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Research Article

Christian Education in Khulna Bangladesh: Conversion, Community, and Propagated Values

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Abstract. This research presents an in-depth analysis of the role of Christian missionary education in Khulna, Bangladesh, with a focus on the contribution to the spread of Christianity and its potential impact in the context of a Muslim-majority society. Based on the text of the Gospel of Matthew, this research explains the three main goals of Christian missionary education, namely the conversion of students to Christianity, the formation of a strong Christian community, and the spread of Christian values. Through a careful literature review and in-depth content analysis, this article discusses the types of educational institutions established by Christian missionaries in Khulna, including regular schools, vocational training centers, Christian theological schools, and Christian boarding schools. Emphasis is placed on the nuanced approach used, including the instillation of Christian ideology in the curriculum, the promotion of values such as compassion and social responsibility, and the provision of scholarships to underprivileged individuals. The research also explores the potential

impact in Muslim communities, where conversion may be difficult due to cultural and social norms. Although conversion does not always occur, missionary education can contribute to secularization or de-Islamization by influencing society's attitudes and views. Additionally, this article discusses the policy landscape surrounding missionary education in Bangladesh and government efforts to regulate these institutions. In its conclusion, this research provides in-depth insight into the multi-layered approach taken by Christian missionary education in Khulna, as well as its impact on the local community and religious landscape.

Keywords: Propagation, Christianity, Education, Khulna, Conversion.

INTRODUCTION

Christian missionary education in Bangladesh is emerging as an important thread in a complex educational landscape. The main goal is to provide education and spread the teachings of Christianity.¹ Before discussing the impact of Christian missionaries on education in Bangladesh, it is necessary to understand the basic objectives underlying Christian missionary education. Rooted in the biblical commandment in Matthew's Gospel – "Go into all the world, and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" – Christian missionaries have established a vast network of schools, colleges, universities, vocational training centers, and hospitals around the world, including in culturally rich Bangladesh.²

The three educational goals of Christian missionaries, as outlined in the landmark 1910 study entitled "Education in Relation to Christianity in National Life," serve as a guide to understanding the missionary agenda.³ Among these goals, the conversion of students to Christianity dominates. The primary goal of missionary education is to guide individuals toward Christ, weaving the educational mission within the broader context of spiritual transformation.⁴ Second, missionary education aims to develop a strong Christian community.⁵ It involves education that

¹ Helen May, Baljit Kaur, and Larry Prochner, *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods: Nineteenth-Century Missionary Infant Schools in Three British Colonies* (Routledge, 2016).

² Parna Sengupta, *Pedagogy for Religion: Missionary Education and the Fashioning of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal* (Univ of California Press, 2011); Willem Van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); Jill Hanson Flatt, *In Love with Bangladesh* (WestBow Press, 2013).

³ Felicity Jensz, "The 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference and Comparative Colonial Education," *History of Education* 47, no. 3 (2018): 399–414.

⁴ Michael J Anthony, *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century* (Baker Academic, 2001); Diane J Chandler, "Whole-Person Formation: An Integrative Approach to Christian Education," *Christian Education Journal* 12, no. 2 (2015): 314–32.

⁵ Steve Bradbury, "Mission, Missionaries and Development," in *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013), 413–29; Mavra Farooq, "The Aims and Objectives of Missionary Education in the Colonial Era in India," *Pakistan Vision* 15, no. 1 (2014): 118.

enables individuals to read sacred texts, establish churches, and contribute as leaders in both the religious and secular realms. The focus is on creating a Christian community that is authentic and capable of expanding its influence beyond local boundaries.⁶ The third dimension involves preparation and fermentation – the spread of the method i.e. Christian influences and ideas.⁷ Missionary education considered not only a tool for conversion but also a basis for broader social change.

