

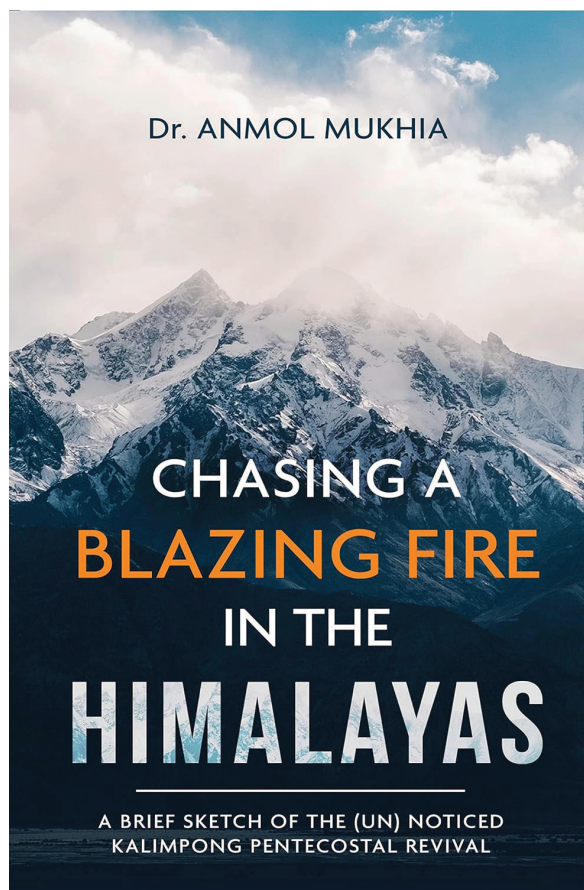
Book Review

Review of *Chasing a Blazing Fire in the Himalayas: A Brief Sketch of the (Un)Noticed Kalimpong Pentecostal Revival* by Anmol Mukhia

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2218/himalaya.2025.10759>



Recommended Citation

Chhetri, Komal. (2025). Review of *Chasing a Blazing Fire in the Himalayas: A Brief Sketch of the (Un)Noticed Kalimpong Pentecostal Revival* by Anmol Mukhia. *HIMALAYA* 44(2): 94–96.



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This book profoundly explores the Pentecostal Revival in Kalimpong, West Bengal, in the mid-20th century. Considered “the greatest revival of the East” (p. 5), this movement was extraordinarily momentous. This work comprises historical and socio-political aspects of academic debate around the subject of Himalayan histories. This is structured chronologically, drawing on both oral historical records and archival material. The author presents Kalimpong as a vibrant intersection of religion, culture, and trade.

Kalimpong saw three waves of spiritual revivals in the early 1900s to the 1970s at a time when it was also called the “Jerusalem of the Hills” (p. 25). Before Christian missionaries arrived, the area had already become a melting pot of Tibetan, Bhutanese, and Nepali people. Dr Mukhia describes a historic “treaty of blood” between the native Lepcha tribe and Tibetan refugees, showing how the people of Kalimpong had already been juggling various customs and beliefs (p. 13), and how each revivalist wave brought unique effects with it.

The first wave kicked off in the early 1900s. Influential figures like Sandhu Sunder Singh and Cecil Henry Polhill, a British Christian missionary, were crucial in bringing Pentecostal ideas to the Himalayas. By the 1940s, a second wave caught people’s attention: the period was characterized by the vibrant energy of the Pentecostal Revival, with visible signs of the Holy Spirit, including speaking in tongues, miraculous healings, and prophecies. This was also a time of global unrest, characterized by a fierce ideological confrontation between the USA and the USSR, as demonstrated by the Cuban Missile Crisis among other incidents (p. 33).

The third wave, which unfolded during the 1960s and 70s, saw the Pentecostal movement expand into other regions. With the establishment of missionaries, the revival’s influence spread far beyond its original heartland.

