

CHRISTIAN MISSION IN BANGLADESH: A CASE
STUDY OF KHULNA DIVISION

BY

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh has a long history of Christian missionary activities lasting around 500 years. The dramatic rise of Christianity every year and the popularity of Christian missionary activities in Bangladesh are causing tension in society as Muslims perceive the phenomenon as a threat to the understanding and practice of their religion and culture. Thus, this research aims to study the historical background of the Christian mission in Khulna Division, identifying the significant areas of activity that Christian missionaries apply for conversion. Similarly, the research investigates how Muslim *du'at* and Hindu priests in Khulna have responded to Christian missionary activities. The research adopted a qualitative method that incorporates extensive textual analysis. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Interviews were carried out with Muslim *du'at* and Hindu religious leaders. The secondary data were sourced mainly from relevant books, documents, articles, theses, dissertations, seminar and conference papers, journals, reliable websites, newspapers, and social media. Two different methods were utilized for the data analysis, namely descriptive and analytical techniques. The findings of the research revealed that there are five key factors influencing religious conversion: socio-economic factors; psychological and emotional appeals; education and interfaith dialogue; government policies and support from the legal infrastructure; and misinformation about religious texts. In addition to that, this research analysed the attitudes of Hindu religious leaders towards Hindu conversion to Christianity. Likewise, the research discovered the strategies to contain Muslim conversion to Christianity as follows: *da'wah*, which includes training programs for Muslim *du'at*, producing and distributing *da'wah* literature, promoting knowledge of comparative religion, expanding discussions on Islam's superiority; educational initiatives; social awareness about missionary activities; community outreach programs; and service-oriented programs. The researcher concluded that Muslim *du'at* and scholars should take proactive measures in propagating Islam as a whole. In addition, practising Muslims should promote social development projects such as education, medical services, poverty alleviation, relief and rehabilitation, and other measures that will prevent Muslims from being enticed by Christian missionary propaganda in this regard.

خلاصة البحث

هناك تاريخ طويل من الأنشطة التبشيرية المسيحية التي دامت قرابة (500) عام في بنغلاديش. إن الارتفاع المثير للمسيحية كل عام، وشعبية الأنشطة التبشيرية المسيحية في بنغلاديش، قد سببت توترًا في المجتمع، حيث يرى المسلمون أن هذه الظاهرة تمثل تهديدًا لدينهم وثقافتهم. وبالتالي، فإن الهدف من هذا البحث هو دراسة الخلفية التاريخية للبعثات التبشيرية المسيحية في منطقة "حُولنا"، مع تحديد أهم مجالات الأنشطة التي يطبقها المبشرون المسيحيون من أجل تحويل الناس إلى المسيحية. كما يتناول البحث كيفية استجابة الشيوخ المسلمين، ورجال الدين الهندوسيين في "حُولنا" للأنشطة التبشيرية المسيحية. اعتمد البحث طريقة نوعية تتضمن تحليلًا نصيًا مكثفًا. تم جمع البيانات من كل من المصادر الأولية والثانوية. وقد أُجريت مقابلات مع زعماء دين مسلمين وهندوسيين. تم الحصول على البيانات الثانوية بشكل رئيسي من الكتب، والمستندات، والمقالات، والأطروحات، والأوراق البحثية في المؤتمرات، والمجلات، والمواقع الإلكترونية الموثوقة، والصحف، ومواقع التواصل الاجتماعي الموثوقة. تم استخدام طريقتين مختلفتين لتحليل البيانات، وهما التقنيات الوصفية والتحليلية. كشفت نتائج البحث أن هناك خمسة عوامل رئيسية تؤثر على التحوّل الديني، هي: العوامل الاجتماعية والاقتصادية؛ والميول النفسية والعاطفية؛ والحوار التعليمي، والحوار بين الأديان؛ والسياسات الحكومية، والدعم القادم من البنية التحتية القانونية؛ والمعلومات الخاطئة حول النصوص الدينية. وقد تم في هذا البحث تحليل مواقف الزعماء الدينيين الهندوسيين تجاه تحويل الهندوسيين إلى المسيحية. وبالمثل، اكتشف البحث إستراتيجيات مواجهة تحويل المسلمين إلى المسيحية، والتي تمثلت في: الدعوة، بما فيها من برامج تدريبية للدعاة المسلمين؛ وإنتاج وتوزيع كتب وصحف تتعلق بموضوع الدعوة والرد على شبهات المبشرين المسيحيين؛ مما يعزز المعرفة بمقارنة الأديان؛ وتوسيع المناقشات حول تفوق الإسلام؛ والمبادرات التعليمية؛ والوعي الاجتماعي بالأنشطة التبشيرية؛ وبرامج التوعية المجتمعية؛ والبرامج الموجهة للخدمة. وقد خلص الباحث إلى أنه ينبغي على الدعاة والباحثين المسلمين اتخاذ تدابير استباقية لنشر الإسلام. كما ينبغي على المسلمين تعزيز مشاريع التنمية الاجتماعية، مثل التعليم، والخدمات الطبية، ومواجهة الفقر، والإغاثة، وإعادة التأهيل، وغيرها من التدابير التي من شأنها أن تقي المسلمين من إغراءات الدعاية التبشيرية المسيحية.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Art in Islamic Thought and Civilisation.

