

The Creeping March of Christianity: The Widespread Evangelization in Bangladesh

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Abstract:

Now the tocsin is being whistled in the firmament of Bangladesh due to the extensive activities of Christian missionary groups, which have made massive assault on the custom, culture and religion of poverty-stricken people. They control the majority of NGOs directly or indirectly and are engaged in evangelization. Their activities termed as the "neo-colonialism" are great challenge and threat for the sovereignty and independence of Bangladesh. This article aims at demonstrating the nefariousness of multi-dimensional Christian activities in Bangladesh.

Introduction

Bangladesh, being a poverty-ridden country with an over loaded population of 120 million, paves a sound atmosphere and opportunity for the Christian missionary activities. A large number of NGOs under the banner of "development partner" working to remove poverty and to bring education, progress and enlightenment to the country are largely engaged in evangelization. The colonial policy was to discourage Islamic education and stifle the *awqaf* (Islamic religious foundations), and so to force the native elite to send their children to missionary-run schools, and to make the poor turn for their health needs to mission hospitals. The policy succeeded in creating a Muslim elite who were beholden to their intellectual "Father" and had come to believe sincerely that health, welfare and charity can best be managed only by missionary bodies.

Being the agent of the powerful West, the missionary NGOs trespassed on this small land of 144,000 square kilometers and indulged in extreme transgression in terms of evangelization. Their activities are termed as 'the revived form of imperialism' and 'neo-colonialism' which are obviously the great threat and challenge for the whole nation in general and 88% Muslims in particular.

The Missionary Bodies and Agencies:

The actors who are engaged in evangelization are foreigner as well as local. 'No one can be certain about the time Christianity first arrived in sub-continent. According to third century Christian document, the *acts of Thomas*, the Apostle Thomas was missioned to India. He settled in Kerala in the extreme southwest part of the country, converted

thousands of Indians to the faith and was martyred there about CE 68.¹ Up to the end of medieval era the presence of Christians in the sub-continent was not significant. Like the present rulers of Bangladesh, the Great Mughal Rulers of Delhi opened the door of the province of Bengal to Christian missionaries in 1517. "Active missionary interest in Bengal is two centuries old. In 1757 the forces of British East India Company (the merchants had come to raise an army as well!) defeated the Muslim Ruler of Bengal, Nawab Siraju-d-Daulah, at the battle of Plassey. By 1793, the famous British missionary, William Carey, had arrived in Calcutta. Work started on rendering the Bible into Bengali language and preparing other literature, and the missionary-run schools began to set up all over Bengal."² Such mission activities then spread to other towns like Dinajpur (1795), Jessore (1805), Dhaka (1816), Barisal (1828), Khulna (1860), Chittagong (1881) and Rangpur (1891). Over the years missionary activities have increased. Missions were established between 1900-1947 and also between 1947-1971.³

New missions have been successful after the creation of Bangladesh because the Christian involvement in their struggle for freedom changed the attitude of government towards them.⁴ The influence that the missionaries could wield on the Mujib government is evident. The Churches, Missions and Christian agencies have been very happy with their work under such conditions. The objectives of all, apart from helping their own community, have been evangelization. Missionary bodies and organizations in Bangladesh are divided into 3 parts: the Protestant church, the Roman Catholic and different other agencies.

The Protestant Church denominations number more than the Roman Catholic. It has more Churches as well as missionaries, although the total strength of the Protestant Christian community is smaller than the Roman Catholics.⁵ The Roman Catholic Church has four dioceses in Bangladesh. These are the dioceses of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Dinajpur. The churches under their jurisdiction number more than 500. The Catholic missionaries work closely with their dioceses in Bangladesh. Since the Roman Catholic structure is more hierarchical, close cooperation with the Church is greater than that found among Protestants. According to a 1973 estimate there are four important Catholic missions in Bangladesh. These are: (a) Congregation of Holy Cross (came from USA), (b) Congregation of Holy Cross (came from Canada), (c) Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, and (c) St. Francis Xavier.⁶

The Government NGO Bureau has identified 52 NGOs as engaged directly in converting people to one of the Christian sects, though the difference between the religious and secular NGOs is only of forms and not objectives. The list of these missionary NGOs are: (1) World Missionary Evangelism, (2) The Salvation Army, (3) Bangladesh Foreign

¹ Historians do not agree on the validity of this ancient tradition. For more information, see Alan Neely, *Christian Mission- A Case Study Approach*, (New York: Orbit Books, Maryknoll 1995) pp. 38-40.

² Cited in Nuruzzaman, "NGOs - The Web of New Colonialism. Aid Merchant Buying up Sonar Bangla" *Impact International* (London), July 1994, pp. 9-10.

³ Abdul Karim Khan, *Christian Missions in Bangladesh. A Survey*, (Islamic Foundation London, 1981) p.4.