From the stated objectives, it is clear that the aim of Christian missionary education is to evangelize and convert people to Christianity, and this is also the case in Bangladesh. Many elite schools and colleges in every city were built and led by Christian missionaries.⁸ For example, Holy Cross School and College, Notre Dame College, and the University of Notre Dame in Dhaka; Sacred Heart School and Saint Louis School in Jessore; St. Paul's High School in Mongla; Reverend Paul's High School in Khulna; Saint Joseph's High School in Khulna, and many more. These schools were run by Catholic Christian missionaries, and mostly wealthy and elite parents competed to send their children to these Christian missionary schools. The Catholic Church runs fifty-two secondary schools, four colleges, one teacher training college, and many elementary schools across the country on the other hand, a total of 1,500 educational institutions are run across the country by Christian churches.

This article focuses on an in-depth understanding of Christian missionary education in Khulna, Bangladesh, including secondary schools, vocational training centers, theological schools, and Christian hostels. The interaction between religious and general education, coupled with the challenges of the dominant Muslim identity in Bangladesh, highlights the complexity of conversion, secularization, and the spread of Christianity through educational channels. There has been no research conducted on Christian missionary education and its values within predominantly Muslim societies. This study aims to address that gap.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article uses an in-depth literature review as well as a thorough content analysis of the impact and role of Christian missionary education in the Khulna region of Bangladesh. The authors focus on compiling and analyzing information obtained from various sources of literature, documentation and data related to Christian education in the area. In conducting a literature review, the authors have detailed and collected information from various references, including books, articles, research reports, and other relevant resources. The selection and use of these

⁶ Sam Metcalf, *Beyond the Local Church: How Apostolic Movements Can Change the World* (InterVarsity Press, 2015).

⁷ Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Baker Academic, 2016).

⁸ Mrinal Debnath, "A Community under Siege: Exclusionary Education Policies and Indigenous Santals in the Bangladeshi Context," *Third World Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2020): 453–69.

sources was done to understand the history, development and impact of the Christian education system in Khulna. Meanwhile, content analysis carried out in articles can include an in-depth evaluation of the information found, including understanding patterns, trends or implications of the data. Emphasis on certain aspects, such as the impact on local communities or socio-cultural changes, becomes the focus of the content analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several researchers have investigated Christian missionary activities in Bangladesh or other parts of the country. However, we have not found any scholarly article examining them in Khulna. Of course, that means there has been no study of people's response to their education and values in Khulna. In a field-based study of Christian missionary activities in Bangladesh, Jubaer Ahmad's Bengali-language book relies predominantly on the author's first-hand observations as fieldwork (70-80%) with additional secondary sources (20%). The book chronicles missionary means of conversion which varied from opening discussion, starting schools, humanitarian work, distributing religious objects, reinterpreted scriptures timely, and converting poor marginalized tribal ethnic groups.⁹ "A PhD by the title of "Feasibility Study for a University in Bangladesh under Catholic Sponsorship" is by Harold Bijoy Rodrigues. The author provides detailed information about Catholic institutions and their social services in Bangladesh. He discusses the education system in Bangladesh.¹⁰ This research focuses on Catholic missionary education in Bangladesh, while this research was not limited to Catholic rather than Christian mission's through education in Khulna. Saidul Islam (2001) examines the activities of selected NGOs that promote Christianity in Bangladesh. The author mentions that Christian missionaries use techniques such as providing education, focusing on evangelizing women, disseminating Christian literature, Bible reading groups, Bible correspondence schools and reading rooms, medical services, caring for orphans, and relief and rehabilitation, among others. The techniques mentioned by Saidul Islam differ significantly from what Jubaer Ahmad mentioned. Saidul Islam mentions nine techniques that missionary NGOs implemented after the independence of Bangladesh.¹¹ He further identifies three methods: corruption, seduction, and conversion. This article is excellent for learning about missionary NGOs' techniques and strategies. Another article by Saidul Islam (2004) is titled "The Creeping March of Christianity: The Widespread Evangelization in Bangladesh." The author in this

⁹ M. Jubaer Ahmad, *Bangladesh Christian missionary opotporota o amader koronio* (Activities of Christian missionaries in Bangladesh and what should we do) (Dhaka: Hilful Fuzul, 2018).