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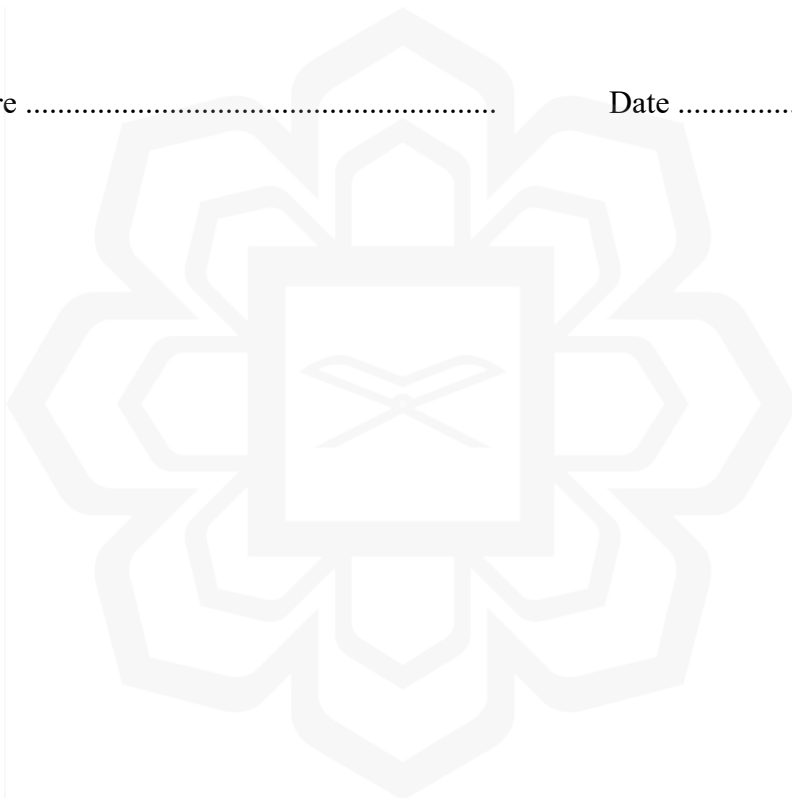
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Mahmudul Hasan