⁴ See, A. Hussain, *Birth of Bangladesh. The Political Role of Missions* (Islamic Foundation London, 1981)

⁵ Abdul Karim Khan, *op. cit.* pp. 5-8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Mission Board, (4) Main-night Central Committee, (5) Seven-day Adventist Church of Bangladesh, (6) Adventist Development and Relief Agency International, (7) New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society, (8) Bangladesh Luther Mission (Venice), (9) International Christian Fellowship, (10) Baptist Mid Mission Bangladesh, (11) New Life Center, (12) Baptist Missionary Society, (13) Social and Institution Board, (14) Church of God Mission, (15) Christian Service Society, (16) Community Health Care Project, (17) Finnish Free Foreign Mission, (18) Association of Baptist, (19) Christian Reform World-relief Committee, (20) World Vision of Bangladesh, (21) Bangladesh Luther Mission (Finnish), (22) Young Women's Christian Association of Bangladesh, (23) Bangladesh Bible Society, (24) College of Christian Theology, (25) Christian National Evangelism, (26) The Australian Baptist Missionary Society, (27) World Alliance of YMCA Bangladesh, (28) National Council of YMCA Bangladesh, (29) New Apostolic Church of Bangladesh, (30) Calvary Apostolic Church, (31) Assembles of God Mission, (32) *Santal* Mission Norwegian, (33) Presbyterian Plebes in Bangladesh, (34) Bangladesh Luther Mission (Norwegian), (35) *Jatio Church Parishad*, (36) The Church of Bangladesh Social development Program, (37) Friends of Bangladesh, (38) Rainbow House International, (39) Christian Life Bangladesh, (40) Connie, (41) Life Bangladesh, (42) Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB), (43) CARITAS Bangladesh, (44) Swedish Free Mission, (45) Hid Bangladesh, (46) BCRS Foundation Homes, (47) Action aid, (48) World-vision Prayer League, (49) Ideas International, (50) *Rangpur-Dinajpur* Rural Service, (51) *Dip-Shikha*, and (52) World Vision.⁷

Apart from this missionary NGOs, there are many other agencies in Bangladesh, which work, in close cooperation with the Protestant and Catholic missions. In many cases they act as 'front' organizations, whose long-term objective is evangelization by aiding or creating feasible contexts for conversions. There are more than 200 agencies in Bangladesh working indirectly and indirectly for evangelization.⁸

The Target Group

Getting a suitable atmosphere the Christian missions trespass on Bangladesh. The main target of proselytisation are the vulnerable, the women, the children, the poor, the uneducated and alienated.⁹ The social structure of Bangladesh is comprised of three major groups of people- Hindus, Tribal people and the Muslims. Each will be discussed below:

1. The Hindus in Bangladesh:

According to the 1991 census, the Hindus constitute 10.5 percent of the total population in Bangladesh.¹⁰ In terms of giving jobs, most of the missionary agencies give priority to the Hindus, since it is easier for them to disseminate Christian culture among the Hindus than the Muslims.¹¹

⁷ Asghar Hossain, *Avishapta NGO abang Amader Dharma, Sadhinata o Nari* (Cursed NGOs and our Religion, Independence and the Women), (Dhaka: Priti Prokason, 1997), pp. 32-33.

⁸ *The Daily Inqilab* (Dhaka), November 5, 1994.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Encyclopaedia of Britannica CD 1997*, Topic "Bangladesh".

¹¹ *The Daily Inqilab*, (Dhaka), September 8, 1998.

The Hindus caste system divides them in a hierarchical order in which the Brahmans are at the top, followed by *Kshatriya*, *Baishiya* and *Sudras*. The major target of Christian evangelization is the *Sudras*. Altogether they number about 3 million, of which 3.1 percent have already been evangelized. This is just one example, but mission work is going on amongst most of these castes. The point is important and can not be ignored by thinking that since missions are working among Hindus it does not matter. The fact is that it does matter if one sees the strategy behind it. First of all the objective is to evangelize those who are most vulnerable, and Hindus therefore are a prime target. Secondly, among the Hindus the scheduled castes are easier to convert than the upper caste Hindus. The upper caste looks down upon the scheduled castes and the latter look up to Christianity to gain self-respect and prestige. Also their poverty-ridden condition offers many opportunities for missionaries to penetrate among them. Thirdly, the most important point for Muslim concern is that the more the Hindus are evangelized, the more the Christian population will increase and the more Christianized Bangladesh will become. Each Christian in turn will try to evangelize others and sufficient numbers will ensure the entrenchment and perpetuation of Christianity through the creation of indigenous missionary church structures.¹²

2. The Tribal People of Bangladesh:

The tribals, who are mostly pagan, are the major targets for Christian evangelization. They are found in three regions of Bangladesh: Northern Bangladesh, which includes the districts of *Dinajpur*, *Rajshahi*, *Rangpur* and *Bogra*; the Chittagong Hill Tracts and North *Mymensingh* and *Sylhet* districts. Some of the tribes among whom the missions are working are: *Kuki*, *Lushai*, *Pankho*, *Bawm*, *Mru*, *Kayang*, *Kumi*, *Tipperah*, *Riang*, *Tanchangya*, *Magh*, *Chakma*, *Khasi*, *Mamburi*, *Hajaong*, *Garo*, *Hadi*, *Dalu*, *Santal*, *Mahili*, *Oraon*, *Munda*.¹³ According to the statistics of 1992, around 30 percent of them have been converted to Christianity already.¹⁴

The Chittagong Hill Tracts is an important area for Christian evangelization. Regarding the tribes in that area, McNee writes:

The greatest gift we can give to Bangladesh is a Christianized Hill Tracts population. The Tribals are under pressure from many directions. The construction of Dam in the early 1960s displaced thousands of Tribals, especially *Tipperahs*. The war of independence has severed the tie, which the Hill Tracts had with India. Bangladesh is naturally concerned about the borders of the country, and therefore there is a military presence in the Hill Tracts which is suspicious of the Tribals. All this has created a sense of instability among the tribals of this area. The necessity for this change is near bursting point. Christian now number 5 percent of the population. The Hill Tracts is a top priority for evangelistic effort.¹⁵

¹² Abdul Karim Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 10

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴ See, Nuruzzaman, *A Study on the Role of NGOs in the Abnormal Growth of Christian Population in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 1993

¹⁵ P. McNee, *Crucial Issues in Bangladesh*. Pasadena, (CA: William Carey Library, 1976), p. 83.

