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Muslim-Christian Debates in the Subcontinent (A Research Review)

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ABSTRACT

The contact between Islam and Christianity commenced very early. When the Christian delegations started coming to Madīnah, a series of Muslim-Christian debates set about, which reached the Subcontinent with time. Muslim-Christian debates started here during the reign of Mughal Emperor Akbar and later his son Jahangir maintained this tradition. According to history, Christianity started in the Subcontinent with the arrival of St. Thomas, and then later the Portuguese and the British continued to increase its promotion and expansion. The Portuguese established various institutions and gave open permission to Christian priests to preach Christianity here, while the British, after gaining political dominance, used all kinds of tactics for this purpose and tried hard to make this land a Christian state. Christian scholars gave speeches against Islam in many places, due to which a controversial atmosphere was created in the Subcontinent. They raised various objections to Islam and tried to create doubts in the minds of Muslims. In such a situation, the Muslim scholars of the Subcontinent played their full role and argued with the Christian debaters and proved it as the true divine religion. Maolānā Raḥmatullah Kairanawī defeated Karl Gottlieb Pfander, Maolānā Muḥammad Qāsim Nānotavī defeated Pastor Knowles and Maulvī Thanāullah Amritsarī defended Islam by defeating Sulṭān Paul in this field. Apart from them, Dr. Wazīr Khān, Āl e Ḥassan Mūhānī, and many other Muslim debaters played an important role in this regard. In this article, a very brief overview of the activities of these Muslim debaters has been presented so that the readers can be aware of their efforts.

Keywords:

Subcontinent, Islam, Christianity, Debates.

Start of Muslim Christian Contact

Scholars are well aware that Muslim-Christian relations began during the time of the Prophet. The layout of these relations is something like this:

1. After the first revelation in Hira Cave, the Holy Prophet first came in contact with the Christian scholar Warqa bin Nawfal.(1)

2. The second contact with Christianity took place on the occasion of the migration of the Prophet's Companions to Abyssinia.(2)

3. The third connection is the conversion of 'Adī b. Ḥatim and his companions to Islam.(3)

4. The fourth contact is the epistle of the Holy Prophet's invitation to Islam in the name of Caesar of Rome.

5. In this connection, an emissary, Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balta'a, was sent to Egypt, where he delivered a letter from the Holy Prophet to Maqūqas.(4)

6. The sixth contact is the arrival of Christian scholars and chiefs, dialogue and debate, and then the Treaty of Najran.(5)

The martyrdom of Ḥārith b. 'Umair, the battle of Mūtah and the battle of Tabūk are historically the starting points of the Muslim-Christian conflict which took the form of the Crusades in the eleventh century AD.(6) This conflict has been going on ever since and it is still continuous in many parts of the world in theoretical form as undeclared world war. As far as religious debates in the Subcontinent are concerned, we see their greatest rise in the era of Mughal kings Akbar and Jahangir. Shah Jahan patronized Islamic preaching after taking over the government, which led to the breakdown of Christianity, Hinduism and later, with the religious policies of Aurangzeb 'Ālamgīr, Islam rose to prominence in the Subcontinent. In this case, a short detail is as under:

Arrival of Christianity in the Subcontinent

Christianity had set its foundations in the Subcontinent in the very beginning. The Indian people, first time, were introduced to Christianity as a divine religion. The establishment and dilatancy of Christianity in the Subcontinent is divided into the following stages.

(1) Ronald Victor Courtenay Bodley, *The Messenger, The Life of Muḥammad* (Lahore, Orientalia, 1954) 77 ; George Bush, *The Life of Muḥammad* (New York, A.L. Fowle, 1900), p.53

(2) Bukhārī, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, *al-Jām'e al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book.22, Chapter.54, Ḥadīth.1318

(3) Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muḥammad* (Oxford University Press, 1955), pp.637-638

(4) 'Alī b. Muḥammad Al-Jazrī, *Usdul Ghābah fi Ma'rifat al-Ṣiḥābah* (Beruit, Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2012), 1st edi, p.239

