

CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN KASHMIR: MUSLIM RESPONSE

JAVID AHMAD BHAT*

*Senior Research Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, Islamic University of Science and Technology
Awantipora, Kashmir, (J&K)

ABSTRACT

After the Dogra's became the Rulers of Kashmir, Christian Missionaries were attracted to it, Kashmir's salubrious climate, its beauty and location promised it to become a great Christian centre amid China, Tibet, Marquand, Samarkand, Afghanistan, Turkistan and Bukhara. Missionaries held the prejudice that people of Kashmir would be converted easily, as they had first converted from Hinduism to Buddhism and vice versa and finally to Islam in 14th century. These missionaries knew the deplorable condition of the people of Kashmir, their mass illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, diseases and their oppressed and tortured condition. The missionary cherished the hope that if the people of Kashmir were converted to Christianity, they might become great evangelists in Asia. The present article attempts to highlight that, how Christian missionaries entered in Kashmir and what was their impact on the common people of Kashmir as well as on the religious scholars of Kashmir and what, was their response towards Christian missionaries.

INTRODUCTION

Christianity has been defined as, The Religion that traces its origin to Jesus of Nazareth, whome it affirms to be the chosen one (Christ) of God.¹ This definition of Christianity is very brief. Alfred A. Garvie has amplified this definition, as he writes as, "We may define Christianity as the Ethical, Historical, Universal, Monotheistic, Redemptive Religion, in which the relation of God and man is mediated by the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ".²

¹ Encyclopedia Britanica, Vol 5, p. 693.

² Alfered A Garvie, (Article on Christianity), in Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, p. 581.

Christianity is a missionary religion like Islam. Christianity and Islam are both known as Abrahamic religions because of their common origin through Abraham. Muslims consider Ismail the first born son of Abraham to be the father of the Arabs and Abraham's second son Ishaq is called father of the Hebrews. Christians are considered the people of the Book. Believing in the *Injil* (*The New Testament* or *The original Gospel of Jesus*), although Muslims view the current Gospel as distorted form of the original. Christianity is an historical religion of the world. There are two major sects of Christians i.e., Catholic and Protestants.

Missionary is a person or a group of people dedicated to teach or invite people towards their own religion. Christian Missionary is a person or group of people who is sent to foreign country to teach or preach or invite people towards Christianity.

Christianity became common to all of Europe and became world's largest religion. It is only because of their missionary activities. The first person who played the role of missionary activity was Paul.³ Almost half of the book of acts is devoted to the missionary activities of Paul.

The first person who played the role of missionary in India was Francis Xavier (1506-1552)⁴ and Kashmir was an autonomous princely state at that time and that is why these missionaries entered Kashmir very late.

After the Dogras became the Rulers of Kashmir, Missionaries were attracted to it. Kashmir's salubrious climate, its beauty and location promised it to become a great Christian centre amid China, Tibet, Marquand, Samarkand, Afghanistan, Turkistan and Bukhara. Missionaries held the prejudice that people of Kashmir would be converted easily, as they had first converted from Hinduism to Buddhism and vice versa and finally to Islam in 14th century. These missionaries knew the deplorable condition of the people of Kashmir, their mass illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, diseases and their oppressed and tortured condition.⁵ The missionary cherished the hope that if the people of Kashmir were converted to Christianity, they might become great evangelists in Asia. Moorcroft expressed the same view when he visited the valley in the early 19th century. He observed: "I am convinced that there is no part of India where the pure religion of the gospel might be introduced with a fairer prospect of success than in the Kashmir".⁶ Last but not the least, the sweltering heat of many parts of India was vary distressing for many Missionaries, so Kashmir was regarding as the best place for Missionary personal to recuperate.

³ Mark R. Woodward, Religions Originating in India, p 289

⁴ Ibid, p, 310

⁵ Shafi ahmad Qadri, Biscoe in Kashmir, Gulshan publishers and Exporters Srinagar 2003, p 21

⁶ Robert Clark, The mission of C.M.S and C.E.Z.M.S in the Punjab and sindh, London 1904, p 129

Such were the causes which motivated Christian missionaries to come to Kashmir .their aim was to win the country for Christ ,and they cherished the belief that the spread of Gospel would provide a panacea for the suffering of the people. Their policy was to extend the knowledge of Christianity, and they saw in Kashmir a duty and an opportunity. But to make use of this opportunity and to fulfill the duty was not an easy task. In fact, there were serious obstacles in the path of the Missionaries.⁷