Evangelization of the Tribal population has continued on a wide scale of Bangladesh. To reach this objective, the missionaries have adopted the following strategies:

- (a) Every non-Christian in every Christian family must be converted.
- (b) Villages where half of the people are Christian should be concentrated on until entire villages become Christian.
- (c) Team evangelistic campaigns should become a regular feature of this work perhaps twice a year.
- (d) The leadership pattern should not revolve around educated young Baptist but around the actual leaders of the village congregations whether they are literate or illiterate.
- (e) To train the natural leaders, the book '24 Bible Stories' should be widely used. The truths of Christian faith are taught to village Christians best through stories.¹⁶

The long-term plan of the Christian missions is to make Chittagong Hill Tracts, the one-tenth area of the territory of Bangladesh, an independent "Christian State", and they are providing fuels to the tribal rebels for this movement. One foreign company prepared the map of Bangladesh excluding the area of Chittagong.¹⁷ The current "68-point Peace Accord" signed on 2nd December 1997 between *Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity* (PCJSS) and Bangladesh government, which ensured autonomy for the tribal people, will work as milestone to execute the long-term plan of the Christian missions. Some of the rudiments of the accord are as follows:

- i) The Regional Council of Chittagong (RCC) will oversee and co-ordinate the administration, law and order and development activities. It will also grant license for NGO activities and setting up of heavy industries.
- ii) All posts of officials and employees in the government, semi-government and autonomous bodies in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) will be filled up giving priority to the tribal people.
- iii) Whatever is in the existing laws, no *khas* land in the CHT region can be leased out, purchased, sold or transferred without the permission of the council.
- iv) The government of Bangladesh will not impose any tax on the area of CHT.¹⁸

3. The Muslims:

The Muslims form the majority of population. Most of this majority lives in the rural areas. There is a lot of poverty among them and, because of this, they are vulnerable to many influences, both internal and external. The main thrust of the missions among the Muslims has been in the rural areas where converts could be made more easily than in the urban areas. In urban areas, missions have to tackle educated people and this has to be done in a more sophisticated manner. In some cases, if conversion is not possible through mission education, they can be secularized or de-Islamized.

Conversion among the Muslims is also achieved by taking advantage of situations. Among the Muslims there is no caste system, therefore the missionaries attack the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁷ Asgahar Hossain, *op.cit.*, p. 60

¹⁸ *The Bangladesh News Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1-15 December, 1997, See also, the *Weekly Sonar Bangla* (Dhaka), September 3, 1999.

poverty-ridden or those in some kind of trouble. One report suggested that when the Burmese government turned out Muslims from its country and they fled to Bangladesh, missionaries converted many of them so that they could go back as Christians. In other cases, through aid, money and treatment of poverty-ridden masses, suggestions and inducements are made.¹⁹

Recent news reveals the fact that in *Jamalpur* District being tantalized for money by various missionary NGOs, more than 250 poor Muslims have converted to Christianity and the number is increasing day by day.²⁰ The new comers have to take oath by putting the Qur'an under their knees, and holding the Bible by hands. They are required to pronounce: "(a) by the name of Jesus, from today I entered in the fold of Christianity, leaving Islam forever, (b) by the name of Jesus, I will not reveal the secrets of my conversion to others until the one-third population of my society is converted to Christianity."²¹

In the 190 years of colonial rule in united Bengal only 111,426 people were converted in Christianity. Out of this converts, about 50 thousands belonged to Bangladesh.²² The number of Christians in the territory had risen by 400% from about 50,000 in 1947 to 200,000 in 1971.²³ According to one estimate, 'in the period between 1971 and 1991, the number of Christian converts in Bangladesh has risen from 200,000 to 400,000.'²⁴ Christian sources tend to underplay their numbers, but it is reported that they have as their target a population of 10-12 million Christians in the next 20 years.²⁵

The Message of the Missions:

Actually the fundamental message of all prophets was same. The fundamental message that was given to the first prophet (Adam), who was also the first man, was same as that given to the last prophet, Muhammad.²⁶ No doubt, Jesus was the prophet of Allah, but his message had been distorted over time.²⁷ The faith of New Testament is that Jesus is Lord and that everything and everybody rightly belongs to him. Mission, therefore, is to bring all mankind to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, because he owns us all, and has a just claim on us all.²⁸ So Christianity returned from monotheism to polytheism considering Jesus as the Son of God and also believing in Holy Ghost.²⁹ Even though the missionaries claim

¹⁹ See, Abdul Karim Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

²⁰ *The Daily Sangram* (Dhaka), February 8, 1999.

²¹ *Ibid.*, April 24, 1999.