(5) Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al- Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book.64, Chapter.73, Ḥadīth.4380

(6) Abī J'afar Muhammad b. Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al Umam wal Malūk*, edit. Ismail K. Poonawala, State University of New York Press, 1990, p.47-49

Period of St. Thomas

Some Christian historians believe that St. Thomas, one of Jesus Christ's twelve apostles, brought Christianity to the Subcontinent in the first century AD in the Kerala province.(1) According to Mr. Mathew Varghese, the community regards St. Thomas as having converted them to the honorable creed of Christianity in the first century alone. This follower of Christ came from the esteemed Brahmin society of Kerala. Some Christian historians believe that St. Thomas, one of Jesus Christ's twelve apostles, brought Christianity to the Subcontinent in the first century AD in the Kerala province.(2)

Julius Richter has related an odd story about St. Thomas's arrival in the Subcontinent. According to what he relates, Indian king Gondophares dispatched one of his merchants to Jerusalem in search of a competent architect in order to construct his palace. The reason for Jesus Christ's visit was revealed to the merchant when they met at Jerusalem's slave market. After pointing to Thomas, Jesus gave the Indian trader his business. Thomas finally made it to the court of the Indian King.(3) Certain experts claim that the introduction of Christianity into the Subcontinent can be attributed to the historical trading connections between Kerala and the Mediterranean Sea, which predates the Arab presence in the region even before Islam.(4) Up until the Portuguese arrived in the Subcontinent in the sixteenth century, Christians lived in Kerala and became largely used to Indian civilization, culture, and way of life.(5)

St. Thomas built chapels and churches in various locations to carry out his missionary work. His miracles, morality, and preaching are credited as major factors in the spread of Christianity. He attracted pilgrims to himself throughout his time in Kerala by performing miracles and deeds of penance. (6) Thomas Christians' life was a perfect match for a Hindu's. Although they lived according to Hindi customs, it would be more accurate to state that Christianity was then India's official religion.

The Portuguese Era

(1) S. M. Ghazanfar, Vasco da Gama's Voyages to India: Messianism, Mercantilism, and Sacred Exploits (Journal of Global Initiatives), vol. 13, No. 1, 2018, p.33

(2) Mathew Varghese, The indigenous tradition of Syrian Christians of Kerala a perspective based on their folk songs: marriage, customs and history (Indian Folklore Research Journal), vol.2, No.5, 2005, pp.36-37

(3) Julius Richter, A History of Missions in India, edit by Sydney H. Moore (New York, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), p.28

(4) Mathew, The indigenous tradition of Syrian Christians of Kerala, p.35

(5) Pynhunlang Shullai, Colonialism, Christianity and Mission Activities In India: A Postcolonial Perspectives (International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies), vol.3, No.5, March 2017, p.325

(6) Thomas, Sonja, From Chattas To Churidars: Syrian Christian Religious Minorities In A Secular Indian State (New Jersey, New Brunswick, 2011), p.31

Even though St. Thomas brought Christianity to the Subcontinent, it was not as structured as it became with the coming of the Portuguese. The Portuguese had two main objectives: first, to take control of India's wealth; and second, to convert the Subcontinent to Christianity. When Vasco da Gama sailed off the coast of Malabar, India, in 1498, the Portuguese began to arrive on the Subcontinent.(1)

Here, the Portuguese built preaching centers and commercial marketplaces. Aside from Goa, Calicut, and Bombay, several cities saw the construction of churches, orphanages, and educational facilities for evangelizing.(2) The period of Christian expansion in India and the Far East began with the arrival of St. Francis Xavier in 1542. Working in good faith with Christians, Francis Xavier converted thousands of people to Christianity and established Mission Stations operated by the Society of Jesus throughout India.(3) Then the aboriginal people started to be converted by force. Anyone who became a Christian was welcomed, while those who refused were punished harshly.(4)