Though Maharaja Gulab Singh was apparently on good terms with the British, he was at heart dead against any western penetration in Kashmir. A special order was issued in 1854 c.e by the Governor General Lord Dalhousie, at the request of Maharaja Gulab Singh, forbidding European visitors to remain in Kashmir during winter.⁸ He established a rule that Europeans were to be admitted to Srinagar by prescribed routes only; and from the time of their entrance to their exit, they were to be under vigilant supervision and were not to be allowed to mix with the people. They were not allowed to rent the house in the city of Srinagar, where they could pursue their activities. Guest house was built outside the main city for the connivance of European visitors .thus the Europeans were completely isolated from the people of the city .this put difficulties in the way of the missionaries, whose task lay with the masses, and whose success depended upon close and constant contact with them.

It should be remembered that the missionaries first made their appearance in 1854 c.e, when Colonial Martin, a retired Army officer of Peshawar, Rev. Robert Clark⁹ of Punjab missionaries and two Indian Christians entered Srinagar. It was in 1864 c.e that a permanent mission was established in Srinagar.¹⁰ In view of the attitude of the authorities and the ruling prince, the missionaries adopted the ruse of renting a house through the resident French shawl merchants of Srinagar.¹¹ In April 1864 c.e, the attempt of Clark, accompanied by Mrs. Clark, to enter the rental house in the city seemed nearly impossible. From the missionary journal we knew that on their arrival to Srinagar they were mobbed by a crowd of 1,000 to 1,500 people,¹² who threatened to set the house on fire, some of them coming within the compound and throwing stones.¹³

⁷ Mohammad Ishaq Khan, Histroy of srinager 1846 -1947 : A study in socio Cultural change, cosmos Publications, Srinager 1999, p, 138

⁸ Ibid,

⁹ Robert Clark, op, cit, p 167

¹⁰ Ibid, p.168

¹¹ Marten Clark, Robert Clark of Punjab, p192

¹² Mohammad Ishaq Khan, op, cit, p, 139

¹³ Marten Clark, op, cit, p, 195

But Robert Clark had an indomitable will. On 18th April, 1864, he opened a school in Srinagar despite the opposition of the authorities.¹⁴ It was an important event in the history of Kashmir. Such parents who sent their children to missionary school received domiciliary visits from the police. They were told if their children's went to school, they would be banished to Gilgit.¹⁵

Other British officers had seen the sight of Srinagar and answered the call – such as Sir Robert Montgomery, lieutenant Governor of Punjab, Sir Herbert Edwards, Colonel Martin and Colonel Rumson¹⁶ (with whom rests the honor of stopping burning of Hindu widows in Kashmir.)¹⁷ These men met together to consider how best they could help Kashmir, and they agreed that Kashmir needed both spiritual as well as bodily help .so they subscribed Rs.14, 000, sent it to the C.M.S,¹⁸ and asked them to send to Kashmir a medical missionary,for he would gain the confidence of the people, and they trusted that Maharaja and his officials would welcome a doctor to their country.

The society selected Dr. Elmslie, a scot, who came to Kashmir as the first medical missionary. Dr Emilie arrived at Srinagar in the spring of 1864 c.e.¹⁹ His life was hard and difficult , for he had no hospital, his operations being performed under the trees ; also orders were issued that the people were not to visit the doctor, and spys were stationed around to keep them away, as the sick persisted in coming for relief . Several patients suffered imprisonment for disobeying the order of the authorities.

Dr Elms lie worked for eight years, and died in 1872 c.e, on his way out of Kashmir²⁰ the Rev. T.R.Wade²¹ worked with him, and did excellent work in the early days of medical mission. The society then sent out Dr Theodore Maxwell,²² to whom, because he happened to be the nephew of General John Nicholson,²³ the hero of Delhi, the Maharaja granted a site for the mission hospital, on a hill called Frustum Gary, which lies below and is a continuation of the tacit – suliamani.²⁴ It is a splendid position overlooking the Dal or city lake.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 213

¹⁵ Robert Clark, op, cit, p, 169

¹⁶ C.E. Tyandale Biscoe, Kashmir in sun light and shade, Mittal publications new dehli, 1925 p, 239

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid, p, 240

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Arther Nave, Thirty years in Kashmir, Gulshan books Srinagar, 2008, p, 29

²³ C.E. Tyandale Biscoe, op, cit, p, 240

²⁴ Ibid

The state government constructed a building at this place at its own expense. The hospital was known as Drugjan hospital. The state also gave a yearly donation to the mission hospital including free electric light. Never could any hospital in the Srinagar earn such reputation as did the Drugjan hospital. It was a boon to the poverty – stricken people of the valley. No doubt, Dr. Arther Neve (1882-1920)²⁵ describes it as a second pilgrimage centre the first being Hazratbal.²⁶ Dr. Maxwell remained until-1876,²⁷ when ill health compelled him to retire, owing to continual worries.