²² See, Prof. R. Amin, *Christian Missionary Activities in Bangladesh* (Dhaka University Press Ltd, 1983)

²³ Nuruzzaman, *NGOs- The Web of...*, p.10.

²⁴ Nur Hossain Majidi, NGO: Bangladeshe Christander Sorojantra (NGO: The Conspiracy of Christians in Bangladesh) *Al-Furqan* (Dhaka). Vol. 10, No. 8 (July 1994). P. 21. See also *Dhaka Courier*, June 17, 1994.

²⁵ Nuruzzaman, *NGOs- The Web of...*, p. 10.

²⁶ See, Abd El Khabeer M. Ata, *Methods of Dawah. Methodological civilizational perspective: Vision and Mission* (Compilation) (IIUM Printing Unit, 1998) p. 114.

²⁷ See, Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, *Tafhimul Qur'an*, (Adhunik Prokashani, Dhaka, 1995) Vol. 1.

²⁸ Arne Rudvin, The Concept and Practice of Christian Mission. *Christian Mission and Islamic Dawah Proceedings of the Chambesy Dialogue* (the Islamic Foundation, London, 1982) p. 19

²⁹ Those who believe in more than one God or consider Jesus as the Son of God are deluded away from the truth. See Al-Qur'an, 4: 171; 5:17, 72,75; 43: 59, 63, 64; 9: 30

that they are disseminating the message of Jesus, the message per se is distorted and far away from the ultimate truth. Actually the aim for their mission is different. "Although the promotion of Christianity was one of the objectives of colonial powers, it deserves to be said in fairness to them, that their most important objective was economic and political exploitation."³⁰

This feature is evident in Bangladesh. They say that Jesus is the only savior of mankind and no one else. "Church of Bangladesh is one Christian NGO which is seriously disturbing the communal harmony due to its aggressive evangelization program. In 1965 it set up Christian Memorial Hospital at *Malumghat*, in the district of *Cox's Bazar*. At the time of opening the hospital the then government of East Pakistan cautioned the hospital authority not to indulge in evangelization activities."³¹ But since its inception to the great detriment of the national interest Dr. Vigo B. Alsen MD, the chief of the hospital, is engaged in evangelization. It has intensified its activities of the evangelization after the war of liberation in 1971. It is exploiting both the ignorance and poverty of the people. According to a survey conducted by the Islamic Foundation Dhaka, it has converted 10 thousand adults directly and with the children and dependants their number exceed 40 thousand. Under the rehabilitation program it has scattered these families to all over greater Chittagong district.³² With a view to avoiding reaction and criticism of the local people, Church of Bangladesh transfers the converted people to the other places.

About the technique of disseminating their message adopted by the NGO in its Malumghat Hospital area, reports enlisted many points of which few are:

- (a) At first it gives inferior medicine to the patients and tells them to seek blessings of Muhammad (SAW) (and in the case of Hindu patients blessings of *Ramakrishna*) for early recovery. When the patient is not cured, it gives correct medicine and tells the illiterate patient to seek the blessings of Christ for recovery. When the patients are cured by good and correct medicine the hospital authorities say Jesus has cured him.
- (b) Since Jesus has cured you, he can also give you paradise. Believe in him and his religion.
- (c) Muhammad is very unlucky and as such his followers are poor. If you want good economic life, become Christian and Jesus will bless you.
- (d) It is stated in the book "*Morone Nehi Bhai*" (There is no fear in Death)-in comparison with the Bible the Qur'an is inferior. There is nothing in the life and teachings of Muhammad. Descendants of Muhammad are thieves etc.
- (e) Pressurize the poor employees such as nurses, gardeners, helpers, carpenters etc. to accept Christianity. Unwilling employees are sacked.
- (f) Conversion is made through cash money, free medicine, and jobs in different places.³³

All the missionary bodies and agencies convey the message that the optimum mercy of God is upon those who are Christians, and the followers of Jesus will not face any financial difficulties.³⁴ In many of their books, like 'Islam Under the Magnifying Glass',

³⁰ Muhammad Rasjidi, Christian Missions in the Muslim World. *Christian Mission and Islamic Dawah...op.cit.*, p. 69.

³¹ *The Daily Inqilab* (Dhaka), March 13, 1993.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Cited in Nuruzzaman, *A Study of the Role of ...*, p. 3.

³⁴ *The Daily Sangram* (Dhaka), April 4, 1999.

'The Sources of Islam and the Qur'an', 'The Secrets of the Qur'an', 'Prophets and Prophecy in Islam', 'A Question that Demands an Answer', 'Who is Allah in Islam', 'What is Islam', 'The Black Gold and the Holy War' and other literatures, they nefariously criticized Al-Qur'an, Islam, and Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and made a lot of lampoons.³⁵

The Tools and Approaches of Evangelization:

Bangladesh has the NGO density of 3.5 foreign NGOs per square miles most of which are directly and indirectly engaged in evangelization. The methods of these NGOs are usual: Corruption, seduction and conversion, only if the methods are becoming more aggressive. The policy of the most Christian NGOs is to 'employ Muslims last' and to favor those who convert. The idea is to create economically and educationally influential community of converts who would, in due course, like in many parts of Africa, control all the key sectors of power: education, economy, social policy, bureaucracy and military.³⁶ The long-term dimensions of their strategies are discussed here:

1. People's Movement:

The people's movement is not a 'mass' movement as some Christian writers have considered. On the contrary, it is a one caste or one tribe movement such those in Punjab.³⁷ The missionary tries to launch a people's movement in one particular tribe or caste and does not go about converting one person from one caste/ tribe and another from another caste/tribe. In the past experiments, such people's movements have multiplied converts because the social pressure from members of one tribe influences others of the same tribe to gain Christianity. Thus, for example, there were 4,123 *Garó* Christians in 1921 and these increased to 40,268 by 1974,³⁸ and 1,42,000 (95%) by 1997. There are 11 Baptist missions, and 11 Catholic missions working among the *Garó*. The *Garó* had their own cultures and traditions, but now there is nothing left for their own. All of their cultures and traditions have now been diffused to and replaced by Christianity.³⁹

2. Education:

Missionary schools have been used as an effective tool of evangelization in Bangladesh, as elsewhere, for reasons clearly outlined by McNee:

- (a) The isolation enforced by boarding schools created in the pupils an attitude of independence on the mission.
- (b) Many schools were situated purposely to isolate children from their parents. This was the reason why the Oxford Mission developed a school in *Barisal* when the center of its work was 40 miles away.⁴⁰

The importance given to education by the Roman Catholics was evident in response to a survey conducted among them which shows that a majority of the clergy (54 percent), laity (75 percent) and sisters (62 percent) believed in the essential need of maintaining

³⁵ *The Daily Inqilab* (Dhaka), November 5, 1995

³⁶ See, Nuruzzaman, *NGOs- The Web of...*, pp. 8-10.

³⁷ See L.W. Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India* (Lucknow Publishing House, 1969)

³⁸ Abdul Karim Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

³⁹ *The Daily Inqilab* (Dhaka), December 20, 1997.

⁴⁰ P. McNee, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

private schools. Most of them also agreed that without its schools and institutions, Christianity could not survive.⁴¹

They established thousands of schools and colleges in various places of Bangladesh. For example, there are 67 missionary schools only among the *Garo* tribe. Learning Christianity is compulsory in the missionary-run schools. They have been able to attract the poverty-ridden people, since they normally provide scholarships and accommodation.⁴² The missionaries are very much successful in converting their students. For example, most of the students in Horizon School in *Sayedabad*, Dhaka, have been converted to Christianity.⁴³

3. Evangelization of Women:

Another important area targeted by the evangelists are the women in Bangladesh. There are estimated to be 431 sisters belonging to 17 different congregations, who are active in 47 parishes to try to convert Muslim women. Obviously, the evangelization of women as 'agents of liberation' to adopt 'a alternative life styles' in an insinuation that they have to be 'liberated' from Islam and adopt a non-Islamic (alternative) life-style. Through evangelization of the women the other family members can also be influenced.⁴⁴

4. Christian Literature:

More than 22 thousand Christian organizations and service agencies, around 5 thousand foreign missions, and more than 100 thousand missionary institutions are working in the Muslim world. Within the year 2000 they will disseminate the Gospel to every people and establish church in every area. With this view, the Christian missionaries translated the Bible into 1907 different languages. According to the census of 1990, their 22 thousand service agencies, 23,800 news papers and 2160 radio and TV centers are engaged in disseminating Christianity.⁴⁵ In Bangladesh the Protestant missionaries have placed a strong emphasis on literature evangelism. There are five groups, which are very active in this regard:

- (a) Christian Literature Center
- (b) National Council of Churches
- (c) Bangladesh Bible Society
- (d) Association of Baptists for World Evangelism
- (e) Bangladesh Mission (Southern Baptist).

Bibles, New Testaments, Gospel and selections have been specially translated into Bengali and other minority languages. Distribution has already increased since 1971 when it was 51,000, and after the civil war it increased sharply 324,000 in 1972 and 50,000 in 1973. The 1972 Annual Report of the United Bible Societies shows that 324,770 items were distributed of which there were 4,825 copies of Bibles, 2,137 New

⁴¹ C. Brouillard and P. Murphy, A Study of the Catholic Elite in Bangladesh. Quoted in: Pro Mandi Vita Dossiers, *Bangladesh: A Test Case for a Self-reliant Nation and a Church*, Belgium, August, 1979, p. 41

⁴² *The Daily Inqilab* (Dhaka), December 20, 1997

⁴³ *Ibid.*, August 8, 1998

⁴⁴ See Abdul Karim Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁴⁵ Asghar Hossain, *op.cit.*, pp. 54-55.

Testaments, 238,360 Gospels and 79,448 selections. The number is increasing every year.⁴⁶ Different attractive cards equipped with nice pictures and gospels and videos on the life of Jesus are now widely distributed free in Bangladesh.⁴⁷ To attract the people now they take the new method of using Arabic and Persian terms in their translation, such as, *doa'*, *Allah*, *Sharif*, *aqida*, *jannat*, *jahannam*, *akhirat*, *tarjama*, *imam*, *firista*, *nabi*, *kalima* and so on.⁴⁸ The missionaries have some newspapers and magazines. The Weekly Protibeshi is one of their renowned magazines. The left-wing newspapers and magazines are now also giving big coverage for the Christians.

