

Christian Missionaries and the Politics of Western Education in Princely Kashmir

Nusratuel Islam Itoo¹, Dr. M.C. Raja²

¹Department of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar-608002, Tamil Nadu, India.

²Professor Co-ordinator History wing DDE, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar-608002, Tamil Nadu, India.

Email: itoonusrat786@gmail.com

DOI: 10.47750/pnr.2022.13.S09.223

Abstract

Kashmir was regarded as a great seat of Sanskrit learning. With the coming of Muslims in valley Persian began to dominate the panorama and eventually became the court language. But soon education began to lose its ground with the subsequent rulers. Kashmir was lagging behind in Modern education in the subcontinent. Modern education came to Kashmir only with the advent of Christian missionaries. This paper will scrutinize the origin and development of education in Kashmir. But the focal point of this paper will be to analyze the educational measures initiated by missionaries in the second half of nineteenth century. It will also investigate the state and its subject's response to Christian missionary's activities in Kashmir. This period was a noteworthy period in the history of Kashmir on account of various social, economic and political developments. Despite setbacks, missionaries in Kashmir were successful in modernising the education system, though enrollment in mission schools was restricted to the region's elite, particularly the Pandits. The number of people who decided to become Christians was surprisingly low.

Keywords: Evangelise; Missionaries; Patshalas; Madrasas; Western Education.

INTRODUCTION

Kashmir is said to have been the seat of learning and this small valley has produced masterpieces of history, poetry, and philosophy. It remained the home of great Sanskrit scholars for centuries. "Kashmiris are proud and justly proud of the literary treasures of their nation," argues George Grierson.¹ With the arrival of the Muslims, the valley was heavily influenced by Islam. Persian and Sanskrit education were promoted throughout the Muslim era. Maktabas and Madrasas were discovered. The first madrasa built in Kashmir under Sultan Qutubuddin's rule was Urwat al-Waqta (1373-89 CE). A comparable madrasa founded by Sultan Sikandar in Nawhatta employed academics from Central Asia. In his capital, Nav-Shahr, Zain ul-Abidin (1420-1470 CE), hired professors from West Asia and Central Asia to build a madrasa. At Khawaja Bazar, Sheikh Hussain Chak (1562-69 CE) founded a Darul Uloom.² Jahangir's reign saw the establishment of a few additional madrasas. Moinuddin Naqshbandi built Khanqah-i-Naqshbandiyah during the reign of Shah Jahan. The Mughal emperors promoted vocational training in various handicrafts including manufacturing carpets, shawls, and paper as well. These institutions mostly failed to exist under Afghan control due to a lack of sponsorship. Sikh control irreparably damaged Kashmir's economy.³

Until the arrival of Christian missionaries in the second part of the nineteenth century, life in Kashmir remained mostly unchanged. According to M I Khan, renowned historians of Kashmir, there were several factors that drew the missionaries to the region, "Kashmir was a remarkably suitable region by its geographical position, by its salubrious climate, and by its beautification, to become a great Christian missionary centre for the surrounding countries of Tibet, China, Yaqand, Afghanistan and Turkistan. Secondly from the dawn of history Kashmir had been a centre of various religions— Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam". So, "they expected that Christianity will keep its dominance in the valley," as Khan puts it. The plight of the people of Kashmir, who had been mistreated by both rulers and priests, the missionaries were not unaware of this situation.⁴ There was also a decline in morality, education, health, and economic stability. The missionaries could not ignore the summons. Their goal was to convert the entire nation to Christianity, and they held fast to the hope that preaching the good news would solve all of the country's ills.⁵

There is little evidence of modern education in Kashmir prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries, who brought with them a new way of thinking. Boys in Srinagar and the rest of the valley were taught Arabic in Maktabas associated with local mosques in the hopes that one day they would be able to read the Quran. Similarly, the Kashmiri Pandits had their own Sanskrit language schools known as Pathshalas so that they could learn to read the holy texts in their original language. Kashmir's Muslim sultans introduced Persian as the state language, and it remained in use until 1907, when Urdu replaced it.⁶ This shows that educational opportunities in the valley were severely lacking. The educational disadvantages of the city's population are documented in the 1873 Administrative Report, the first of its type in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The Pathshala, Nawakadal School, Maharaj Gunj School, and Basant Bagh School are the only publicly funded institutions in the city that are mentioned in the study. Maktabas and Pathshalas are types of educational institutions that are not, strictly speaking, engaged in advancing general education because they often only give religious instruction of a very limited nature.⁷

