States. These men encountered a world in India that was more deeply wounded than any they had seen in their Euro-American contexts. By 1857 with only a few scattered converts, mostly of European descent, the missionaries gathered with other Latter-day Saints in the American West. The emphasis on gathering to one central place in order to build the Church meant that many of the Indian converts were left behind and unsupported.

This paper will focus on two of these early LDS missionaries to India, Hugh and Allan Findlay, brothers who came from Scotland and served in mainly in Bombay and Poona. Drawing from archival sources including journals, letters, and orientalist writings of Hugh and Allan Findlay I will examine how they compare to other Euro-American missionaries of their time and place. I will also look at the inequalities in the numbers of native Indian converts versus the European ones and begin to unpack the realities on the ground in Nineteenth-century Western India to understand the power dynamics among missionaries and those they served.

The all-male, Euro-American make-up of the Latter-day Saint Missionary force was replaced in the Twentieth Century with a more equally dispersed cadre of both male and female, foreign and Indian born missionaries. This paper will draw from an archive of over 100 oral history interviews and several years of field work in India to retrace the steps of the Findlay brothers in Mumbai (modern-day Bombay) and Hyderabad to place mission in the Church of Jesus Christ in the context of India today and understand how healing has occurred and where vulnerabilities remain.