The Portuguese also acquired access to the court of Mughal emperor Akbar (1542-1605) to defend their Christian operations at the political and governmental level. People of all religions were welcome to attend and take part in the intellectual conversations during the theological debates held at Akbar's court. Portuguese Christians seized the chance and made great use of it in their missionary work. They offered Akbar a copy of the Bible, bound in seven volumes and consisted of four languages,(5) so in return they were permitted to preach Christianity by Akbar. Gauvin Alexander has described this incident in his writing.(6)

British Period

"Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies" was the name of the trading company that was established in Britain on December 31, 1600.(7) Sitting in a tiny London building, neither the British government nor the

(1) George Smith, *The Conversion of India : From Pantaenus To The Present Time* (New York, 1893), 48 ; Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity In India* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.3

(2) Pynhunlang Shullai, *Colonialism, Christianity and Mission Activities In India: A Postcolonial Perspectives*, *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies*, Vol.3, No.5, March 2017, pp.326-327

(3) Arun Andrew John, *The Impact of Religious Conversion on Cultural Identity: Conversion Story of South African Anglican Indian Christians*, University of South Africa, 2007, p.86

(4) Ghazanfar, *Vasco da Gama's Voyages to India*, vol.13, No.1, India, 2018, pp.33-34

(5) Avril A Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (Routledge Press Ltd, 2003), p.10 ; J.S Hoyland, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, On His Journey to the Court of Akbar* (London, Oxford University Press, 1922), p.37

(6) Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Occasional Papers: The Jesuits and the Grand Mogul: Renaissani at the Imperial Court of India, 1580-1630* (Washington D.C., 1998), vol.2, p.12

(7) Robert E Gross, *The History and Management of The East-India Company* (London) vol.1, p.4

company's leaders realized that the company would do more than just trade in spices; it would grow to become the most powerful multinational corporation in history, directly controlling the richest nation on earth and nearly a quarter of its population. In 1608, Sir William Hawkins anchored the ship at the Indian port of Surat (1) and thus the British government reached the Subcontinent in the form of the East India Company. Sir William Hawkins was dispatched to Emperor Jahangir (1569-1627) in an attempt to secure a trading concession, but his efforts proved fruitless. (2) Sir Thomas Roe (1581-1644) was then dispatched by King James I as the royal envoy to Jahangir's court. As a result, when Sir Thomas Roe traveled to India in 1614 to meet with Jahangir, the Mughal emperor, he was able to gain financial advantages from him thanks to his diplomatic abilities.(3)

In addition to establishing a financial and economic hegemony in India, the British administration sought to carry on the Portuguese goal of evangelization throughout the Subcontinent. Jayant Pandurang Naik (4) writes that it was the direction by the Parliament to maintain ministers of religion at factories in India so that Christian teachings could be delivered to Indians.(5)

In 1823, the British parliament granted Christian missionaries in India the right to labor without a license to preserve the ongoing missionary endeavors.(6) The government saw value in the missions' ability to placate the hill tribes and give the populace inexpensive education; the missions, on the other hand, saw value in the government's support of their educational endeavors and ability to provide security for both themselves and their converts.(7) The connection between Christian mission and colonialism is demonstrated by individuals such as Francis Jenkins and David Scott, two commissioners who controlled the British government in Assam from 1826 to 1861. They were both fervent evangelical Christians who backed and promoted missionary endeavors.(8)

Muslim-Christian Debates

(1) A city in the Indian state of Gujrat whose original and old name is "Surajpur", was established by Gopi. The city has been under Muslim standards since the twelfth century and was governed by the Mughals at the hour of the East India Company's appearance.

(2) Nandini Choudhary, British East India in Company (International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development, IJTSRD Jul-Aug 2018), vol.2, No.5, p.1116

(3) Gross, The History and Management of The East-India Company, pp.6-7

(4) An extraordinary humanist, political dissident, polymath, all-encompassing scholar, and communist educationist. He was perceived by the UNESCO close by Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi as three spearheading educationists. He likewise was Instructive Counsel to the Public Authority of India.

