ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

Christian Missionary Activities and Muslim Apostasy in the Subcontinent: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

The Subcontinent has the distinction of being the center of many religions. Apart from Hinduism and Buddhism, Christianity and Islam also set foot in the region. Islam is the last religion to enter this land compared to other faiths. Despite being a Muslim government for eleven hundred years, no formal strategy was adopted for the propagation of Islam, nor was there any coercion in the matter of acceptance of Islam. After the arrival of the Portuguese and the British, apostasy began among the Muslims of the Subcontinent. Various attempts were made to eradicate Islam from this region. Particularly, during the British period official and public sources were used to spread Christianity. Along with the establishment of Missionary institutions and Eristical training centers, Christian literature was published on a large scale and divided among the Indians free of cost. The Christian preachers had full freedom to do work as they wished for the propagation of Christianity. This article provides a brief overview of the missionary activities of Christian preachers behind the Muslim apostasy in the Subcontinent.

Keywords: Apostasy, Islam and Christianity in the Subcontinent, Missionary Activities

Advent of Islam in the Subcontinent

Western scholars acknowledge that an Arabian light shined, illuminating the world from east to west, during a time when ignorance, polytheism, and irreligion enveloped Europe. A revolution occurred in Arabia that had an impact on politics, economics, human culture, and even the cognitive realm.[1] Islam's authenticity was demonstrated by its capacity in a matter of decades to carry the banner of its majesty from Arabia to Iran and Rome. Even the prosperity of Islam outside of its borders was predicted by the Holy Prophet (ﷺ), as noted European Islam specialist Philip K. Hitti shows in his writings.[2,3] Furthermore, in his distinguished work, Indian reformer, political philosopher, and well-known thinker of the 20th century Manabendra Nath Roy (1887–1954) claimed that the revolutionary importance of Islam was the primary reason for its phenomenal success.[4]

There were known to be trading and commercial ties between Indians and Arabians, particularly the Makkens, even prior to the revelation of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ). The 'Jāt' tribe was one of the most well-known clans in India that the Arabs acknowledged. In his Jām'e, Imām Tirmadhī expounded on a ḥadīth in which 'Abdullah b. Mas'ūd mentioned a few people who seemed to be Jāts (Indians).[5] Similarly, the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) asked, "Who are these fellows who seem to be Indians?" in reference to a delegation from Banū Ka'ab.[6] Thus, these scant facts demonstrate that Arab-Indian ties predate Islam.

The Subcontinent held the unique distinction of kissing the footprints of the great religious luminaries who were the companions of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ). 'Allāma Ṭabarī claims that the land of Makrān was conquered under 'Umar's caliphate and mentions five companions who reached the land of Makrān.[7] In addition to Ṭabarī, the capture of Makrān is

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
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mentioned by Ibn Khaldūn and ‘Allama Jalāl al-Dīn Sayūṭī in Tārīkh al-Khulafā (History of the Khulafā).[8] A statement from the Cambridge History of Islam, which describes Muḥammad b. Qāsim’s entrance in Sindh and recounts the Makrān triumph, supports the opinions of these eminent historians.[9] Certain stories state that many Hindus in Sindh were influenced by Shīism during ‘Alī's caliphate; some even took part in the Battle of Camel and lost their lives defending ‘Alī.[10] After Sindh was conquered by Muḥammad b. Qāsim, permanent Muslim governance began and persisted here until 1857.

Start of Christianity in the Subcontinent

According to some Christian chronologists, the arrival of St. Thomas, one of Jesus Christ’s twelve apostles, during the first century is when Christianity first appeared in Kerala.[11] According to some authors, Jesus Christ personally traveled to the Subcontinent. In this instance, the most well-known book is ‘La vie Inconnue de Jesus Christ’ by Nicolas Notovitch, which was subsequently translated into English as ‘Unknown Life of Jesus Christ.’ He traveled to the Indian Subcontinent and used inscriptions he found in a convent to try and confirm that Jesus Christ had made a visit to India.[12] Authors other than Nicholas have refuted his made-up narrative. The renowned German astronomer and orientalist Max Müller (1823–1901) asserts that Notovitch was either deceived by the monks at the monastery or that he fabricated the evidence in this particular case.[13] In addition, Max wrote to the same convent to corroborate this story. In response, the convent leader stated that Notovitch’s comment was undocumented and that no Western visitor had visited the monastery in the preceding fifteen years.[14]

Christian narratives state that St. Thomas’s pursuit of the Gospel caused the Hindus and Buddhists in the Subcontinent, particularly in Kerala, to fall under its teachings and become Christians.[15] Sonja Thomas’s research indicates that the Portuguese used the term ‘Syrian Christians’ to refer to native Christians who were converted from Latin Catholicism.[16] The Portuguese established trade and propaganda centers here. Along with Gova, Calicut, and Bombay, other cities saw the construction of churches, orphanages, and educational facilities for evangelical objectives.[17]