¹⁰ Harold Bijoy Rodrigues, "A feasibility study for a university in Bangladesh under Catholic sponsorship." *University of the Incarnate Word*, 2009.

¹¹ Saidul Islam, "The Role of NGOs in Promoting Christianity: the case of Bangladesh." *Intellectual Discourse* 9, no. 2 (2001).

article mentioned that the Christian missionary give priority of Hindus in Bangladesh; the second target is the tribal people, who are primarily animists. Thirdly, they target Muslims. If conversion is not possible through mission education, they can be secularized or de-Islamized.¹² "Faith and education in Bangladesh: A review of the contemporary landscape and challenges" (2020) by a group of people provides ample information on faith-based education in Bangladesh. The authors discuss how Christian missionaries promote education.¹³ Catholics lead many schools, colleges, universities, and training institutions. There are eight dioceses, one university, 12 colleges, 579 schools, and 13 vocational training institutes under Catholic leadership. The authors also mention educational institutions run by Baptist missionaries and other groups. "Christian Mission in Bangladesh: A Survey" by Abul Karim Khan (1981) provides much information about the Christian mission in Bangladesh. He references several leading missionary organizations, detailing the regions within the country where they are active and their various initiatives and activities. Notably, he mentions the names of some missionary groups working in the Khulna Division. This article briefly mentions the source of funds for some of the leading Christian missionary NGOs like Caritas. The author also discusses the social conditions under missionary work. He examines the target population by Christian missionaries to evangelize them.¹⁴ An important book was published in 2015 by the World Faith Development Dialogue (WFDD); the title of this book was "Faith and Development in Focus: Bangladesh." This book covers much valuable information about religious NGOs and their significant fields of activity. He briefly surveys the history of various religious NGOs in Bangladesh, including Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian organisations. The author discusses the activities of some leading Christian missionary NGOs such as Caritas, World Vision, and the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB). He also discusses the activities of Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist NGOs and their contributions to social development activities.¹⁵

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Christian Missionary Education In Khulna:

¹² Saidul Islam, "The Creeping March of Christianity: The Widespread Evangelisation in Bangladesh." (2004).

¹³ Sudipta Roy, Samia Huq, and Aisha Binte Abdur Rob, "Faith and education in Bangladesh: A review of the contemporary landscape and challenges," *International Journal of Educational Development* 79 (2020): 102290.

¹⁴ Abdul Karim Khan. "Christian Mission in Bangladesh: A Survey." *Islamic Foundation, Leicester*, 1981.

¹⁵ "Faith and Development in Focus: Bangladesh," World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), <<http://hdl.handle.net/10822/1052080>> (2015).

In Khulna Region, about 10 secondary schools are operated by Catholic missions. Protestants also have a primary school in Khulna, as well as Khulna Bible College. Between 1953-2017, Father Marino Rigon (1925-2017), an Italian missionary of the Xaverian Order, founded around 50 schools and boarding houses for poor children, as well as a sewing center for uneducated village women in Mongla, located in the south of Bangladesh under Khulna Region.¹⁶ The educational institutions run by Christian missionaries in Khulna can be divided into three:

First, Schools that follow the national curriculum like other schools, colleges and universities; Students at this school come from various religions. Vocational training center; Students at this school come from various religions. Christian theological schools; students at this school are only Christians. Christian Hostel; students at this school are only Christians. In the first type of school above, apart from the national curriculum components, there are religious subjects with different religious backgrounds. They study together in the same class for general subjects, but for religious subjects, the classes are separated according to their religion. However, it is important to note that notebooks and other materials that usually have plain covers have images of Jesus and Mary printed at this school, and buildings have their images emblazoned on the walls, along with quotes from the Bible and statements from the Pope. Another important issue is the morning prayer meeting, which is attended by all students from various religious backgrounds.¹⁷