(5) Jayant Pandurang Naik, A Students History of Education in India:1800-1961 (London, McMillan & Co, 1962), p.27

(6) Shullai, Colonialism, Christianity and Mission Activities In India, p.328

(7) Ibid, p.330

(8) Ibid

We may divide Muslim-Christian Debates into the following four steps:

1. Akbar's Period

During Akbar's reign, the Subcontinent started holding regular theological discussions. All religious academics were welcomed to Akbar's court since he claimed to be a seeker of truth. There were academic gatherings when all the professors engaged in full-blown debates to defend their own beliefs. Christian debaters were given the chance to defend their faith throughout the same time frame. Converted to Christianity, Pastor Barakatullah has made an effort to disprove the notion that Muslim scholars are not more knowledgeable than Christian debaters.(1) According to Mr. Sharma, talks took place every Thursday and frequently continued until Friday midday. Akbar's soul was genuinely thirsty, yet the Muslim divine's little quarrels did not quench his desire.(2)

Akbar loved theological debates so much that he traveled with the academics during battle and attended their lectures when he had free time.(3) Smith writes that one evening he called the Fathers and leaders of the Muslim and Hindu communities into the private audience chamber, where they resumed their long-standing debates on the relative merits of the Bible and the Koran.(4) The arguments led to the spread of Christianity, which was restricted to the church and only gained traction in the Subcontinent as a result of Akbar's religious policies.

History demonstrates Akbar's profound regard for all religions, which explains why experts from other faiths used to visit the royal court. Father Antoni de Montserrat (1536-1600) (5) stayed in the Subcontinent at least for eight years, during which time he recorded the events of Akbar's time. According to what he writes, Akbar's mother once asked that the Bible be beaten and hung over a donkey's neck around the town. Portugal responded in this way after seizing a ship from the Moores and discovering the Qur'ān within. They then tied the Qur'ān around a dog's neck and thrashed the hound around the town of Ormuz.(6) Her petition was rejected by Akbar, who replied that he would not

(1) Pādri Barakatullah, *Mughlia Salṭanat aor Masīhiyat*, Punjab Religious Book Society, Anārkalī Lahore, 1970, pp.135-138

(2) S.R Sharma, *Mughal Empire in India*, (Bombay, Karnatak Printing Press,), part.1, p.341

(3) Vincent Arthur Smith, *Akbar the Great Mogul: 1542-1605* (New York, Oxford University Press,), p.199

(4) *Ibid*, pp.204-205

(5) A Spanish priest, map maker and traveler, Jesuit, missionary and representative, and guide in the Portuguese ruling families of the Aviz and Timurid dynasties. In 1574 Antoni de Montserrat went with a gathering of ministers to Goa, a Portuguese settlement in India. After five years he was accused of joining an international haven to the court of Fabulous Mughal Akbar and taking note of all that would occur just as the gatherings he had made during the outing.

(6) The Kingdom of Ormuz (also known as Hormoz; Persian/Arabic: هرمز, Portuguese: Ormuz), was established by an Omani prince in the 11th century. Ormuz later became a client state of the Portuguese Empire.

exact retribution on an innocent book since disrespecting any religion amounted to disobedience to God and that it was no longer appropriate for a sovereign to exact revenge on another.(1)

2. Jahangir's Period

Salīm, the son of Akbar, took to the kingdom following his father's death in 1605, and he was titled Nūruddīn Jahangīr. Jahangir, like his father, advocated for religious tolerance and showed sympathy for all faiths. He had commanded all Muslims in the realm to refrain from forcing any Hindu to convert to Islam. Furthermore, he granted universal authorization to all non-Muslims to construct their temples. According to Beni Prasad, European visitors to India under the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan provide powerful evidence of the complete religious tolerance of the nation.(2)

Following in his father's footsteps, Jahangir carried out his policy on Christianity. He continued to interact with Christian missionaries and permitted conversations between Muslims and Christians in his court. Pastor Barkatullah claims that Jahangir kept up his relationship with the clerics,(3) especially Jerome Xavier after he revolted against his father Akbar and left the royal palace.(4)