After Maxwell, Dr Arther Nave arrived in Srinagar. He had hoped to be sent to Equatorial Africa to help in the pioneer work around Lake Nyanza with his friend Bishop Hannington, but a doctor was badly needed in Kashmir, so doctor Nave went east, and was soon giving his best to Kashmir. When he arrived, he found a line of mud huts on the side of the hill which answered the purpose of a hospital. Later Dr Arther was accompanied after few years by Dr Earnest F. Nave.²⁸

Another hospital, exclusively for women, was established at Rainawari, by the Church of England zenana Missionary society.²⁹ Among the lady missionaries whose dedication to the cause of women's health earned approbation were, Miss Butler a lady doctor, Miss Irinie Petrie and Miss Robinson,³⁰ trained nurses, “ who laid down their lives on duty in the valley.” Miss Kate Knowles was yet another noble doctor who earned deep affection for her service to the women of Srinagar. The medical Missionaries also did a great deal of work during famines of 1877-80, 1888, 1892, 1900. Credit goes to missionaries for saving thousands of people who would have otherwise died.³¹

The people of Kashmir are fortunate in having much medical assistance, besides the two well –equipped state hospitals in Srinagar, the one for the general public and the hospital for women, there are dispensaries in all the important centers.³²

At Anantnag there is a well run hospital, founded by Mrs. Bishop³³ – betterly known as traveler and writer, she established it in 1902 c.e.³⁴ Miss Isabella Bird which is fortunate in having two ladies in charge, Dr Minnie

²⁵ Mohammad Ishaq Khan, op. cit, p 143

²⁶ Arther Nave, op, cit, p, 301-302

²⁷ C. E. Tyandle Biscoe, op, cit, p, 240

²⁸ Ibid,p,242

²⁹ Mohammad Ishaq Khan, op, cit, p 143

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid, p, 144

³² C. E. Tyandale Biscoe, op, cit, p, 251

³³ Ibid, p, 252

Gommery and miss Newnaham. besides these medical services these missionaries have established few mission schools in valley.

There was not a single school in Kashmir, where the right type of education could be imported. Maharaja established a school in 1874,³⁵ and it was the only state school but here the medium of instruction were Sanskrit and Persian. The proposal of Christian missionaries to found schools in Kashmir were approved by the C.M.S .in London. The founder of the modern school in Srinagar was Rev. J.H. Knowles.³⁶ It was in 1880 that Knowles laid the foundation of the C.M.S school on the hospital premises in Srinagar.

In its infancy the C.M.S school had to face a number of problems .The most pressing problem was that of the school building .It was owing to this difficulty that Clark's first school was abandoned in 1864. Between 1864 - 1880, Kashmir medical mission had succeeded in bringing about good relation and understanding among the people. The government's orders prohibiting the missionaries from renting a house for a school building were still in force. Thus the C.M.S had no alternative but to start the school on the Hospital premises. In 1880 there were only five pupils reading in the C.M.S school.³⁷ To remove the obstacle Of accommodation the missionaries obtained in 1883 a building at Sheikh Bagh. This act is said to have given rise to opposition and suspicion.

It is clear that in the beginning the attitude of the state authorities towards the missionaries was hostile. But it was in 1890 that the government permitted the C.M.S to shift the school down to the city, and it was moved from the hospital premises to a large house and compound on the river bank in the middle of the city (Fatah Kadal). As a result of this, the number of students increased to about 200 in 1890.³⁸

Mr. Knowles had to undertake ten years spade work in laying the foundation of the C.M.S .school. He was assisted by C.L.E .Burgess, A.B.Tyndale and also by some kashmiri teachers in the work of building up the school.³⁹ Miss Helen Burgess was the first lady who established the kindergarten system in Srinagar. It is interesting to note that in the beginning, the kindergarten system generated doubts in the parent's minds, for several among them are reported to have removed their wards from the school because of it, for they said "We

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ P. N. K. Bamzai, Socio- economical history of Kashmir (1846-1925), Gulshan books srinager, 1990, p, 254

³⁶ C.E. Tyandale Biscoe, op, cit, p, 260

³⁷ Eric Biscoe, Fifty years against the stream, Wesleyen Mission Press, Mysore 1930 p, 1