In the second type, Christian missionaries provide vocational training programs to help individuals in society acquire new skills and improve their employment prospects. These programs include training in areas such as sewing, computer skills, agriculture, or other trades that are in demand in the local job market. This program aims to empower individuals to be independent and able to provide for themselves and their families. Additionally, missionaries also incorporate teachings and values based on their faith to help individuals develop personally and professionally. Through this vocational training program, missionaries can have a positive impact on the lives of people in Khulna. Demonstrating these efforts are the striking contributions of organizations such as the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) and Caritas Bangladesh, which are leading missionary NGOs with projects aimed at training local citizens and students. Through these initiatives, the missionary organization actively interacts with the community in Khulna, seeking

¹⁶ S M Tanveer Ahmed, *Christian Missions in East Bengal: The Life and Times of Archbishop Theotonius Amal Ganguly, CSC (1920-1977)* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018).

¹⁷ Anthony, *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century*; Sengupta, *Pedagogy for Religion: Missionary Education and the Fashioning of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal*; Derek Davis and Elena Miroshnikova, *The Routledge International Handbook of Religious Education* (Routledge, 2013).

to address not only immediate economic needs but also broader aspects of individual development.¹⁸

The third category is boarding schools based on Christian ideology. For example, the Baptist Children Village (BCV) was established by the Social Health Education Development Council (SHED) to provide living facilities to orphans, partially orphans, and the poorest children from villages and urban churches of Bangladesh Shanga Baptist Church (BBCS) as well as providing access to education despite socio-economic disadvantage. BCV is located at the Baptist Church in Khulna and has been run with financial and technical support from Liebenzell Mission International since August 4, 1995.¹⁹

Fourth, are seminars where Christian theology is taught and provide training for pastors.²⁰ A striking example is Khulna Bible College, founded in 1996 near the village of Tilak to educate Bangladeshi church leaders and pastors. It offers only one major: biblical studies, within the context of the liberal arts paradigm. Each graduate must complete a total of 126 semester hours in Bible, religion, ministry training, and some general education subjects such as geography and world history. As of spring 2019, it had produced 51 graduates, all males. Every semester, students come from different parts of Bangladesh and prepare for mission work. According to the 2022 report, graduates have endeavored to experience conversion and establish churches in various parts of Bangladesh. It should be noted that Khulna Bible College has other centers apart from its main campus in Khulna Region.²¹

Secularisation in Education

Conversion from Islam to Christianity can be a social and cultural challenge in Bangladesh due to the dominant Muslim identity in society. However, changing Muslim's perceptions and understanding of Islam is not difficult because of the secular education system in this country.²² An evangelical Christian missionary NGO by the name of "World Vision Bangladesh," specializes in targeting youth from

¹⁸ Faye Y Abram, John A Slosar, and Rose Walls, "Reverse Mission: A Model for International Social Work Education and Transformative Intra-National Practice," *International Social Work* 48, no. 2 (2005): 161–76; Tasneem Siddiqui, *Migration as a Livelihood Strategy of the Poor: The Bangladesh Case* (Citeseer, 2003).

¹⁹ Shourabh Pholia, "The Church of Bangladesh," *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to the Anglican Communion*, 2013, 239–52.

²⁰ Pholia.

²¹ Aparna Basu, "Mary Ann Cooke to Mother Teresa: Christian Missionary Women and the Indian Response," in *Women and Missions: Past and Present* (Routledge, 2021), 187–208.

²² Md Nazrul Islam and Md Saidul Islam, "Politics and Islamic Revivalism in Bangladesh: The Role of the State and Non-State/Non-Political Actors," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 19, no. 3 (2018): 326–53.

schools, colleges, and universities in general.²³ This NGO promotes and funds youth groups that fight for social programs such as opposing marriage under the age of 18, anti-drug campaigns, advancing education for women, planting trees, fighting global warming, and feeding the poor. Many youth leaders have emerged from these groups, and many are Muslim, but their outlook and worldview have been shaped and changed by the intellectual environment in which they engage in these activities. They mimic to Western secular ideas, especially feminism. Many of these ideas conflict with Islamic faith, law, culture, and values. Behind these programs, they could be considered as creating a generation of Muslim youth who are against Islam and Muslims. These movements are found all over Bangladesh, and Khulna is no exception.