5. Bible Correspondence Schools and Reading Rooms:

The Bible Correspondence Schools is another important evangelical tool and following organizations support and supervise such schools:

- (a) Seventh Day Adventist Mission
- (b) International Christian Fellowship supervises the Bangladesh Bible Correspondence School. It began functioning in 1960 and is the largest correspondence school in the country.
- (c) The British Brethren started their operation in 1963.
- (d) The Assemblies of God started their own school in 1972 and used the materials of International Correspondence Institute.
- (e) Every Home Contact follows up contacts made by correspondence schools through simple correspondence courses, and personal visits.⁴⁹

The Bible Correspondence Schools act as a "soil testing tool" for they determine which segment of social structure could be attracted to Christian teachings. Enrollment at the Bangladesh Bible Correspondence Schools has steadily increased over the years since 1960 to 45,000 students. In 1973, 14,000 lesson papers of the nine-course curriculum were corrected and 1,300 new students were enrolled. Compared to 1972, it was reported that there was a 200 percent increase. The International Correspondence School is administered by a staff of five missionaries. Each month, on average, over 2,500 lessons are marked and the total number of enrollees since 1972 has reached 9,000.⁵⁰

6. Medical Service:

Medical services are a very effective tool for evangelism. The Missions have several hospitals, dispensaries, leprosy hospitals, and family planning clinics in Bangladesh. Medical missionary work undertaken after the establishment of hospitals, clinics and sanitariums, is also guided by certain principles, which involve the participants with missionary activities in a subtle manner. Dr. VB. Olsen, a medical missionary who was highly regarded by the *Mujib* government for his services to the war-torn country, laid down certain principles favorable for evangelism to guide the medical missionary policy in Bangladesh.⁵¹ The following have sponsored medical missions in Bangladesh:

⁴⁶ *Bangladesh: Status of Christianity Country Profile* (MARC, Montovia, 1974) p. 4.

⁴⁷ *The Daily Sangram* (Dhaka), February 2, 1999.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, December 11, 1995

⁴⁹ Abdul Karim Khan, *op.cit.*, p. 16

⁵⁰ *Bangladesh: Status of Christianity Country Profile*, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4.

⁵¹ See V. Olsen, *Daktar/Diplomat in Bangladesh* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1974) p. 350.

1. American Churches of God with a hospital in *Bogra* and a dispensary at *Khanjanpur*.
2. Association of Baptists for World Evangelism with a hospital at *Haluaghat* and related clinics at Chittagong.
3. Australian Baptist Missionary Society with a hospital at *Haluaghat* and dispensary in Northern *Mymensingh* District.
4. Bangladesh Mission of Northern Churches with a general dispensary at *Amnura*.
5. British Baptist Missionary Society with a hospital at Chittagong offering a nurses training program, where the wives of *Sangali* converts are often trained for this profession. Also a clinic for the rehabilitation of the lepers has been established.
6. Church Missionary Society with a hospital at *Bollobhpur* and an outpatient hospital at *Meherpur*.
7. English Presbyterian Mission with a hospital at *Rajshahi*, also providing a nurses' training program.
8. New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society with a dispensary at *Brahmanbaria*.
9. Oxford Mission with a hospital in *Barisal* and momentary clinic at *Jobarpur*.
10. Fatima Hospital, *Jessore*.⁵²

Sometimes the foreign missions visit Bangladesh to see the development of the activities. For example, in December 1997 Plattner Orthopedic went to Bangladesh to visit Memorial Christian Hospital in *Malumghat*.⁵³

7. Orphanages:

These orphanages took orphans and raised and converted them. Since the government now takes care of non-Christian orphans, Christian orphanages only take Christian children. The Roman Catholics opened lots of orphanages, which provide them with food, clothing and education. Now they are playing very important role in evangelization.⁵⁴

8. Bible Reading Groups:

This tool of evangelization has proved to be effective. The practice is to gather whole families in the evening when their work is over and the most respected among them reads a portion of Bible. This strategy is again a 'soil testing' operation for missionaries to find out the degree of interest, their needs and other aspects about these families- to make it easier to evangelize. In fact missionaries are advised to study such collectivities and develop a 'scale of awareness'. A score from one to nine is given to nine various items in the scale which are given below with their scale scores in brackets:

- (a) Practically no knowledge of Christianity (9)
- (b) Interest in Christianity (8)
- (c) Village discussion about Christianity (7)
- (d) Understanding of the Gospel (6)
- (e) Implications of the Gospel understood (5)
- (f) Challenged to act (4)
- (g) Repentance and faith in Christ (3)
- (h) Post decision evaluation (2)

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ www.plattners.com/banglade.html, "Plattner Orthopedic goes to Bangladesh".

⁵⁴ See *CARITAS Bangladesh Annual Report*, 1978, p. 60.