The author highlights that Sadhu E.J. Mashi’s arrival in 1942 marked a significant

turning point. Mashi instituted “Immersion baptism”, which caused a rift among Macfarlane Church members. As a result of this rift, a fellowship group was established at a place named Salem Cot, under the direction of people like Tenzing Elijah and Tshering Dhandup. Through an emphasis on the power and immediate presence of the Holy Spirit, these leaders felt compelled to adopt a more experiential brand of Christianity. According to the author, Salem Cot became the epicenter of this thriving movement, and the Full Gospel Pentecostal Church emerged in 1945 as a result. Local and international influences, like active participation in mobilization, were combined to create the Revival, each of which had a distinct impact on the movement.

The most critical question remains as to whether it was a case of the locals being forced to adopt Western ideas. Here, the book reveals that it was a dynamic process of innovation and adaptation. An essential factor contributing to this dynamism was the rise of the Full Gospel Pentecostal Church that served as a hub for blending local and international influences to create a brand of Pentecostalism unique to Kalimpong. Sadhu D.P. John, a devoted preacher who relocated to Nagaland seven years after the India-China war in 1969, and an individual significantly highlighted in the book, went on to become actively involved in the Revival movement there. This expansion was a result of the spiritual awakening sparked largely by the movement in Kalimpong.

Two other individuals featured in the story are John Lal and his colleague Reuben Rai, as church leaders asked them to travel to Sikkim. The telegram “Spiritual Problem in the Church Sends Lal and Reuben” (p. 61) describes how the Pentecostal fire began in Kalimpong and blazed brightly, spreading its influence across the eastern Himalayas. The book conveys a close resemblance to the Azusa Street Revival in the United States—a pivotal moment in Pentecostalism’s history. The focus of both revivals was on unity, repentance, and the

power of the Holy Spirit—a key factor in starting and maintaining a revival fire.

One remarkable aspect of the Kalimpong Revival was its ability to transcend social and ethnic divisions. The book notes that people from various backgrounds—Tibetans, Lepchas, Nepalis—came together seeking God. This was not just a superficial gathering but a community bound by a shared commitment to repentance and spiritual renewal. This bond was reflected in close cultural intermarriages and inter-cultural practices to a degree.

The book emphasizes a genuine desire to return to God, individually and collectively, as the only way to achieve true unity. The movement's focus on repentance and turning away from sin created a fertile ground for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Oral history and firsthand accounts of remarkable occurrences, including even teleportation, are featured as well. One particularly remarkable example is that of John Hendry Gurung, who is said to have been miraculously transported 1.5 kilometres from the Mission Compound to Salem Cot during intense prayer. It explains how the experience of such powerful manifestations served as proof that God was moving powerfully among followers, strengthening their faith and inspiring them to share their newfound beliefs with others. The Revival ignited a strong desire for service and evangelism. Tenzing Elijah, who won a sizable fortune but decided to use it to finance the translation of gospel tracts into Tibetan and English rather than for personal benefit, is a noteworthy example of someone committed to spreading the good news of salvation. The book also tells the stories of people whose lives were changed by the Revival and who committed to helping others. This impact further extended when many went on to found churches and share the gospel in nearby areas. The Revival profoundly influenced people's lives and communities for years beyond Kalimpong and was more than a fleeting flurry of spiritual fervor.

Finally, the book highlights a thriving community that lived out the biblical teaching of loving one another by regularly

getting together for prayer, camaraderie, and support. Faith was actively displayed in concrete ways rather than being merely discussed. It also describes how Kalimpong Christians demonstrated their support and unity with the larger body of Christ by sending financial aid to churches in other regions of India. This illustrates how genuine revival is never isolated; rather, it is intended to be shared and spill over into other people's lives, ultimately shaping the world at large.

The book's last section examines the enduring legacy of the 20th-century movement and its lessons for spiritual awakening and its long-lasting effects. It is strongly recommended to readers of Himalayan studies and area studies of International Relations, vis-à-vis other social sciences such as political science, sociology, and history. To conclude, it covers a multi-disciplinary approach that opens the door for further research in connection with the Himalayas.

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