Incorporation of Christian Faith and Values

Christian educational institutions prioritize instilling core values such as compassion, love, tolerance and social responsibility in their students.²⁴ The goal is to encourage the application of these values in their daily lives, thereby encouraging a Christian lifestyle and promoting positive interactions with others. This influence has been clearly established in the local Bengali community which views Christianity as the only religion that is more about love, friendship and progress.²⁵ This view is especially visible during festive occasions like Christmas and others.

Mufti Jubair Ahmad, an expert on missionary activity in Bangladesh provides an overview of the perspective of the president of the Christian Missionary Society. According to him, the main goal of Christian missionaries is to shape the minds and intellects of students who graduated from their schools in a different way. He quoted the president's statement, which emphasized developing student's cognitive capacities within the framework of their educational approach. Mufti Jubair Ahmad also observed that in Dhaka and other parts of Bangladesh, parents prefer to enroll their children in missionary or church schools over other schools. This preference was associated with perceived benefits, including instruction in English, language proficiency, and development of intellectual abilities. The hope is that such students will have a better chance of being accepted into universities, having a better future, and pursuing higher education in Western countries.

The President of the Christian Missionary Society stated: "The primary aim of Christian missionaries is to develop the minds and brains of the students who

²³ Shafi Md Mostofa and Muhammad Sazzad Hossain Siddiqui, "Faith Leaders and Child Well-Being in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 22, no. 1 (2024): 59–74.

²⁴ Manzoor Ahmed, "Understanding and Promoting Ethics and Values Education: The Methodological Challenge," *Prospects* 48, no. 3 (2020): 115–34.

²⁵ Ankur Barua, *The Hindu Self and Its Muslim Neighbors: Contested Borderlines on Bengali Landscapes* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

graduate from our schools in our style." The President emphasized that such individuals, despite appearing to adhere to Islamic rituals such as the Jum'ah prayer and the Eid prayer, will gradually distance their thoughts, emotions, thoughts and ideas from Islam. Despite their visible religious practices, the president envisioned that these students would become unwitting supporters of Christian missionaries, contributing to the substantial spread of Christian values and ideals. Christian educational institutions often include Bible studies and religious education as part of their curriculum. Students are taught about the Bible, the life of Jesus Christ, and the history of Christianity. This exposure can lead to a better understanding of Christian beliefs and principles.

Scholarships and Financial Assistance

Christian educational institutions provide scholarships or financial assistance to students, with a special focus on those from difficult, marginalized, and disadvantaged economic backgrounds.²⁶ This financial support plays an important role in facilitating access to education for these individuals. Specifically, within the Khulna Region, the Rishi Community represents a marginalized group.²⁷ Caritas Bangladesh, with support from the Association of the Holy Childhood (Kindermissionswerk), Germany, collected substantial donations of 2,810,649 taka between January 2021 and December 2022 specifically for the benefit of this community.²⁸ It is important to note that historical records indicate significant conversion to Christianity within the Rishi community, underscoring the impact of such financial assistance in increasing educational opportunities and community engagement. Hundreds of Christian NGOs play a vital role in providing substantial financial support to marginalized students. Among these, Bangladesh Baptist Church Shangha (BBCS) has been a major contributor, pouring in substantial funds to empower less fortunate individuals. Additionally, World Vision Bangladesh actively collaborates with various small NGOs, providing financial assistance to promote youth leadership and educational initiatives.²⁹ Notably, World Vision Bangladesh allocates 16% of its resources specifically to education programs, as outlined on their website. This joint effort underscores the extensive support provided by Christian NGOs to uplift and empower marginalized students, promote educational

²⁶ Manjuma Akhtar Mousumi and Tatsuya Kusakabe, "School Education System in Bangladesh," in *Handbook of Education Systems in South Asia* (Springer, 2021), 443–77.