Signature Date





This thesis is dedicated to the An-Noor Islamic Dawah Center, which I was inspired to build during my travels to my country for fieldwork and data collection in completing this research.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Bangladesh is the fourth-largest Muslim and the eighth-most populous country overall.¹ According to the census of Bangladesh 2022, the total population of Bangladesh is 165,158,616 and the ratio of its population based on religious identity which includes Muslims 91.04%, Hindus 7.95%, Buddhists 0.61%, Christians 0.30%, and others 0.12%.² However, the history of Christianity in Bangladesh is more than 500 years. Jesuits were the first missionaries who worked hard to lay the foundations and spread Christianity in Bangladesh. These missionaries spread Christianity in various ways, such as education, health care, and helping the poor and weak. Portuguese traders came to Bengal at the beginning of the 16th century. They brought missionaries and established churches, schools, and hospitals there. The first place they came to in Bangladesh was Chittagong in 1517,³ Later, they expanded their network to Dhaka. When the British East India Company took over the whole of India, Christian missionaries operated with the full backing of the governing authority. During the Pakistan period and later in independent Bangladesh, the activities of Christian missionaries continued extensively.⁴ Roman Catholics comprise the most significant portion of Bangladesh's Christian population, and the number of Baptists is also significant.⁵

It is challenging to know the actual numbers of Christians in Bangladesh because many converts hide their religious identity, as per the advice of the priests, especially

¹ "Muslim Population by Country 2023," <<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/muslim-population-by-country>> (accessed 12 June, 2023); Pew Research Centre, "The Future of the Global Muslim Population," Projections for 2010-2030, January 2011.

² *Population & Housing Census Preliminary report 2022*, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, preliminary report, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Bangladesh Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Ministry of Planning, August 2022, p vii.

³ Reva Filip Majumdar, *Itihash kotha bole (History speaks) from the first century to 2000 CE* (Narayanganj: Mrs Elizabeth Majumdar, 2002), 8.

⁴ 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), 4.

⁵ Ibid.

those who converted from Islam. According to one report, their number is 600,000.⁶ Another report (2020), their number is 866,000.⁷ However, a British Baptist missionary couple working in Bangladesh claims Christians comprise five per cent (8.31 million) of the total population.⁸

The nine-month-long war of independence in 1971 left the country devastated and urgently needed help. Many NGOs entered the arena and were welcomed by the Government.⁹ Since then, succeeding governments have continually supported their activities in consideration of their effectiveness in satisfying the pressing material needs of the population, especially the neediest portions.¹⁰ Christians have established schools and provided educational materials to society's deprived children. Other missionary programs include providing loan facilities, establishing hospitals, and building shelters for victims of natural calamities.¹¹ Many of these NGOs see their humanitarian activities as achieving a more important goal: population conversion. An intermediate goal in that regard is the secularisation of the country. They have a strong presence in Khulna because many areas of the Division are impoverished and affected by natural disasters.¹² Many foreign Christian preachers from Europe have come to Khulna. For example, Father Marino Rigon, who came from Italy and spent more than 60 years (1953-2017) in Khulna to preach Christianity, built 17 schools, hospitals, and many other social development organisations.¹³ Another is an American engineer, Chris Hogle, who converted his Bangladeshi wife, Rahima Khatun, to Christianity. The couple provides loan facilities to ordinary people in Jashore and plans to build a big hospital in this

⁶ "Church in Bangladesh," Union of Catholic Asia News, <www.ucanews.com/directory/country/bangladesh/7> (accessed 8 September, 2022).

⁷ 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): 11.

⁸ BMS World Mission, "Four Interesting Things About Bangladesh," <www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/461848/Four_interesting_things.aspx> (accessed 10 August, 2022).

⁹ Saidul Islam, "The Role of NGOs in Promoting Christianity: the case of Bangladesh," *Intellectual Discourse* 9, no. 2 (2001): 186.

¹⁰ Ziaul Islam, "Christianization and Christianity in Bangladesh: Historical Perspectives," *Journal of the Chittagong University Journal of Arts and Humanities* 29 (2016): 10-18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11-24.

¹² M. Shahjahan Mondal, Thpal Kumar, Richard Sloman, and Umme Kulsum, "Urban Risk: Hazards and Vulnerability in Khulna and Bagerhat cities, Bangladesh," August 2014.