Sir Thomas Roe, who was sent by King James I as his ambassador to Mughal emperor Jahangir,(5) describes Jahangir's meetings with the skirmishers and writes that one night Jahangir mentioned the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'ān in a particular congregation. "I am the king and I greet you," he said to Thomas Roe. I do not meddle in anything about Islam, Christianity, or Judaism. They approach my court in an atmosphere of love and harmony, and I neither oppress nor permit anyone to be oppressed.(6)

According to Father Antoni de Montserrat, Muslim experts were unable to counter the claims made by Christian clergy, who emerged victorious in these debates.(7) In Jahangir's court, Fernão Guerreiro recounts the Christian clergy's triumph over the Muslim intellectuals. He writes:

“In these the Moors were completely defeated by the Fathers; and though they were not converted, for their obstinacy and perversity would not allow

(1) J.S Hoyland, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, On His Journey to the Court of Akbar* (London, Oxford University Press, 1922), p.ix

(2) Beni Prasad, *History of Jahangir* (Allahabad, The Indian Press, 1930), p.89

(3) Pādrī Barkatullah, *Mughlia Salṭanat aor Masīhiyat*, pp.225-226

(4) A Spanish Jesuit missionary to the Mughal court of Akbar and his son Jahangir. During the reign of Akbar, he accompanied the Emperor on various expeditions. In July 1610, Jahangir summoned him and Emmanuel Pinheiro, to his court in Agra. His best job is to convert three of Jahangir's nephews to Christianity.

(5) William Foster, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul* (London), vol.2, p.556

(6) Pādrī Barkatullah, *Mughlia Salṭanat aor Masīhiyat*, p.236

(7) Hoyland, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, On His Journey to the Court of Akbar*, p.51

them to admit the truth of our faith, nevertheless the same was made manifest to the great glory of Christ our Lord.”(1)

Indeed, Muslim scholars did not enjoy the success they deserved throughout the Mughal era, particularly under the reigns of Akbar and Jahangir. This was clearly due to Muslim intellectuals' lack of knowledge of Christian disciplines. In Hindu-Muslim debates, Muslims prevailed since they primarily encountered Hindus in the Subcontinent. It became possible to defend Islam as a result of Muslim academics' increasing attention to Christian sciences over time.

3. Shāh Jahān's Era

The world knew him as Shāh Jahān, but in 1628 the Subcontinent's reign went to Mirza Shahābuddīn Baig Muḥammad Khān Khurram, son of Jahangir. In terms of the Subcontinent's history, the thirty-eight-year reign of Shah Jahān (1628-1666) is regarded as its economic, political, educational, and religious heyday. In terms of religion, Shah Jahangir's approach differed greatly from Akbar's and Jahangir's. Under his direction, he began to propagate Islam throughout the Subcontinent, and Muḥib 'Alī Sindhī and Shāh Mīr Lahorī were chosen for this task.(2)

Official encouragement was given to Muslims who converted to Islam during the reign of Shah Jahān. In addition to receiving substantial financial aid from the government, these individuals also received titles and honors appropriate to their standing. In addition to receiving financial assistance, those in need were urged to work for the government to convert to Islam. Shāh Jahān took his mission of promoting Islam so seriously that he barred Hindus from using their power to stop any Hindu from converting to Islam. The religious affiliation and policy of Shah Jahān led to Raja Bakhtawar Singh, the son of Raj Singh Kachwaha, converting to Islam. As a reward, Shah Jahān handed him two thousand rupees and a magnificent vestment.(3)

Regarding Christian missionaries, Sri Ram Sharma clarifies that Shah Jahān did put an end to the widespread custom of permitting Christians and Hindus to win people over to their own faiths. The fight against the Portuguese resulted in the revocation of the privilege given to Christians. Many Muslims and Hindus have never been won over to Christianity by Christians. For the most part, their efforts had been limited to adhering to

(1) Charles Herbert Payne, *Jahangir and the Jesuits, with an account of the travels of Benedict Goes and the mission to Pegu, from the Relations of Father Fernão Guerreiro* (London, George Routledge & Sons Ltd.), p.49