²⁷ Rina Aktar and Rahul Halder, "Socio-Economic Conditions of Rishi Community in Khulna City Corporation (KCC)," *Indonesian Journal of Social Sciences Volume* 15, no. 01 (2023): 40–48.

²⁸ K K Islam et al., "Enhancing Livelihood and Biodiversity Through Caritas Intervened Project in the Northeastern Region of Bangladesh: A Case Study," *Journal of Agroforestry and Environment* 15, no. 1 (2022): 1–9.

²⁹ Tamgid Ahmed Chowdhury et al., "NGOs for Development: Experience of Bangladesh," *Bangladesh's Economic and Social Progress: From a Basket Case to a Development Model*, 2020, 351–80.

opportunities and leadership development. A clear indication of this leading NGO advancing Christianity through educational and social development services is visible when perusing their website. Their mission revolves around "Witnessing to Jesus Christ through life, actions, words, and signs that encourage people to respond to the Gospel." This statement affirms their commitment to actively promote Christian values and principles through various channels, emphasizing the integral role of education and social development in the fulfillment of their mission.

Propagation of Christian values through Interfaith Dialogue:

The Xaverian missionaries have established an interfaith dialogue center in Khulna with the main aim of fostering positive relations among various ethnic and religious communities. The main aim of this effort is to facilitate unity among Muslims, Hindus, and Christians.³⁰ Recently, the practice of engaging in interreligious dialogue has become popular in Khulna, especially in educational institutions led by Catholic missionaries. Apart from schools, this dialogue extends to various segments of society, including the active involvement of lower-level government figures, such as local residents. In particular, religious leaders sometimes take part in these seminars and interreligious dialogue programs.

Interreligious dialogue occupies a prominent position in the priorities of the Khulna diocese, as expressed in their statement: "the continued formation of Catholics and interreligious dialogue are priorities of the pastoral plan of the Khulna diocese."³¹ Through this dialogue initiative, there is a deliberate effort to provide a safe space and valuable opportunity for individuals to become acquainted with Christian teachings, culture, and values at every level of society, from the top to the grassroots level.

An important outcome of interfaith dialogue is the normalization of Christian education, teaching, culture, and values in a predominantly Muslim society. This is especially visible in Christian educational institutions where students predominantly come from Muslim backgrounds. Conspicuously, these institutions actively participate in the celebration of Christian holidays and events such as Christmas which opens the door to the integration of Christian culture and traditions into local Muslim communities.

Female Education Plan and its Reflection In Khulna:

Christian missionaries played a key role in encouraging women's education in Bangladesh during the colonial period, ultimately contributing to the emergence of

³⁰ Ali Riaz, "More than Meets the Eye: The Narratives of Secularism and Islam in Bangladesh," in *Ghosts From the Past?* (Routledge, 2021), 105–22.

³¹ http://www.fides.org/en/news/67243-ASIA_BANGLADESH_Formation_and_interreligious_dialogue_the_priorities_of_the_diocese_of_Khulna

feminist ideals in Muslim society.³² This commitment to women's education was emphasized at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, where it was emphasized that the Christianization of Indian life depended heavily on the Christianization of Indian women. Recognizing the influential role of Hinduism in the domestic sphere, missionaries aimed to overcome this power through the empowerment of women.

A striking quote from the conference report encompasses this perspective: "Men rule over women in material things, and women rule over men in spiritual or religious matters." These profound insights suggest that for missionaries to successfully Christianize the Indian population, especially in the context of predominantly Hindu households, a strategic focus on women's conversion was essential. This strategic approach is manifested in their joint efforts to provide education for women.