¹³ "Father Marino Rigon laid to rest in Mongla," *The Daily Star*, October 22, 2018, <<https://www.thedailystar.net/country/news/body-freedom-fighter-father-marino-rigon-reaches-mongla-1649914>> (accessed 26 October, 2023).

remote area.¹⁴ Many other Christians have come from Western countries to this region to spread Christianity.

Missionary schools have been used as an effective tool for evangelisation in Bangladesh. Christian missionaries have built thousands of schools and colleges throughout the country.¹⁵ Muslim parents compete to send their children to Christian missionary schools, colleges, and universities and take pride in securing admission to them.¹⁶ In many parts of Bangladesh, where the percentage of Christians is high, they use English. Thus, the mother tongue is being replaced with a foreign language.¹⁷

Missionaries use various techniques to attract people. Their use of Islamic terminologies in their books, religious lectures, and the names of their organisations (*Isae-Muslim Jamat*) can only be seen as deceptive labelling designed to mislead Muslims about the true nature of their identity, aims, and beliefs. Their use of girl preachers can also be seen as a marketing technique for attracting male listeners and others. They conduct their work in a very organised way. The problem of Muslim scholars is that they focus on the religious side only and are not very concerned about social issues. On the contrary, Christian missionaries look first to the social conditions and work based on that. Because of dynamic social activities and active preaching of Christianity, they are very successful in increasing their numbers in this region.

Khulna is one of eight divisions in Bangladesh, comprising ten districts with a population of more than 15 million. Muslims comprise 82.87%, Hindus 16.45% and others 0.68%. Various groups of Christian missionaries are active in the Khulna Division, including Caritas, the Salvation Army, the Assemblies of God, the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) and many others.¹⁸

¹⁴ Tauhid Zaman, "The American engineer who came to Bangladesh for love wants to build a hospital," *Bangla Tribune*, August 4, 2022, <<https://www.banglatribune.com/country/khulna/756573/হাসপাতাল-বানাত্তে-চান-প্ৰেমের-টানে-বাংলাদেশে-আসা>> (accessed 26 October, 2023).

¹⁵ Saidul Islam, "The Role of NGOs in Promoting Christianity: the case of Bangladesh," *Intellectual Discourse* 9, no. 2 (2001): 188.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁸ Abdul Karim Khan. *Christian Mission in Bangladesh: A Survey*. Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1981.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

More than 500 years of history of Christian missionary activities in Bangladesh. The dramatic rise of Christianity every year and the popularity of Christian missionaries in Bangladesh is causing tension in the society as Muslims perceive the phenomenon as a threat to the understanding and practice of their religion and culture. This assertion is supported by research claiming that 91,000 Muslims across Bangladesh have converted to Christianity in the last six years.¹⁹ In addition, vulnerable, poor, uneducated Muslims and Hindus have become the main targets of Christian missionaries to facilitate their needs by building shelters, hospitals, and educational institutions, as well as providing financial assistance. It is thus essential to make Muslims aware of Christian missionary activities so that Muslims protect themselves from losing their faith. A matter of particular concern is that Muslim children who attend these missionary schools are getting access directly or indirectly to Christian education, which might affect their Muslim identity. Even though a few books and articles have been published on Christian's missionary activities addressing this issue, there is no research on such activities, particularly in Khulna. Therefore, this research is essential for studying and analysing Christian missionary activities in Khulna.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the historical background of the Christian mission in Khulna?
2. What activities do Christian Missioanries use to propagate Christianity in Khulna?
3. How have Muslim du'at and Hindu priests responded to the Christian missionary activities in Khulna?

¹⁹ Samuel Smith, "Islamic Radicals Slaughtering Christians in Bangladesh, Says Bishop," The Christian Post, July 20, 2016, <<https://www.christianpost.com/news/thousands-of-muslims-converting-christianity-bangladesh-despite-rising-persecution.html>> (accessed 26 October, 2023).