Following the Portuguese, the British established the East India Company, a commercial enterprise named ‘Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies,’ which was founded in Britain on December 31, 1600.[18] At first, the company functioned autonomously, but it quickly became apparent that trade and enterprise in India necessitated the backing of the Mughal rulers. Although Sir William Hawkins (1569-1627) was sent to gain favor with Jahangir (1569-1627), he was unable to achieve his goals. The highly trained statesman and lawmaker Sir Thomas Roe (1581-1644) was persuaded to take up the role of royal ambassador to Jahangir’s court. So, in 1614, Sir Thomas Roe visited the Mughal emperor in India and used his diplomatic abilities to get his consent for business.[19]

In addition to pursuing financial and economic hegemony, the British administration also sought to maintain the Portuguese mission and promote Christianity throughout the Subcontinent. In a telegram from 1659, the court of directors had expressed their honest willingness to use any means necessary to propagate the Gospel. They let the missionaries go on board their ships.[20] After seizing power, they granted Christian preachers access to a multitude of facilities, such as mandating that factories employ religious leaders and pressuring public servants to convert to Christianity.[21]

In 1823, the British parliament gave missionaries in India permission to labor without a license, ostensibly to support the missionary movement.[22] However, the missionaries' primary objective was to propagate the Gospel and did not regard themselves as representatives of the colonial government. Christian outreach and colonialism were closely related, as demonstrated by the two commissioners who supervised British rule in Assam

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

between 1826 and 1861: David Scott and Francis Jenkins. Both of them were devout Christians who supported and encouraged missions.[23]

Missionary Preaching Strategies

Governments in the West worked hard to help Christianity proliferate. Under the pretense of offering humanitarian relief, the Salvation Army was established to promote Christianity, and women were heavily involved in missionary activities. The resources that the European empire employed to spread Christianity over the Subcontinent are described here.

1. Establishment of Christian Missionary Institutions

A missionary member works for the advancement of Christianity through a variety of tactics, including persuading people to accept Christianity, obtaining access to a variety of sciences and arts, enduring hardships, and developing a missionary plan tailored to the political and cultural context. Actually, Mathew's great commission, a biblical mandate that spurred Christians to persevere despite missionary hardships, is where the enthusiasm and ardor of missionaries can be found.[24] Christian missionaries eagerly embraced the call as a result, seeing it as their obligation to spread the good news of Jesus Christ over the globe. M. Rose Greenfield spoke at a Conference of Lady Missionaries in Amritsar, India, in 1888, asserting that the sole goal of missionary organizations ought to be evangelization.[25] Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) divided the world into East and West regions in order to promote Christian missionary endeavors, European sovereignty, and the propagation of the gospel.[26]

The Portuguese, and then the British, constructed numerous missionary institutions throughout the Subcontinent in order to propagate Christian doctrines. They helped Christian missionaries in whatever way they could. The difficulties faced by the mission were overcome with the assistance of all available government resources.

2. Free Educational Arrangements

Christian missionaries provided funding for the establishment of free educational institutions in exchange for Christian instruction. Christians had been using this tactic prior to 1857, and these tactics were furthered following the War of Independence, once total control was achieved. Despite the fact that the modern sciences were highly valued at these educational establishments, all students were expected to participate in Christian prayers. While E. Blackett had come to India specifically to establish a Divinity School in Bengal, W. Dr. Hooper had been called down from Lahore to launch a comparable college in the North-West Provinces. As a result, spaces that had previously been used for non-Christian education were now being used to teach Christian preachers and pastors.[27]

3. Free Distribution of Christian Books

This media was widely used to spread Christianity over the Indian Subcontinent. In actuality, religious texts have spread throughout and outside of the Subcontinent thanks to Columbus.[28] The missionaries' strategy in this case, according to Eugene Stock, was to meet people of all ranks, many of the most prominent clerics among them, and provide religious material and Holy Scriptures in all languages.[29] Only a few short and focused poems from the Gospels were produced and given away at first. Eventually, in addition to the Gospels, books on a wide range of other subjects were also published, and the series was extended across the Subcontinent into multiple languages.

4. Establishment of Eristical Training Institutes

The strategy of persuading people of one's viewpoint and views is known as argument-based discussion. The argument in the discourse not only supports its stance but also provides evidence to back up the allegations made by the adversary. The argument's most important tenet is that it should be stated among experts and backed by knowledge, as the Qur'ān instructs.[30] During the British era, establishments and missionary academies were

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ISSN P:2709-8265
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created to achieve these goals; these establishments would not have been possible without government assistance. According to Roberto Catalano, schools were considered one of the most efficient evangelization tools and crucial for sharing the gospel even in the early missionary communities.[31]

In addition to building institutions, it was vital to impart theological and intellectual lessons to convert people to Christianity. Steve Bishop asserted that the education of native leaders would be necessary to accomplish the goal of independent indigenous churches.[32] In 1911, a major missionary conference was held in Lucknow, when action plans and research results were presented. The meeting aimed to achieve the following four objectives:

(A) The insinuations of Pan-lslamism for Christian ministry.
(B) To train Christian missionaries to evangelise Muslims.
(C) Missionary material for Muslims.
(D) Missionaries' integrated policy to combat the spread of Islam.