Missionary NGOs, especially prominent ones such as World Vision Bangladesh, Christian Service Society, Banchte Shekha, and others operating in Khulna and throughout Bangladesh, actively prioritize women's education.³³ In keeping with their grand vision, these organizations strategically emphasized educational initiatives for women, recognizing the transformative potential such initiatives had for the broader societal shift toward Christian values. This deliberate focus on women's education emerged as a key tool for these missionary organizations, in line with their mission to bring complete Christianization to the lives of local communities.

The Policy of Christian Missionary Education:

In this article appearing in the Daily Sun, the focus shifts to the interesting policy landscape surrounding missionary education. The report notes significant government initiatives aimed at overseeing the functioning of missionary educational institutions through the enactment of specific government regulations. Traditionally, missionary agencies operated independently, avoiding compliance with government regulations. However, as reported by Daily Sun in 2019, sources within the education ministry revealed that the government was on the verge of finalizing different policies to regulate the operations of these institutions. Significant developments in this regard are expected, with a meeting scheduled at

³² Santi Rozario, "Ethno-Religious Communities and Gender Divisions in Bangladesh: Women as Boundary Markers," in *Intersexions* (Routledge, 2020), 14–32; Md Shaikh Farid, "Revisiting the Aims of Catholic Missionary Education in Bangladesh: The Case of Holy Cross Congregation," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 15, no. 2 (2023): 148–66.

³³ Nusrat Jahan Rodon, "Colonial Influence on the Rights of Women in Bangladesh" (Jahangirnagar University, 2023).

the ministry of education on July 9 that will hopefully achieve formal ratification of this pioneering policy for missionary educational institutions.³⁴

On January 19, 2023, an important discussion took place between the researcher and Father Josef Rana Mondal, a prominent intellectual associated with the Catholic mission in Khulna. During the conversation, Pastor Mondal expressed his concerns regarding the government's allocation of supplies to missionary schools. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the decision, stressing that he believes such government interference has the potential to compromise the educational standards that missionary schools hold dear.

Pastor Mondal articulated an important aspect of his views: the perceived tendency of the government to close schools operated by Christian missionaries. According to him, the government's condition that missionary schools comply fully with its regulations raises substantial concerns. He argued that complying with government regulations would undermine the essence of the quality of education that these missionary schools were renowned for providing. In Pastor Mondal's view, running schools under government guidance erased the advantages of missionary education. He argued that the unique quality of education provided by Christian missionaries depended on the autonomy they had in shaping their educational programs, free from external interference. Another objection raised by Pastor Mondal concerns the perceived lack of security for missionary institutions under the current government. He emphasized that strict policies and regulations have created an environment where missionary schools feel vulnerable and limited in their operations. Additionally, Pastor Mondal discussed the financial challenges faced by missionary schools, pointing out that most of the funds received from foreign NGOs are diverted to the government, leaving them with limited resources for their work. According to him, this hinders their ability to carry out their mission effectively.

In summary, Father Josef Rana Mondal's insights reveal deep dissatisfaction with government policy, reflecting concerns about the potential sacrifice of educational standards, threats to the autonomy of missionary institutions, and the financial constraints imposed on their operations. This complex perspective provides valuable insight into the challenges faced by missionary schools under the current regulatory framework.

FINDINGS OF THIS RESEARCH

The study of Christian missionary education in Khulna indicates that missionary organizations assist in the shaping of society through multi-faceted education. Their schools, vocational centers, hostels, and seminaries impart formal and skills-based

³⁴ Md Bayezid Alam and Zhiyong Zhu, "Private Tutoring in Bangladesh: Evolution, Expansion, and Policy Responses," *International Journal of Comparative Education and Development* 24, no. 1 (2022): 20–36.

education, while concurrently establishing a learning environment that is immersed in Christian values, imagery and teachings. Although missionary organizations engage students of all religious backgrounds through quality education and financial assistance, they are breathing grounds for the establishment of Christian ideologies into institutions, normalizing them in a Muslim society, and gradually influencing the imaginations of Muslim youth and marginalized groups.