³⁸ Brain Holmes, Educational policy and the mission school, Routledge and K.Paul, NewYork, London 1967 p, 161

³⁹ C.E. Tyandle Biscoe, op, cit, p, 260

send our children to school to learn and not to play.”⁴⁰ After Knowles, C.E. Tyandale Biscoe was another towering personality who joined the school in 1891 c.e,⁴¹ the role increased to 250, nearly all kashmiri pundits.⁴²

The first step taken by Biscoe, was to insist upon punctual attendance by the pupils. For this purpose he introduces regular hours of instruction. Also holidays were arranged on the western pattern. Thus started the processes of westernization in mission school⁴³ At the beginning these measures were opposed by the pupil. To discourage absenteeism among the boys, the practice of fine was introduced. This was not enough. Sometimes the boys did not come to school and pretended to be sick. To check this tendency Biscoe hit on a novel scheme of visiting the houses of the boys.

It was also recorded that the boys were reluctant to play games. This shows how superstitious their minds were. Why did the boys stoutly refuse to play games? They said ‘we shall grow muscles on our bodies and then we shall become low-caste folk like the boatman and coolies. If we play games, we shall have to run about and be energetic and people will laugh at us for gentle man must not hurry.’⁴⁴ It is also interesting to note that the Brahman boys even refused to touch a football. The Brahman boys said,⁴⁵ “For it is an unholy ball and we are holy Brahmans. Biscoe had worked hard near about 60 years and during his time C.M.S school flourished and people knowing this school (Biscoe school) .This indicates how hard Biscoe has worked. Biscoe, much against his wishes, left Srinagar on 9 octobar 1947.⁴⁶

The success of missionaries in both medical and the educational fields encouraged them to take up the cause of the women education in Kashmir. To the missionaries the education of girls was of utmost importance for the girls would be the mothers of the future generation. Accordingly, the missionaries started a girls school at Fateh Kadal, in 1895.⁴⁷ The people of Srinagar fearing that the character of the girls will be spoiled revolted. The principal of the school invited some of the European ladies to Srinagar city for the prize day of the school. the hope was that this would be encouragement for the girls and their parents, as one British lady entered the school, someone in the street shouted that the English had come to kidnap the girls and run to the school windows and told the girls to escape from the windows, before the visitors could enter the school, all the people present had

⁴⁰ Mohammad Ishaq Khan, op, cit, p 164

⁴¹ C.E. Tyandle Biscoe, op, cit,p 263

⁴² Ibid, p 265

⁴³ Eric Biscoe, op, cit, p, 7

⁴⁴ C.E. TYandale Biscoe, op, cit, p, 267

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Shafi Ahmad Qadri, op, cit, p, 148

⁴⁷ Mohammad Ishaq Khan, op, cit, p 167

left.⁴⁸ The school faced various difficulties and for some time it had to be shut down. A few weeks later the school reopened and surprisingly the school registered an increase in the number of girls. This phenomenal success emboldened the Christian missionaries to open another school which was attached to the boys school at fateh kadal.

Among the heroic souls who made girls education acceptable in Kashmir in the midst of severe odds were Miss Churchill Taylor, Miss Stubbs, and Miss Goodall.⁴⁹

When Miss Fitze started a girls school in 1912, the majority of Girls attending her school were Muslims.⁵⁰ By 1914 the number of girl's schools rose to 3 in the city. As Miss Mallinson joined as the principal of school (1922 - 1961⁵¹), the C.M.S girls school underwent a radical transformation. She was instrumental in bringing about enough educational and cultural advancement among the women of Srinagar. She introduced swimming, dancing, drill, picnics, camping and mountaineering. Some vocational skills like basket making, embroidery and Cushions were also taught⁵². Also, Laundry and cooking received much attention. It is also said that the girls learnt to weave some woolen bags and mats.

In spite of the noble work of the Christian missionaries, Kashmir continued to remain very backward in education. Missionaries were faced with seemingly insurmountable odds and were unable to take up the educational work on an extensive scale. But the decade after 1904 saw some advance in education. In 1905 a Hindu collage was started by Mr. Annie Besant⁵³ in the city with the support of some luminaries of the theosophical society and Pandit Bala Koul of the sahib family. Later this collage was taken over by the state and came to known as Sri Pratab college. At first it was the Hindu community which took to modern education. Many Hindu young men who passed from the Sri Pratab college⁵⁴ occupied posts of importance in the various branches of education.