The arrival of the missionaries to Srinagar coincided with this time frame. Western donors were made aware of the enormous possibilities of missionary activity in the Valley of Kashmir thanks to the published travelogues of European travellers in the first half of the nineteenth century. The retired Army officer Colonel Martin of Peshawar, along with Robert Clark of the Punjab Missionaries and two Indian Christians, arrived in Srinagar in 1854.⁸ Despite beginning its work in Srinagar in the 1860s of the nineteenth century, the Christian Missionary Society of London encountered significant resistance from the local government.⁹

At first, the missionaries thought it would be prudent to help the people of Srinagar when an outbreak broke out. Kashmiris saw medical missionaries favourably because of the aid they received, which in turn motivated them to fight against illiteracy. No appropriate educational institution could be found in Srinagar. The only public school was one founded in 1874 by Maharaja Ranbir Singh, where Sanskrit and Persian were used as the language of teaching. There is no denying the fact that the Dogra Government treated the education of its subjects with a blatant lack of care.¹⁰ A primary school modelled after western models was established by the Church Mission Society of England in the Church Mission hospital by Rev. J. H. Knowles.¹¹ The Church Mission School encountered many challenges in its early years. Dogra policy up until 1886 had limited schooling to the reading of sacred texts. Subjects like grammar, logic, rhetoric, and arithmetic were also taught in the different amounts in the Maktabas and Pathshalas that were attached to mosques and temples, respectively.¹² English classes were available at the public school in 1886. Up to the turn of the twentieth century, Christian Missionary Schools did not enrol a single Muslim boy.¹³

Missionaries and their activities in Kashmir

a) Christian Missionaries before Dogra rule:

Since the time of the Mughals, the Kashmir valley's natural beauty and mild climate have been drawing tourists from throughout Europe. Father Jerome Xavier, nephew of Francis Xavier, a great missionary to India, and Brother Benedic De Goes, both Portuguese, were the first two Jesuits (a Roman Catholic religious group) to arrive in the valley with the Mughal king Akbar in 1597. Neither of them intended to set up a mission in Kashmir. King Jahangir, who ascended to the throne after Akbar, showered the missionaries with favours and gifts. During Jahangir's reign, two more missionaries—Father Francis Corsi and Father Joseph De Castro—travelled to Kashmir. They wanted to verify that the area was suitable for spreading the gospel. George Foster, a second European, arrived in the valley on May 7, 1873. Ferguson mentions George Foster, the next European to visit Kashmir, and explains that Foster was a government servant for the East India Company under the presidency of Madras.¹⁴ He came to the valley for business reasons only.

The influx of European tourists began around 1830 and continued at an exponential rate. This time it was a Frenchman named Jacquement who came on September 19, 1831, four months after his initial arrival on May 9, he finally left the valley. Rev. Joseph Wolff, the son of a Jewish rabbi, was another European to travel to the valley in 1832. Along with Moorecraft, he came to the valley on a mission. His goal was not business but evangelism.¹⁵ In 1854, Reverend Robert Clark, who had earlier founded the Amritsar mission, set out to explore Kashmir, Ladakh, Iskardo, and other regions of the Western Himalayas. On April 20, 1854, it was announced that a group of Christians would go out to spread the Gospel in distant lands.¹⁶ The secondary goal was to determine if there is a need for missionary activity in these countries, and if so, how much, and under what conditions, this work can be initiated and continued with the highest possible chance of success.¹⁷

b) Christian Missionaries after Dogra rule and their activities:

On May 20th, 1854, Robert Clark and his brother Colonel Martyn Clark arrived at the Happy Valley after travelling there from Rajouri and Poonch. Clark was welcomed warmly by Kashmir's absolute monarch, Maharaja Gulab Singh, and showered with several gestures of goodwill. Mr. Clark made no request for permission to preach. He decided it was best to sneak about and get his bearings before he started preaching.¹⁸ Mr. Clark's candid and real statesmanship won over Gulab Singh. After a year of people trying to incite the Maharaja's enmity toward the work Mr. Clark was doing.¹⁹ The Maharaja stopped listening to them. Despite his cordial relations with the British, Maharaja Gulab Singh strongly opposed any attempts at western intervention in Kashmir. In 1854, at Maharaja Gulab Singh's request, Governor General Lord Dalhousie issued a special order preventing Europeans from spending the winter in Kashmir. He framed a rule that the Europeans were admitted through prescribed routes only, and from their time of arrival to exit, they were to be under cautious supervision and were not to be allowed to mix with the people.²⁰ The rule was of no difficulty for an ordinary visitor, who merely wanted to visit the valley to spend the summer amidst the natural beauties. But it was a barrier in the work of Christian missionaries. They were not allowed to rent a house, to pursue their activities. Under no circumstances could a European or a British subject own landed property in the dominions of the Maharaja.²¹