- (i) Incorporation into the Christian community (1)⁵⁵

9. Relief and Rehabilitation:

One of the most common strategies used is to supply relief and aid to people in times of stress, such as during the cyclone in Bangladesh (1970) and the aftermath of civil war (1971). Through this means the goodwill of the people is gained and trust is established between the people and the missionaries. The people are thus prepared to welcome and listen to missionaries. The Seventh Day Adventists not only supervise hospitals but also have donated large amount of clothing, food and medical supplies. Such aid amounted to \$49,716 in 1973, \$69,690 in 1974, \$109,961 in 1975 and \$133,138 in 1978. Apart from these there are many foreign cooperative agencies that provide funds to a large number of Christian projects; they are too numerous to be listed here. The funding provided by two such agencies will give an idea of the scope and nature of these projects. The World Council of Churches based in Geneva has three categories in which projects are allotted and marked for various countries.⁵⁶

In category 1 are projects of high priority for the life of the Church or community. Category 2 covers projects screened locally but of less immediate urgency, while category 3 contains projects of refugees, scholarship, World Youth Urban Industrial Mission. In 1976, funds for projects in category 1 in Bangladesh amounted to \$26,410 and in category 2 to \$34,515. In 1978, six projects were selected amounting to \$1,894 in category 1 and \$18,500 in category 2. More funds were made available later.⁵⁷

During the cyclone in 1991 hundreds of people stormed the office of an NGO in Kutubdia in Chittagong to protest against being asked to change their faith if they wanted to receive the relief material. Even otherwise Muslims are given a meager share of the relief aid. The Church of Bangladesh argued these had come from 'Christian' countries.⁵⁸

The Feedback:

The abnormal rise of Christian population in Bangladesh shows that the objectives of the Christian missions are successful and they are getting mostly the positive feedback. From the outset of the systemic Christian missions, Dr. Carry made special effort in setting up of the missionary run schools with a view to changing the outlook of the young generation. Though he had not succeeded much having some negative feedback in converting Muslims to Christian faith, his literary and educational campaign de-Islamized the Muslim educated class. Dr. William Carry and other Christian missionaries executed the objectives of British education in India spelled out by Lord Maculay. Lord Maculay said:

⁵⁵ The numbers indicate 'distance away from becoming Christian.' See Abdul Karim Khan, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ *Service programs and list of Supplementary Projects for 1976*. Geneva: WCC., 1976. Also see *List of supplementary Projects*. Geneva: WCC., 1976.

⁵⁷ See Abdul Karim Khan, *op.cit.*, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁸ Nuruzzaman, *NGOs- The Web of...*, pp. 10-11.

We must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the Muslims whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and color but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.⁵⁹

The Christian Missionaries and their NGOs have not changed a bit from their past. 'In 25 years of Pakistani Rule more people were converted to Christianity than in 200 years under British Rule.'⁶⁰ The following tables are the actual proof of being successful and having positive feedback in their missions:

Table - A
(Growth of Christian Population in Bangladesh)

Year	Catholic	Protestant	Total
1939	20,000	30,000	50,000
1970	120,000	80,000	200,000
1980	170,000	130,000	300,000
1990	n.a.	n.a.	4800,000
1992	n.a.	n.a.	5000,000

(Source: A study on the role of NGOs in the abnormal growth of Christian Population in Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1993.)

Table - B

1881 One Christian in every 6000
1901 One Christian in every 1000
1982 One Christian in every 326
1990 One Christian in every 29
1992 One Christian in every 22

(Source: A study on the role of NGOs in the abnormal growth of Christian Population in Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1993.)

Response from the Muslims:

Responses from different levels to this coming aggression of the Christian missionary activities are not satisfactory and to some extent meaningless. The responses are as follows:

1. From the Government:

From the above it is quite clear to what extent the NGOs are powerful in Bangladesh. 'They are increasingly assuming the role of invisible government having little regards to the history, culture, customs of people and rules and regulations of the government.'⁶¹ They run a very powerful parallel government and they can undo any order of the government any time they like.⁶²

⁵⁹ See Md. Saidul Islam. Our Educational Institutions: A Great Concern. *Weekly Sonar Bangla* (Dhaka) September 12, 1997.

⁶⁰ See Prof. R. Amin, *op. cit.*

⁶¹ *The Daily Inqilab* (Dhaka), September 13, 1992.

⁶² *The Daily Millat*, (Dhaka), August 26, 1992.

Government in Bangladesh is now in a state of utter helplessness. Neither they can overlook the volatile situation created by the NGOs nor they take any action against NGOs involved in the activities incompatible with the national interest and the sovereignty of the state.⁶³ NGOs are now humiliating the government in every step. When the NGO Bureau of the government took action against two powerful NGOs - ADAB (Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh) and SEBA (Society for Economic and Basic Administration) canceling their registration on the ground of defalcation of funds and receiving money from a foreign embassy without the permission or even the knowledge of the government, the foreign embassies allegedly compelled the government to withdraw the cancellation order within 3 hours of the issuance of the same.⁶⁴ After this humiliation the democratic government of the country has refrained from taking action against the corrupt NGOs and their executives involved in undesirable activities including violating government rules and indulging in political activities.⁶⁵ They are termed as "Neo-East India Company" in Bangladesh. Different newspapers highlighted the helplessness of the government, giving 3 or 4 column headlines as follows:

- (a) The government yields to dishonest and vicious NGO circle.
- (b) Plot to snatch away our independence through the tactics of East India Company.
- (c) Government fails to control NGOs etc.⁶⁶