Speaking at the conference regarding the curriculum for missionary training, Pastor Ahmad Shah[33] stated that in addition to Urdu, a missionary should be fluent in the languages of their area, such as Bengali, Tamil, Marathi, Gujarati, Panjabi, Sindhi, Kashmiri, Pashtu, and Balochi.[34]

5. Publication of Religious Books

Urdu replaced Persian as the East India Company's official language in 1830. Urdu grew dramatically as a result of this revolutionary action, but the East India Company only encouraged Urdu since it aided imperialist goals. Newspapers and magazines were a common tool used by Christian missionaries to propagate their religious beliefs. They established their printing presses and made use of this sector of the economy for both religious and political ends. Numerous Christian literary works have been written, including translations of the Bible into several Indian languages.[35] Julius Richter writes,

> *"Nowadays there are many printing- houses in India. It is a comparatively easy matter to publish Indian books in the homeland, and the great literary auxiliary societies are also disposed to bring out any literature serviceable to the cause of missions."*[36]

6. Education in Orphans and Destitute Children

Christian missionaries in the Subcontinent employed a range of tactics to further their religious goals, but they never lost sight of the needs of future generations. The only entity authorized to establish orphanages was the government; private individuals were not permitted to offer the kids personal assistance. Sir Syed Aḥmad Khān, a well-known figure in the Subcontinent who is recognized for having healed the rift between Muslims and the British, also looked for these youngsters. But the kids were taken over by the British government, which then put them in official orphanages. Two orphanages were built by the missionaries Rev. Ifraheem and Rev. Opal as they began their educational work in Sialkot in 1856.[37] Children at these orphanages received a thorough Christian education, preparing them to become adult Christian missionaries.[38] In 1597, a catastrophic famine struck Kashmir. Christians purchased children from many families unable to care for them, placed them in orphanages, and baptized them. The children of Acherontics were baptized right away for them to become martyrs for Christ.[39]

The state provided a big sum of money to orphanages for this purpose, and the missionaries also made significant contributions to the establishment and management of the orphanage system. The Nawab of the Carnatic, whose palace was subsequently guarded by the Company, donated £360, but only under the stipulation that it be used to construct more orphan schools.[40]

7. Attempt to Distort Muslim History

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
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Every act of anti-Islamic behavior contains certain harmful microbes that work to erode the foundations of Islam and pervert it's given realities. The British attempted to demonstrate how gravely the rise of Islam threatens humanity. They also tried to persuade their audience that Muslims had always been antagonistic and violent toward Christians and Jews. One of the most widely circulated claims about the expansion of Islam in the Subcontinent is that it was fueled by literature, which was produced by the British as part of a carefully thought-out plot to incite hostility between the two major Muslim and Hindu nations. In their accounts of Indian history, they depicted Shiva as a fierce opponent of the Muslims, while on the one hand, they denounced Muslim emperors as despots and invaders who massacred followers of other faiths and demolished their sacred sites. One well-known Muslim philosopher who converted from Judaism, Muhammad Asad, has endorsed this kind of behavior.[41]

The way Muslim kings are portrayed by T.S. Elliot is completely false. He says it is not surprising that under such rulers the sources of justice are tainted, that state revenues are never obtained without indignation and violence, that villages are burned, that the people who live there are either mutilated or sold into slavery, and that the officials, far from offering protection, are the main usurpers and robbers.[42]

Smith's 'The Early History of India' is regarded by many as a seminal piece of historical writing. It makes derogatory statements about the history of Muslims. Most of the smaller episodes have developed a sectarian flavor, masking the achievements of the Muslim government and emphasizing its flaws.[43] The well-known Indian historian Jadunath Sarkar, who authored the five-volume 'History of Aurangib,' is similar to British historians in that he fabricated Islamic history and promoted sectarianism.[44] According to his description of non-Muslims' status in the Islamic state, they are not regarded as state citizens. His condition was a kind of modified slavery, and he belonged to a depressed class.[45]

Christian missionaries thus used intellectual dishonesty, twisting Islamic history to propagate it around the globe, shape Muslim thinking in the Subcontinent, and ensure the success of their missionary work.