(2) Dr. Banarsī Parsad Saksaina, *Tārīkh e Shāh Jahan* (New Dehli, Qaomī Kaoncil, 1978), pp.352-353

(3) *Ibid*, p.353

Christianity for Armenians, Europeans, and other people of like faith who happened to work at the Mughal court.(1)

Before the reign of Shah Jahān, Christians under the leadership of the government converted Muslims to Christianity; today, the reverse is true. In addition to defending Islam, the government was actively converting people to it. While Shah Jahān made no concessions, Akbar and Jahangir had made numerous allowances to the Christians in connection with the preaching mission. The battle with the Portuguese serves as one illustration of this. Only the Christian prisoners who converted to Islam were freed as a result of this war.(2) Why did he adopt such an antagonistic stance during the Portuguese War? The following are the actual causes of this attack, as stated by Pastor Barakatullah:

1. The Portuguese initiated both the slave and commodity trades; in one instance, they also abducted Mughal women.

2. In the same case, Mumtāz Maḥal, the wife of Shah Jahān, had two slave girls abducted and forced to become Christians; Mumtāz protested to Shah Jahān about this.

3. They covertly assisted the Chittagong people while inciting them to rebel against the Mughal Empire.

4. Muslim women, men, and kids were kidnapped and forced to become Christians.

5. Muslims living in Portuguese settlements were subject to severe restrictions, including being prohibited from calling prayer.(3)

Therefore, it would be equivalent to ignoring reality to hold Shāh Jahān responsible for what transpired for these reasons. Pastor Barkatullah claims that the Christian mission persisted despite all of these occurrences, with 40 individuals being baptized in 1604, 100 in 1623, 49 in 1648, and 21 in 1650.(4)

4. Debates during British Rule

Following its triumph in the War of Plassey and the defeat of Nawāb Sirāj al-Dawla in 1757, Britain established its dominance over the Subcontinent.(5) They conquered Bengal, Banaras, Allahabad, Seringapatam, Dehli, Agra, and 'Alīgarh between 1757 and 1803.(6) The British also captured Punjab in 1849, ten years after Rāja Ranjīt Singh's death.(7) The British, emboldened by these wins, tried to seize ecclesiastical supremacy to acquire political control. Churches were granted permission to carry out missionary work by the Charter Act of 1813, which established the first official program to spread

(1) Sri Ram Sharma, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors* (Oxford University Press, 1940), p.105

(2) Father François Catrou, *History of the Mughal Dynasty in India* (London, 1826), pp.186-187

(3) Pādri Barakatullah, *Mughlia Salṭanat aor Masīhiyat*, pp.326-327

(4) *Ibid*, p.344

(5) Nandini, *British East India in Company*, p.1117

(6) John Capper, *Dehli, the Capital of India* (Asian Educational Services, 1997), p.28

(7) Jagtar Singh Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.99

Christianity.(1) The mid-1900s until the mid-1900s, in Robert Eric's opinion, were the years of the foreign evangelists. Following the adoption of the Company's Charter Renewal Act of 1813, missionary entrance and activity within Company-ruled territory were officially prohibited in India.(2) Pynhunlang Shullai explains the aim behind this Charter:

“This happened after the Charter Act of 1813 permitted missionaries to propagate their faith in British India. The officials, therefore, expected that what could not be achieved by military power could be gain by the power of the gospel.”(3)

The Muslims were unable to come together because of their extreme weakness as a result of their consecutive defeats. As a result, the final struggle for independence was waged in 1857, and as a result, the British occupied the whole Subcontinent. They created a new avenue for theoretical and intellectual warfare here after seizing power. Promoting Christian doctrine and converting the native populace to Christianity was one of the key goals of this British occupation. The remarks made in Parliament in 1857 by Mr. Mangles, the Chairman of the East India Company, attest to this.(4)