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To study the historical background of the Christian mission in Khulna Division.
2. To identify the significant areas of activity that Christian missionaries apply for conversion.
3. To investigate how Muslim du'at and Hindu priests in Khulna have responded to Christian missionary activities.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research offered contributions in the following ways: First, it is an excellent source for learning the historical background of the Christian mission in Khulna. Through the knowledge of the background of a Christian missionary in Khulna, people will identify the elements involved in developing this region. Second, this research will provide readers with a clear picture of missionary activities and the social conditions underlying those activities in this area. Third, this research examined the techniques applied by Christian missionaries to propagate Christianity in Bangladesh, particularly in Khulna. Finally, it provided a broad picture of Muslim preachers and Hindu priests' responses to Christian missions in Khulna. The reader will understand which categories of people are converting more, which have more positive attitudes towards Christian missionaries, and why. More importantly, Muslims can understand the causes of Christian missionaries' success and Muslim activists' lack of it. Finally, this research provided insight into the present social situation under missionary activities and sketched their future impact on the people of Khulna.

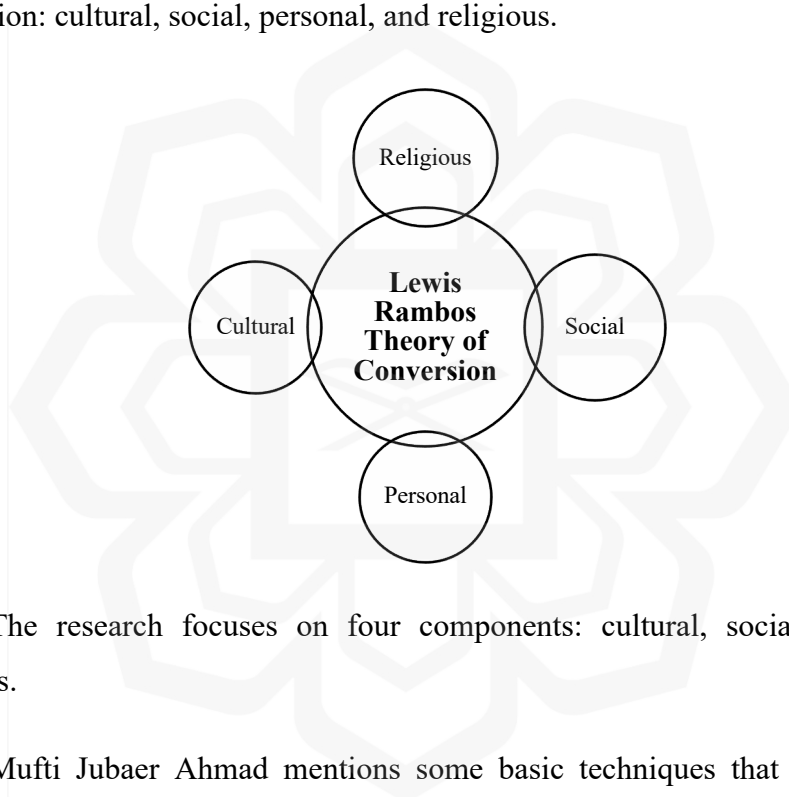
1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research investigates the impact of the Christian mission on the Bangladeshi society in Khulna. It focuses only on Khulna rather than other areas where Christian missionaries operate. The research further investigates the techniques applied by Christian missionaries in this region to propagate Christianity, not secular NGOs.

Additionally, this research discusses and examines Muslims and Hindus' responses to Christian missionary activities, not those of secular NGOs.

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study intends to clarify the Christian mission, conversion to Christianity, and its impact on the people of the Khulna Division in Bangladesh. The gathering of information and its analysis was based on two authors' views and theories: Lewis Rambo and Mufti Jubaer Ahmad. Rambo mentions four components of religious conversion: cultural, social, personal, and religious.



The research focuses on four components: cultural, social, personal, and religious.