Guest houses were built outside the city, Srinagar of Kashmir, for the comfort of European visitors and a special quarter in the environs of Srinagar was set apart from them. The ruler appointed agents, to look after the requirements of Europeans and all business was translated through a Babu, deputed for the purpose.²² This put barriers in the way of Missionaries whose task lay with the masses and whose success depended upon close and constant with them. The reason behind this deliberate isolation on the part of Maharaja was neither, social nor spiritual but political. Robert Clark was the one who initiated the establishment of a long-term mission in Srinagar in the year 1864. The Maharaja's reaction to this was one of considerable opposition, despite the fact that he respected and treasured Mr. Clark's acquaintance on a more personal level. Despite the fact that establishing a mission in Kashmir was primarily seen as a religious responsibility for the British, they did so anyhow. Yet it speaks of their understanding of the vacuum that existed so far as the social and educational situation was concerned. Repressed and poor people having been denied the privilege of ideal citizenry under the Monarchy, were involuntarily seeking redemption through Mission education, even if it meant Proselytization.²³ In whatever way may the establishment of the Mission be interpreted, which largely be a political one, the fact remains that the ground was fertile enough for it to develop and serve as an institution of educational reconstruction.

The pronounced Monarchical regime with feudal character could do nothing beyond suppressing the common people, and the advent of new educational order would be welcome in the circumstances. Robert Clark was thus confident in his argument on the subject of importance of the schools, to be opened by the Kashmir Mission. At initially, the missionaries in Kashmir believed that it would be a good idea to provide medical aid to the locals in Kashmir while diseases were taking place there. The people of Kashmir are encouraged to fight against illiteracy as a result of the popularity that the Medical Missionaries have gained among the population as a result of the beneficial services that they have provided. In the entire valley, there was not a single educational institution that could provide the appropriate level of instruction. The only state-run institution of education was the Maharaja Ranbir Singh School, which opened in 1874. Sanskrit and Persian were the languages of instruction at this school. It is impossible to deny that the Dogra Government had a cavalier attitude toward the education of its subjects. On April 18, 1864, Robert Clark was the one who was ultimately successful in founding a school.²⁴

In 1880, Reverend J. H. Knowles established CMS School in the Srinagar hospital complex, marking the commencement of modern education in Kashmir.²⁵ When the CMS School was first starting out, it encountered a variety of challenges. When it came to emergencies, the state of the structure was paramount. Still in effect were government directives that made it illegal for missionaries to lease a home to operate as a school. Because of this, the Knowles were forced to establish their school in the hospital.²⁶ In the years between 1864 and 1880, the Kashmir Medical Mission successfully promoted peace and harmony among the locals. However, the official's outlook on the mission remained unchanged. There was still a ban in place from the government on the missionaries hiring a home to serve as a school. Because of this, the C. M. S. was forced to establish the school within the walls of the hospital.²⁷ Five students at the C. M. S. School were reading in 1880. Perhaps the issue of space constraint is to blame for the low enrollment. No public transportation, such as buses or tongaes, were available in the city during that time. Because of the hospital campuses' remote locations, it was unable to draw a sizable student body.²⁸ The problem was remedied in 1883 when the missionaries secured a building in Srinagar's Sheikh Bagh. According to witnesses, this action sowed the seeds of distrust and dissent. Said Knowles in his article, "The government of this country has shown fierce opposition to the mission school throughout the past year. Our decision to rent a huge property close to the city and relocate our school there has met with significant criticism. His Majesty the Maharaja has decreed that no one within the Valley is to rent a room or own a stick. In the beginning, it was obvious that the State authorities viewed the missions with hostility. The number of male students enrolled at the institution dropped from 47 to 30 that year, 1883. In his explanation, Knowles said that physical separation was to blame. In 1890, with permission from the government, the C.M.S. relocated the school from the

hospital grounds to a huge home and compound along the river bank in the heart of the city (Fateh Kudal). Thus, by 1890, there was roughly 200 pupil's enrolled.²⁹

c) A.B. Tyndale Bisco and his role for the upliftment of Western Education in Kashmir:

Ten years of spadework by Mr. Knowles were required to establish the C.M.S. School's present location. The Reverend C.L.E. Burges, A.B. Tyndale, and a few Kashmiri instructors helped him in the work of building a school. The Rev C.L.E. Burges, was a math teacher. A.B. Tyndale of Magdalen College, Oxford's established a Technical School to educate young Brahman males the art of carpentry but the Kashmiri Pandits barred them from studying this field due to their religious beliefs.³⁰ So, this effort was unsuccessful, since Kashmiri Pandits are traditionally forbidden Brahman man spent two years toiling away in the smithy of the school. He eventually went into business for himself as a bicycle mechanic. Early childhood education in Srinagar can be traced back to Miss Helen Burges, the city's first female pioneer. It's worth noting that initially, the system raised concerns among parents; a number of them reportedly pulled their sons out of the school because of it "Parents send their kids to school because they want them to learn, not to play."³¹

For modern Srinagar, the establishment of the Mission School in Srinagar marked the start of a new era. When Reverend Tyndale Biscoe arrived at the school in 1891, there were 250 kids enrolled.³² When Mr. Biscoe came to help out Knowles, he was amused to see some of the boys wearing what looked like very mucky nightgowns. Additionally, they had bright red paint slapped on their foreheads. According to Mr. Biscoe, "would have pulled the lobes of their ears off if they hadn't been supported by a thread across the tops of their heads," as many of the boys wore enormous golden earrings. Initially, the mission boys were allowed to have Kangri with them in the winter, which is an interesting point to note.³³ At first, nearly all of the school's initial enrollment of 250 boys were members of the minority Pandit community of Kashmir. "their big mansions in the city, with all their wealth were a standing witness to their plundering abilities, for the pay they earned from the State was fairly tiny," as the author puts it, "they were the sons or grandsons of those officials who for years had tormented and squeezed the Mohemmadan peasants."³⁴

Mr. Biscoe exerted tremendous effort to accomplish his goal. When he first tried to teach the Brahman boys a different method of schooling, he ran into a lot of problems. Biscoe's mission was monumental, yet he was ultimately successful in eradicating misconceptions. He claims that his primary motivation for visiting Kashmir was educational, rather than pedagogical. The immediate dilemma that troubled his thoughts was how and what to teach the advanced students.

So, Bisco researched the people of Kashmir extensively before implementing any major initiative. His research convinced him that the people's souls had been stolen by tyranny, corruption, exploitation, and superstition. Biscoe was resolved to provide these enslaved individuals with an education that would renew their hope and empower them to become contributing members of society.³⁵ Many Brahman boys attended C. M. S. School were in their twenties or more and a sizable portion of them even married.

It was challenging to convince such mature males of the merits of thane and to ready them for its founding in the metropolis.³⁶ We have been told that for some years, students didn't start showing up to class until lunchtime, even though classes officially began at 11 a.m. The State's indigenous school did not have a policy of strict punctuality, hence it was not enforced. Hindu males celebrated these festivities. Biscoe talks about the challenges he faces and the nature of his work, saying: "It was difficult to predict how many students would show up to school on any given day because some boys may consider one deity significant while others would not. When guys were free to show up or not, how could there be any form of discipline."³⁷ For this reason, Biscoe's first move was to implement a strict policy of mandatory on-time arrival. That's why he instituted set class times. Western holiday traditions were also adopted. Because of this, the C. M. S. School began its westernisation. Fines were instituted to deter absence among the boys. It wasn't sufficient. The guys would often call in ill to school when they didn't want to show up. Biscoe came up with an innovative plan to counteract this trend by paying the boys' homes a visit. The boys' reluctance to participate in games is also documented.³⁸ What this demonstrates is the power of superstition to influence people's beliefs. It's worth noting that when football was first introduced to Kashmir by Biscoe, the local Brahman boys flat-out refused to play the game. The young Brahmins responded, "We can't kick this ball" "Because it's an impure ball and we're pious Brahmins".³⁹ The opposition of parents to what they saw as a time-waster in sports is, however, not surprising. Clearly, the boys' educational experience thus far has been motivated by a desire to complete their formal education. To them, games were a waste of time, while exams were a pathway to a career in government. The Brahman boys at the school apparently felt that rowing a boat was beneath them.⁴⁰