The government used force and resources to further the Christian missionary endeavor. The missionaries started preaching, and over time, their efforts not only grew more intense but also dispersed over the Subcontinent. Religious objectives were also pursued using aggressive and eristical means. Witness to the War of Independence Sir Syed Ahmad Khan claims that state directives and approval served as the foundation for the Christian clergy's divisive religious activities and discussions.(5) He describes:

“But the Missionaries' plan was exactly the opposite. They used to attend the places of public resort, markets for instance, and fairs, where men of different creeds collected together, and used to begin preaching to them. In some districts the Missionaries were actually attended by Policemen from the station.”(6)

Under such hostile circumstances, every attempt was made to establish the Bible's revealed nature, the Trinity, Christ's divinity, and the Atonement. The Muslim

(1) Arthur Berriedale Keith, *A Constitutional History of India 1600-1935* (London, 1936), pp.128-129 ; Henry Clay Sheldon, *History of the Christian Church* (Boston, Crowell & Co. 1894), vol.5, p.390

(2) Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India; From Beginnings to the Present*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p.261

(3) Colonialism Shullai, *Christianity and Mission Activities In India*: 329

(4) *The Indian War of Independence of 1857, An Indian Nationalist*, London, 1909, p.46

(5) Sir Syed Ahmad Khān, *The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, edit by Frances W. Pritchett (Medical Hall Press, 1873), pp.17-18

(6) *Ibid*

intellectuals of the Subcontinent critically examined this official strategy and made a significant contribution to the historical defense of Islam.

Famous Debates in the Subcontinent

A few famous debates are the following;

Agra Debate

Christian priest Karl Gottlieb Pfander (1803–1865) and Maolānā Raḥmatullah Kairanawi (1818–1891) engaged in this well-known discussion. Among those who supported Karl Gottlieb Pfander was Thomas Valpy French (1) (1825–1891); local Christian converts from Islam, and representatives of the Anglican Church, while Dr. Wazīr Khān, Safdar 'Alī (a civil servant) and Imādud Dīn Lāhiz (2) (1830–1900) were in the crowd on Kairanawi's side. Four topics had been selected for discussion beforehand, but after two days the conversation could only focus on two, and no matter how hard they tried, the argument was stopped. (3) Regarding the debate's result, both sides declared themselves winners, but Clinton Bennett stated that Pfander was ill-prepared for his Muslim opponent's use of European biblical criticism and that Pfander was not ready to handle Muslim arguments.(4)

Debates of Dr. Muḥammad Wazīr Khān

Muhammad Wazīr Khān, MD, was a Calcutta Medical College graduate. He studied Christianity extensively while pursuing his further medical studies in London. He carried copies of the Torah and the Gospel with him when he returned from London.(5) He took part in a number of conversations and backed Kairanwi against Pfander in the most well-known argument on the Subcontinent.(6) Additionally, he challenged Pastor Pfander to a dispute in a communication with him. Powell goes on to explain Wazīr Khān's access to Christian works as follows:

“Wazir Khan informed Pfander on that occasion that he had studied the works of Paine, Voltaire, Spinoza and Bolingbroke, and that among recent

(1) Thomas Valpy was the first Bishop of Lahore, in 1877, and founder of the St. John's College Agra, in 1853.

(2) Imad ud-din Lahiz was an Islamic writer, preacher and Qur'ānic translator, while Safdr 'Alī was Deputy Inspector of Schools in Jubblepore. Both converted to Christianity.

(3) Clinton Bennett, *The Legacy of Carl Gottlieb Pfander* (International Bulletin of Missionary Research, April 1996), p.78

(4) Ibid

(5) Ataullah Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century* (London, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997), p.6

(6) Nagīna BI, *The Impact of British Christian Missionaries on Indian Religious, Social and Cultural Life between 1800 and 1857* (University of Bradford, Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, 2011), p.118

Western publications on Islam he had read the 'lives' of Muhammad by Sprenger and Washington Irving.”(1)