Mufti Jubaer Ahmad mentions some basic techniques that are followed by Christian missionaries to convert people in Bangladesh:

1. Distribution of books and pamphlets.
2. Use of Islamic terminology and names, including Islamic names for Christian books, to confuse Muslims.
3. They are using pseudo-Islamic terminology for their groups like (*Isae-Muslim Jamat*).

4. They are copying Muslim traditional designs.
5. They also misinterpret verses of the Qur'an related to Jesus and the People of the Book.
6. They use Arabic verses of the Quran directly in their books.
7. Appointing fake imams and spiritual leaders to convert people secretly.
8. Using young girls to preach Christianity and missionary activities.
9. Giving fake challenges to uneducated, ordinary Muslims
10. Selecting poor areas and poor people.
11. Providing education and its facilities
12. Building hospitals, especially for women and children
13. Targeting tribal populations
14. Frequent humanitarian slogans
15. Targeting women, especially young girls
16. Inter-marriage
17. Helping the poor and vulnerable
18. Women's empowerment

1.8 RESEARCH METHOD

This research has adopted a qualitative method that incorporates extensive textual analysis. Data were collected mainly from library research. References were made to books, documents, articles, theses, dissertations, seminar and conference papers, journals, reliable websites and newspapers, and social media.

To accomplish the goals of this thesis, we employed two different methods: descriptive and analytical. The researcher described and then analysed the historical background of the Christian mission in Khulna. Moreover, this research analysed the Christian mission's activities there. Finally, an analysis of the views of the Muslims and Hindus in Khulna on Christian missionary activities was made.

In chapter four of this thesis, interviews were conducted with two expert Muslim du'ats who work in da'wah and social activities and have relevant practical experience. Likewise, interviews have been conducted with two Hindu priests. The insights provided by these interviews were applied to help achieve the second and third research objectives. Both groups have been chosen from the Khulna Division.

1.9 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 activities in Khulna.

The book *Bangladesh Christian Missionarider Opototprota O Amader Koronio* (in English translation: *The misconduct of Christian missionaries in Bangladesh and our duties*), by Jubaer Ahmad, provides, in Bengali language, a short historical background on missionaries in India and Bangladesh as a prelude to a detailed discussion of their activities in Bangladesh. This book is unique because the author's information about their activities is based on his observation. He focuses on the groups that actively evangelise, pointing out how they get financial support, their plans, and their techniques to convert people to Christianity. These include the establishment of educational institutes and humanitarian activities, distributing books and pamphlets, changing the names of scriptures and organisations, and misinterpreting the Holy Qur'an, among others. He further explains the situation of tribal people, who he thinks are the most vulnerable to conversion due to poverty. He provides statistics about missionary groups and the percentage of conversion. Further, he details the challenges

Muslim scholars and Islamic da'wah face in this context.²⁰ Therefore, this book is an excellent source for learning about missionary activities, but there are some gaps in it; for example, references are not provided for some of the information quoted. Some parts of the writing are not academic, but the good side is that 70%-80% of the information provided is based on fieldwork. Only about 20% of the information is taken from other sources. Another shortcoming is that the author briefly mentions many missionaries' strategies without elaboration. Another gap is the author's emphasis on religious issues from the Islamic point of view without discussing the social realities in Bangladesh that make many people amenable to conversion. Moreover, this research focuses on Bangladesh; there is a scant mention of the Khulna Division. The research focused mainly on Khulna Division.

The most crucial twenty-first-century contribution to the study of other religions in the Bengali language was by Abdullah Jahangir. He wrote two books, one titled *Pobitro Bible: Porichiti o porjalochona* (Holy Bible: Introduction and Analysis). The second is *Kitabul Muqaddas, Injil shorif, and Isa-e dormo* (Bible, Gospel, and Christian faith). In these two books, Abdullah Jahangir discussed the original corruption of the biblical text and how missionaries mistranslated the existing text to make Christian beliefs more acceptable to people in Bangladesh. A related phenomenon is their use of Islamic terminologies, such as calling Christianity *Isa-e dormo* or *Isa-e Jamat* (Religion of Isa). He also compares the Bible and the Qur'an to the understanding of Christian people.²¹ These two books are a significant contribution as the author answers many misconceptions propagated by missionary groups to spread Christianity in Bangladesh. However, these books focus more on religion and comparative analysis, while my research is on missionary activities, particularly in Khulna. Additionally, the research covers people's responses to missionary activities in Khulna.