Another significant finding illustrates that Christian missionary activities extend beyond formal learning in the classroom to also include social development and women's empowerment, through human capital development and inter-religious dialogue. Missionary organizations such as Caritas, World Vision, and Banchte Shekha involve disadvantaged populations by financing scholarships, human resource development through vocational training, and providing leadership opportunities. Involved missionary NGOs such as these, enable disadvantaged populations to engage in secular and Christian-oriented values, which contribute to the material uplift of oppressed populations. Over time these developmental interventions contribute to the meaning making process through which Christianity is perceived to be more progressive, compassionate, and relevant than Islam, resulting in the gradual reproduction of Christian practices and ideals in local populations, posing the challenge of positively preserving Islamic identity and values.

CONCLUSION

The spread of Christianity through education, especially under the auspices of Christian missionaries in Bangladesh, reflects a multifaceted approach aimed at fulfilling spiritual goals and community development. The basic goal, as derived from the commandments of the Bible, is very clear: to spread the Christian faith globally, using education as a powerful tool for evangelism. The three main goals outlined in the 1910 study, "Education in Relation to Christianity in National Life," emphasized the comprehensive nature of Christian missionary education. First of all, conversion became the primary goal, with leaders emphasizing the transformational power of education in bringing individuals to Christ. Second, the development of an intelligent Christian community, capable of maintaining its own institutions and contributing to both church and secular life, is emphasized. Third, the preparation and change of society through the general diffusion of Christian influences and ideas emphasizes the broader impact of missionary education beyond individual conversion.

This global mission is clearly realized in Bangladesh, where Christian missionaries have established many educational institutions, from schools to universities and vocational training centers. These institutions, often led by Catholic Christian missionaries, were attended by students from a variety of religious backgrounds. Prominent examples include Holy Cross School and College, Notre

Dame College, and the University of Notre Dame in Dhaka, reflecting the widespread influence of Christian educational institutions in the country. The Khulna Division serves as a microcosm of this mission effort, with a variety of educational institutions operating there, including those following the national curriculum, vocational training centers, Christian theological schools, and Christian boarding schools. The unique features of these institutions, such as the incorporation of religious subjects and morning prayer meetings, contributed to their uniqueness in providing educational experiences by Christian missionaries.

Its impact is not limited to conventional education, but also includes vocational training programs aimed at empowering individuals in the community. Organizations such as Caritas Bangladesh and the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) play a central role in the implementation of these programs, facilitating skills development and self-reliance. Additionally, Christian missionaries have played a role in shaping cultural perceptions and ideologies, particularly through initiatives targeting women's education. By emphasizing the Christianity of Indian women during the colonial period, missionaries have influenced public attitudes and succeeded in introducing feminist ideas into the Muslim community in Bangladesh. The insertion of Christian faith and values into the educational curriculum serves as a mechanism for promoting compassion, love, tolerance, and social responsibility. Christian educational institutions, celebrating events such as Christmas, aim to make Christianity the primary religion that reflects these values. Scholarships and financial assistance provided by Christian educational institutions, such as Caritas Bangladesh and Bangladesh Baptist Church Shingha (BBCS), contribute to conversion efforts, especially among marginalized communities. Notably, the Rishi community, historically associated with conversion to Christianity, has received substantial support from these Catholic-based NGOs.

Interfaith dialogue, especially in Khulna, serves as a strategic approach to facilitate positive relations between different ethnic and religious communities. This dialogue not only facilitates understanding of Christian teachings, but also provides an opportunity to normalize Christian culture and values in a society that is generally Muslim. The policy landscape surrounding missionary education in Bangladesh is under scrutiny, with the government considering regulations to govern these institutions. However, the autonomy traditionally exercised by missionary institutions remained a distinctive feature, along with adherence to their own policies. At its core, the spread of Christianity through education in Bangladesh is a dynamic process that involves a multifaceted strategy, combining evangelism, community development, and cultural influence. As the government considers policy, the balance between autonomy and regulation remains a critical consideration in shaping the future direction of Christian missionary education in the country.

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