Challenge of Āl e Ḥassan Mūhānī

Syed Āl e Ḥassan Mūhānī lived in the Indian region of Mūhān. Following his studies, he practiced law in Dehli and Murādabād and served as a judge. Wazīr Khān had corresponded with the missionaries, visited one of them, and then had a formal discussion as part of their initial communication. But Syed Āl e Ḥassan Mūhānī rose to the occasion and asked Pfander to a public debate, which was subsequently held with Raḥmatullah Kairānwī.(2)

Debate of Shāh Jahān Pur

In an effort to promote Christianity and foster interfaith understanding, the British government began using Hindus to arrange religious fairs where the Gospels would predominate. In order to do this, a network of pastors prepared to make any sacrifice in order to propagate Christianity throughout the Subcontinent was established. Thus, in 1876, a "Fair for God-Consciousness" was held in Shah Jahān Pur thanks to the efforts of Pastor Knowles and Munshi Piaray Lāl. Scholars from Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity attended, but the main discussion was between Islam and Christianity.(3)

So, Maolānā Muḥammad Qāsim Nānotavī represented the Muslims, and Pastor Knowles represented the Christians. One of the primary founders of Dārul Uloom Deoband, Maolānā Qāsim Nānotavī (1832–1880) was an Indian Sunni Ḥanafī Islamic scholar and theologian. Pastor Knowles presented arguments on the first day, but Maolānā Qāsim Nānotavī spoke logically on the second, countering the pastor's arguments and demonstrating the Islamic faith's veracity in the face of logical arguments. This debate was lost by Pastor Knowles. To exact revenge for this setback, the debate was rescheduled for the following year, 1877, and Maolānā Qāsim was once more invited to participate in the discourse. Once again, he demonstrated that Islam is the real religion of the world.(4)

Ḥāfizabād Debate

A significant debate between Muslims and Christians took place at Ḥāfizabād in 1928. Maulvī Thanāullah Amritsarī and Maulvī Ḥāfiz Muḥammad

(1) Powell, *Contact and Controversy Between Islam and Christianity in Northern India, 1833-1857: The Relations between Muslims and Protestant Missionaries in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (ProQuest, 2018), p.401

(2) Nagīna, *The Impact of British Christian Missionaries*, pp.116-117

(3) Mubāḥithah Shā Jahān Pur (UP, India, Hujjat al-Islam Academy Deoband, 2017), p.14

(4) Ibid

Gondlanwala represented Islam, while Sulṭān Paul and Pastor 'Abdul Ḥaq represented Christianity. The four following subjects were covered in this debate:

1. Is the present Bible free from distortion?
2. Proof of Monotheism
3. Prophethood of Muḥammad
4. Islamic Salvation

Since the people made the final choice, both sides declared their wins in this discussion. Maulvī Thanāullah was challenged by Sulṭān Paul to write a response to whatever booklet he produced on the subject of redemption.(1) Therefore, Maulvī Thanāullah wrote a pamphlet entitled "تم عیسائی کیوں ہوئے" (Why did you become a Christian) in response to which Sulṭān wrote Sher e Afghan. He challenged Maulvī Thanāullah's claims in this book and attempted to demonstrate that Christianity is the only religion that can save a person. M.K Khān Mahān Singh Bāgh, Lahore, later published the Ḥāfizabād debate proceedings.

Conclusion

Discussions between Muslims and Christians began during Akbar's reign and continue to this day. The British government employed every available means to spread Christianity during its era. Muslim academics focused particularly on this area and trained Muslim debaters to defend Islam. Today debates are being conducted on electronic media rather than print media because we are living in the social media era. Currently, a sizable portion of debaters are involved in promoting Islam throughout the Islamic world, including Pakistan. Debaters who identify as Muslims should also be aware of the contemporary sciences, as, without them, progress is impossible. To achieve any substantial success in this field, there should be an intellectual harmony between the religious schools (Madrissā) and the Islamic studies departments of the universities. Also, the Islamic government should support Muslim scholars so that they can work in a better way.



(1) Sulṭān, Sher e Afghan (Muhammadanism.org, 1930), pp.4-5