"A Feasibility Study for a University in Bangladesh under Catholic Sponsorship" is a PhD thesis by Harold Bijoy Rodrigues. The author discusses the historical background of Christian missionary activity in Bangladesh and the Catholic mission. He provides detailed information about Catholic institutions and their social services in

²⁰ M. Jubaer Ahmad, *Bangladesh Christian missionary opotoporota o amader koronio (Activities of Christian missionaries in Bangladesh and what should we do)* (Dhaka: Hilful Fuzul, 2018).

²¹ Abdullah Jahangir, "*Pobitro Bible: porichiti o porjalochona.*" (2016); "*Kitabul Muqaddas, Injil shorif, and Isa-e dormo.*" (2013). (Both books are written in Bangla language).

Bangladesh. Finally, he discusses the education system in Bangladesh.²² This research focuses on Catholic missionary education in Bangladesh, while this research was not limited to Catholic rather than Christian missions in Bangladesh, particularly in Khulna.

Ziaul Islam (2014) discusses the history of Christianization in Bangladesh, dividing it into four periods: the pre-colonial Period, Christianization in the British period, Christianisation in the Pakistan period, and Christianization after Independence. Finally, the author examines the reasons behind the conversion success in Bangladesh over the years. He traces a gradual increase in the Christian population throughout those periods. He estimates that one in 6000 people was a Christian in 1881. He claims that by 2015, one in three people in Bangladesh was a Christian. However, this claim appears to be highly exaggerated.²³ This research tried to find their competitively authentic numbers from real-world situations.

Saidul Islam (2001) examines the activities of selected NGOs that promote Christianity in Bangladesh. The author mentions that Bangladesh has an NGO density of 3.5 foreign NGOs per square mile and that most are engaged directly or indirectly in evangelisation. The Christian missionaries use techniques such as providing education, focusing on evangelising 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.²⁴ He further identifies three methods: corruption, seduction, and conversion. This article is excellent for learning about missionary NGOs' techniques and strategies. However, many points are missing in this paper, such as how they get support from the Government, how they support women and children, and many other issues that were discussed in the research.

²² Harold Bijoy Rodrigues, "A feasibility study for a university in Bangladesh under Catholic sponsorship." *University of the Incarnate Word*, 2009.

²³ Ziaul Islam "Christianization and Christianity in Bangladesh: Historical Perspectives," *Journal of Arts and Humanities* 29 (2016).

²⁴ Saidul Islam, "The Role of NGOs in Promoting Christianity: the case of Bangladesh." *Intellectual Discourse* 9, no. 2 (2001).

Another article by Saidul Islam (2004) is titled "The Creeping March of Christianity: The Widespread Evangelisation in Bangladesh." The author starts with a brief history of the development of churches in Bangladesh over time; then, he mentions missionaries who are most actively working on conversion. He further mentions that the Government NGO Bureau identified 52 NGOs who engaged directly in converting people. After that, he mentions how the missionaries target populations. Their priority is 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 secularised or de-Islamized. Finally, he discusses the responses of Muslims, which he categorises into three: 1) from the Government, 2) at the non-governmental level, and 3) from outside of Bangladesh.²⁵ Therefore, this article is excellent in two aspects: its discussion of the target populations and Muslims' responses.

Similarly, Ali and Nurullah (1970) discussed how missionaries target the population, their strategies, and how their plan has succeeded over the years. The authors also explained the challenges to Islamic da'wah in Bangladesh's recent context.²⁶ This paper does not have much new; however, the authors discussed the historical background of Islamic da'wah in Bangladesh, which nobody else discussed.