Biscoe even claims that certain Brahman instructors actively discourage their students from taking up rowing. But the man who laid the groundwork for modern education in Srinagar did not deviate from his course. From his perspective, school was a place where children might learn and grow as people. Mr. Tyndale Biscoe's main duty, as described by Ernest Neve, "was to educate the boys manliness, loyalty, charity, manners, cleanliness, truth," among other values.⁴¹ For those interested in developing their bodies, he emphasised volunteer work, games, and athletics; for those interested in developing their minds, he included subjects like English, Indian languages (Urdu and Hindi), Persian, mathematics, history, geography, science, and art. A unique water sport of the school, the boys were taught to swim. Every student at the Mission School was required to take and pass a swimming test before his thirteenth birthday, and if he did not, his tuition would be increased to an amount that would make it financially impossible for him to continue attending. Non-swimmers were not accepted into the institution." Dr. Brain Holmes, in his work on British Imperial Policy and Mission Schools, makes a note on the C.M.S. School's robust athletics while under Biscoe's leadership "is an illustration of how English-style extracurricular were adapted for use in local schools.⁴² Initiating numerous community service projects in 1893, Biscoe was able to make great strides. There is no denying that the boys moral fibre was strengthened and that they gained insight into how tradition-bound Srinagar was and the need to improve it as part of the missionary job.

Mr. Biscoe is not exaggerating when he says that his students developed empathy for those in a problem. In doing so, they were able to tell the difference between the school's ethos and the community's. The people had now come to terms with the fact that their more enlightened selves had been stifled by superstition, ignorance, and stupid conventions. Surely these young men were aware of how far behind the rest of the world Srinagar was. With this goal in mind, they set out to alter the culture of Srinagar. Students in Mr. Biscoe's class gained a fresh outlook on the problems they faced. They were "behaving in a novel, unusual, and non-conformist fashion" and "speaking a foreign language." Soon after, the world recognised these young men as influential educators. To paraphrase, "the entire civilization was subtly entangling in its vortices" due to the ongoing profound intellectual revolution.⁴³

State response to Missionary activities in Kashmir

Christian Missionaries did a lot of good, but Srinagar remained educationally backwards despite their efforts. In the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, missionaries were unable to undertake widespread educational work. It would have been easy for the government to improve people's lives by establishing a system of schools.⁴⁴ The Dogra aristocracy was opposed to any effort to raise political awareness among their subjects. One can get a sense of the intellectual backwardness of the Kashmiris and the indifference of the Dogra rulers from the reports that emerge in the vernacular newspapers of the Punjab. Throughout these publications, the Maharaja was fervently urged to prioritise the education of State subjects.⁴⁵

By the turn of the last century, Maharaja Pratap Singh had opened a High School in the city.⁴⁶ However, no efforts were made by state officials to make it more appealing or increase enrolment numbers. According to an article published in the *Puissa Akhbar* (Lahore) on November 30th, 1901, state authorities did not encourage citizens to become efficient even in the context of the education provided by the aforementioned institution.⁴⁷ A easy-going attitude toward schooling was highlighted by the 1901 census. In that year, just about 2% of people were literate. While progress in education was slow, some improvement was accomplished in the decade after 1904.⁴⁸ Mrs. Annie Besant established a Hindu College in the metropolis in 1905 with the assistance of various theosophical social leaders and Pandit Bala Koul of the Sahib family. This institution was eventually taken over by the state and renamed Sri Pratap College.⁴⁹ It was the Hindu population that first embraced Western education. Sri Pratap College produced a large number of influential Hindu leaders, and its alumni have gone on to hold positions across government.

Conclusion

All of this points to the fact that Christian missionaries laid a solid groundwork for modern education, which is something for which they should be celebrated. They had many difficulties because of the threatening behaviour of the early Dogra overlords. However, despite all of these challenges, the missionaries persisted in their work. They instituted numerous changes in Kashmiri society, culture, and education. In terms of educational philosophy, they ended up serving as an example for the rest of the State's schools to follow. However, only the wealthy and the Pandits were allowed to attend the mission schools. Furthermore, for a long time, missionary efforts ignored the majority of the Valley and focused solely on Srinagar city. Nonetheless, missionary activities spread throughout the entire society, and a more modern outlook emerged by the turn of the twentieth century. However, as far as conversions is concerned, the missionaries failed. A vast number of people converted outside of the valley, primarily as a result of the caste system, which did not exist in Kashmir.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Department of History, Annamalai, University, who furnished me related source of material to finish my research paper in a stipulated manner within a short period of time. It would be pleasure for me to express heartfelt gratitude to my Research Supervisor Dr. M.C Raja who assisted and helped me a lot in organising my research paper in a befitting fashion.

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