Similarly, without the approval of Bangladesh government, Swedish Free Mission received 70.3 million taka, *Proshika Manabik Unnayan Kendro* 110.2 million, Australian Baptist Society 60.3 million and BRAC received 870 million taka from the foreign embassies in 1990, and most of the amount had been spent for missionary purposes.⁶⁷ NGOs make Bible reading compulsory for their staff, including the Muslims. One big missionary NGO employed only Christian teachers in its schools and a student has to be Christian before he is given board and lodging in its hostels. While a pupil in a government or other private schools is taught only his or her religion, the study of Christianity is compulsory for all students in most missionary schools, which is also the threat to the government policy.⁶⁸ Once the Director of Bangladesh NGO Bureau went to visit the project of 'the Salvation Army' in Jessore, but he was not given permission to enter in the project, rather he was told: 'even the President of Bangladesh will not be permitted to enter without the prior permission of our authority.'⁶⁹ The NGOs are also active in political campaign violating the government rule. In many cases they actively

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ It was not a case of not knowing and doing nothing, it was a case of knowing and not being able to do anything

⁶⁶ August issues 1992, among all the leading Dailies. See also Nuruzzaman...

⁶⁷ Asghar Hossain, *op.cit.*, p. 40

⁶⁸ In one case when the District Education Officer pointed out this irregularity, he was told- "We are not funded by your government and we are not obliged to answer you." See Nuruzzaman. *NGOs- The Web of...*, p. 10.

⁶⁹ Asghar Hossain, *op.cit.*, p. 40

participated in the election, financed them and run massive political campaign for them.⁷⁰ So the responses from the government is obviously impotent to this great power.

However, The present Awami League (AL) government is soft-minded towards the NGOs and missionaries, since the party got tremendous help from them during the parliamentary election in 1996. Now the NGOs and the missionaries are enjoying their hey-days under the present government. Like other Christian countries, the Christmas Day is celebrated in Bangladesh with pomp and grandeur, with the full support and help of government.⁷¹

2. From Non-governmental Level:

The public of Bangladesh has launched massive protest against missionary NGOs. The NGOs have created social tension in Bangladesh as in the last few years many incidents have happened against which Bangladeshi community, particularly led by the *Ulama*, have protested. The simmering crisis spilled on the streets in 1994 when large demonstrations against the NGOs took place in various towns and cities of Bangladesh. They claimed that the government must act before the country loses its sovereignty and the nation its Islamic identity. The main reason for this protest is that great majorities of the NGOs are allegedly engaged in missionary activities.⁷²

Since the NGOs aim at destroying the Islamic foundation of the society and employ the leftist activities for the same purpose of leftist political parties consider the NGO activities as complementary. They do not sense any danger as they are primarily and presently concerned with growing popularity of *Jamaat-e-Islami*, Islamic parties are aware of the danger but probably they feel that without the change in government with a tilt to Islam NGOs can not be curbed. *Jamaat-e-Islami* has confined its protests to the National Assembly.⁷³ While the other Islamic parties which do not have the representative in the parliament have organized public meetings and rallies, to register their protest against the volatile situation created by the NGOs.

3. From Outside Bangladesh:

It is not known whether the Muslim embassies in Dhaka have ever noted the mounting pressure of the Dhaka based Western Christian Embassies on Bangladesh to allow the NGOs to christianize the country freely and in an unfettered way in exchange of much needed Western dollar for the industrialization of the country or providing electricity to the villages. In short neither the Muslim countries nor OIC have expressed their concern over increasing evangelization through NGO networks. It may be that the Muslim

⁷⁰ They actively participated in the National Parliamentary Election 1996. Many NGOs specially FEMA spent millions of dollars for election purposes so that the Islamists could not pass in the election and they are quite successful in their anti-Islamic campaign. See *the Report from Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh about the National Parliamentary Election, 1996*.

⁷¹ See, *The Daily Ittefaq* (Dhaka), December 26, 1997.

⁷² Syed Serajul Islam, Impact of Technology and NGOs on Social Development: the Case of Bangladesh. *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. xxi, No. 2, Winter 1998, p. 84.

⁷³ Jamaat's Parliamentary Party Leader Maulana Motiur Rahman Nizami and other Jamaat MPs addressed Parliament at that time.

countries are not aware of the NGOs and their dangerous activities in Bangladesh. And as such how they can give their reaction to this regard??

Conclusion:

John Henry Borrow's 01 said:

I might sketch Christian movement in Musalman land which has touched, with the radiance of the cross, the Lebanon and the Persian mountains as well as the waters of the Bosphorus and which will be sure harbinger of the day when the Cairo and Damascus and Tehran shall be the servants of Jesus and when even the solitudes of Arab will be pierced and the Christ in the person of his disciples, shall enter the 'Kaba'.⁷⁴

The extensive effort to evangelize Bangladesh is the part of their 'old dream of the Christian world'. It would be positive factor in the quest for a solution to the vexing problem if the Muslims of Bangladesh and their friends abroad keep in mind that the pernicious efforts of the Christian world can only be halted by efforts of similar magnitude.

The Muslim Ummah owes great responsibility to safeguard the Muslims of Bangladesh against the plots, conspiracies and attacks of the Christian fundamentalists and the Christian NGOs on our custom, culture and ideology. If timely action is not taken by all concerned and NGO bombs are allowed to explode a Lebanon like situation will fast emerge in this country to the bewilderment of everybody. We pray to Allah to give strength, courage, and sagacity to the Muslim Ummah to counter the design and the machination of Christian missionaries and their NGOs.

⁷⁴ Cited in Nuruzzaman, *A Study of the Role of ...*, p. 3.