8. Establishment of Missionary Hospitals

Another effective strategy was to use Christian clinics and hospitals as platforms for evangelization. In addition to providing medical care, these hospitals also carried out covert Christian evangelism. Every patient in these hospitals received a Bible and other Christian literature for personal study, and the Bible was routinely taught every morning. According to a first-hand account by Andrew Gordon, the villagers agreed to remove Bible instruction from the curriculum in exchange for the construction of a school for girls. The plan was modified by the missionaries, who decided to build a 'Zenana hospital'.[46] According to Andrew Gordon, among the patients, two women professed their faith in Christ and were baptized; another elderly woman expressed a desire to be baptized but was only kept from doing so by her relatives, who then left her to starve or beg.[47] Julius Richter explains to the workers and financial plan of a missionary hospital for women:

> *"Thus the Zenana Bible and Medical Mission, the old Indian Female Normal School and Instruction Society, maintains 104 women missionaries with 53 women helpers, a native staff of 191 women teachers and nurses, and 84 Bible women; in 4375 zenanas which it visits it has 2728 pupils under regular instruction, 3208 more scholars in its 64 day schools, hospitals or dispensaries in 5 towns with 1892 patients and nearly 100,000 consultations per annum, and it spends yearly on this many-sided activity over £ 25,ooo."*[48]

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9. Economic Support to Poor

The economy is essential to human existence; without it, neither an individual nor a society can be considered advanced. A person who lacks wealth is plunged into a bottomless hole and deprived of all happiness and tranquility. A person devoid of faith is miserable and unlucky. Christian missionaries exploited the situation and expanded the mission by providing financial aid to the economically downtrodden people of the Subcontinent, particularly Muslims. The following five methods are how former Christian pastor Muḥammad Amīn reveals missionary fundraising tactics:

* In an attempt to repudiate Islam, certain uneducated persons who had been refused access to Islamic teachings were given clothing, butter cans, and dry milk.
* Muslims were drawn to Christianity by the promise of employment, particularly young people who were despondent and jobless. Since the majority of elected officials attended missionary institutions, they utilized their position of power to address the concerns of the poor.
* The apostate family received a monthly payment from the ministry based on the number of children. The children also had their tuition paid for and were given free books.
* After receiving such love and financial assistance, a person is easily misled and is unable to fight anything from their benefactor. Pastors on mission offered their financial assistance to send children overseas for further study.
* In an effort to lower unemployment, Christian missionaries welcomed Muslim students into the Christian Salvation Training College. There, in addition to receiving a monthly stipend, they were trained in the Bible and equipped to preach Christianity. These students underwent a whole conversion, progressively accepting Christianity.[49]

10. Religious Debates

Christians had the chance to defend and plead for their religion in Akbar's court, and as British conquests on the Subcontinent increased, they eventually took control of all the significant areas of the Subcontinent.[50, 51] The British were more committed than ever to achieving religious and governmental domination as a result of their achievements. Thus, in order to disseminate Christianity, missionaries were allowed to have intellectual conversations with others. In this regard, a thorough account of Christian discussions has been given by Sir Syed Aḥmad Khān.[52]

Open challenges to Islamic principles were made in these heated talks, while Christian ideas were vehemently defended on the side. The Indian Subcontinent's Muslim intellectuals were instrumental in safeguarding Islam as they scrutinized the official plan with great care.

Conclusion

While Hindus made great efforts to undermine Islam, Christian missionaries preyed on Indian Muslims on the one hand. Whereas Hindus just wanted the Vedas to rule, Christians wanted India to be a Christian state in its entirety. Consequently, these groups have all made an effort, in different ways, to apostatize Muslims, and this trend is currently going strong. According to a 2005 Pakistani media source, 8,000 Pakistani Muslims converted to Christianity in a single year in 1958, whereas 17,000 Pakistanis did the same between 1995 and 2005.[53,54] As a whole, the Muslim Ummah is being forced into intellectual heresy. These are some suggestions for rescuing Pakistan and the Ummah as a whole from this deviation.

* The youth of the Muslim world in the twenty-first century must be taught about Islamic history, particularly our scientific and intellectual legacy.
* Islam holds parents responsible for educating their children, teaching them the fundamentals of Islam, and monitoring their social relations to ensure they don't stray by hanging out with the wrong people.

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ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
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- The modern Qur'ānic disciplines should inform the youth about the Qur'ānic universality and immortality.
- All Muslim governments should take particular care to promote Islam and educate the public about its teachings and history.
- Every Islamic nation should create curricula that not only keeps Muslims together ideologically but also keeps them from straying in any way.
- At the very least, scholars from all schools of thought ought to work together to devise a plan of action to halt the growing tide of heresy.
- To uphold Islam, all Muslim countries must band together and fight. In the areas of economy, finance, technology, and cognition, all Muslim states should work together.
- Academics from various schools of thought should promptly put an end to their disagreements about religion. To keep the public out of such needless knowledge, any theological or intellectual disagreement on a topic should only be communicated in writing to that side.

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