One of the result of Christian missionary was to sensitive kashmiris critical of their own society and some of its institutes.⁵⁵ It is important to realize that some missionaries were also men of closed minds who failed to understand or appreciate the kashmiri point of view or character. They started with a somewhat naïve assumption

⁴⁸ C.E. Tyandale Biscoe, op, cit, p, 157,158

⁴⁹ Mohammad Ishaq Khan, op,cit, p 168

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid, p, 169

⁵³ Ibid, p, 170

⁵⁴ P.N.K. Bamzai, op, cit, p, 359

⁵⁵ Mohammad Ishaq Khan, op, cit, p,152

that everything in Kashmiri society and religion was bad and that Christianity was the only true religion that could save the afflicted soul. The missionaries launched indiscriminate attack upon Kashmiri society through various kinds of publications. On the other hand, Christian missionaries were spreading their network in the valley with the view to find new converts of Kashmiri Muslims,⁵⁶ and called for some corrective measures to safeguard the same. One positive, the indirect result of such hostile criticism was to produce a new sense of awareness among many people regarding the necessity of change and reform.

The Muslims of Kashmir needed pragmatic educational guidance which could make them aware of their human and fundamental rights and also articulate and strengthen their religion and cultural values.⁵⁷

But the Muslims of Kashmir were less influenced by modern education than the Hindus. Because the Muslims of Kashmir had for long been caught on a vicious web created by religious superstitions and social obscurantism. The so-called religious elite exercised an overwhelming influence on the gullible and credulous people.

The beginning of the 20th century witnessed the rise of various socio – religious reform movements in Kashmir. These movements think it the need of the hour to aware people about the modern challenges, and Modern education because the Muslims are gullible people and are also loyal to their superstitions and obscurantism ulama.

Anjuman Nusrat al-Islam is one among these socio-religious movements, which tried to initiate such religious, social and Educational activities which, later on, prepare Muslims of Kashmir to live up to their responsibility and also fight for their rights. In view of the same, the founder of Anjuman Mir Waiz Moulvi Gulam Rasul Shah has been called ‘Sir Syed’ of Kashmir. He founded the Anjuman in 1899.⁵⁸ It was initiated by him to safe guard Muslims being driven towards Christianity. He believed that ignorance of the principals of Islam was dangerous for the Muslims. The climax of this effort was the creation of a Primary school in which religious instructions was imparted. With this initial purpose, the school slowly developed into a high school and began to follow the mission school pattern. Later Anjuman started many other school in the valley of Kashmir.

Many other prominent socio – religious reform movements existed in Kashmir, which played a significant role in creating Socio – Religious consciousness among Kashmiri Muslims were Anjuman -Ahl- I Hadith, Ahmadiyahs,

⁵⁶ Mushtaq Ahmad wani, Muslim Religious trends in Kashmir in Modern Times, Patana, 1997,p, 22

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

Anjuman – I Hamdard –I islam, Anjuman -i- Tabligh –ul – Islam, Anjuman-I Tahaffuz –I Namaz wa satri –I Masturat, and Jamaat-i-Islami. Some of main aims and objectives of these reform movements were:

- (a) To preach the doctrine of Tawheed (oneness of God).
- (b) The revivalist emphasis on bringing Islam back to its pristine purity and the emergence of the reactionary forces entrenched itself behind the bastions of orthodox.
- (c) To denounce the un islamic practice among kashmiri muslims.
- (d) To make the adequate arrangements for the teaching of the Quran and the Sunnah.
- (e) To eradicate the social evils among society.
- (f) To promote the education among both men and women.
- (g) To equip the youth with modern education along with Islamic teachings.
- (h) To create a balance between modern education and religion.
- (i) Reconstruction of muslim society of Kashmir.

No doubt Religious reformation was a major concern of these movements. But it is to be noted while mobilizing the masses, the reformers did not reject the modern education totally but they aimed to flourish modern education rather than western education.

CONCLUSION

So I can conclude that the Christian missionaries have done the perfect job in Kashmir no doubt their aim was to preach the doctrines of jesus Christ and wants to convert people towards their own religion. They know that the Kashmir is a central place of Asia and they are thinking that when we will convert people of Kashmir towards christianity this will become the bridge for us to reach other parts of the aisa. Their aim was to win the hearts of the Kashmir's towards their own religion and for that purpose they established hospitals, schools. They worked on social grounds they helped people and they got victory in Kashmir they converted many people to christianity. However they opens the hearts of people towards their religion but they also open the people's eyes and minds towards modern education and in response of that many muslim organizations have opened the schools on modern lines.