Father Tapan De Rozari (2011) wrote an article titled "Christian Mission and Evangelization in Bangladesh," wherein he discussed four main points that are different from any other writer. He mentioned the religio-cultural and socio-political context of the mission in Bangladesh. Secondly, he discussed the Christian community and its denominations in Bangladesh, including the Roman Catholics and the Protestants, with a short historical background on their development and the groups among them. Thirdly, he discussed the challenges and opportunities for Christian missionaries in Bangladesh. Finally, he discussed the strategies and activities of missionaries in Bangladesh. He mentioned four strategies and activities of missionaries. The new

²⁵ Saidul Islam, "The Creeping March of Christianity: The Widespread Evangelisation in Bangladesh." (2004).

²⁶ Yousuf Ali & Nurullah, "Challenges of Islamic Da'wah in Bangladesh: The Christian Missions and Their Evangelisation." *IIUC Studies*, 4 (December 2007).

techniques that he mentioned and which others did not are theological and lay Christianity and social concern.²⁷

According to a report in *the Refugee Review Tribunal* (2006), Christian missionaries divided the churches in Bangladesh into two as an essential strategy to spread Christianity: 1) the Underground Church, consisting of converts from Islam; 2) the Visible Church, consisting nearly entirely of converts from Hinduism. The Underground Church is further divided into a group that secretly worships and conducts meetings openly. The latter occurs when an entire village turns to Christ.²⁸

"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.²⁹ 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 organisations, 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 evangelise them.³⁰

"The NGO sector in Bangladesh: Emergence, Contribution and Current Debate" by Shahidul Islam provides information about NGO activities and the reasons for their

²⁷ Tapan De Rozari, "Christian mission and Evangelization in Bangladesh." *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*, no. 2, (2011).

²⁸ Refugee Review Tribunal, "RRT Research Response," Number: BGD30942, Australia, (November 23, 2006).

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ Abdul Karim Khan. "Christian Mission in Bangladesh: A Survey." *Islamic Foundation, Leicester*, 1981.

development in Bangladesh. More importantly, this paper mentions NGO activities in different periods: the British period, the Pakistani period, the post-liberation period, and others. The author mentions some of the oldest Christian missionary organisations that have worked since the British period, such as the Baptist missionary society.³¹

"Aspects of Christian NGO work in a Muslim society: Challenges and response in Bangladesh," by A. K. M. Hedayetul Huq (1999), covers the social development work of Christian missionary NGOs from 1971-1995. The author focuses on the work of four leading NGOs: Caritas, Rajshahi-Dinajpur Rural Service, World Vision of Bangladesh, and YMCA. He mentions their activities and how much money they spent on their projects. The author mentions what kind of people they target to provide their facilities.³²

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.³³

Navigating the Constraints of the Ummah: A Comparison of Christ Movements in Iran and Bangladesh," authored by Christian J. Anderson and published in 2018 in the International Journal of Frontier Missiology, examines the socio-religious dynamics shaping Christ-centered discipleship movements in predominantly Muslim societies, specifically Iran and Bangladesh. In this article, Anderson explores how the concept of the ummah, the collective socio-religious Muslim identity, functions as a constraint that influences the trajectory and nature of Jesus discipleship movements. His analysis spans

³¹ Shahidul Islam, "The NGOs sector in Bangladesh: emergence, contribution and current debate," *Advances in Asian Social Science* 7, no. 2 (2016): 1182-1188.

³² AKM Hedayetul Huq, "Aspects of Christian NGO work in a Muslim society: Challenges and response in Bangladesh," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 22, no. s1 (1999): 209-220.

³³ "Faith and Development in Focus: Bangladesh," World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), <<http://hdl.handle.net/10822/1052080>> (2015).

three levels of social structures: individual, community, and state. He argues that the strength and characteristics of the ummah in each context profoundly shape how such movements emerge, adapt, and sustain themselves. However, this article focuses overall on Bangladesh and a very particular concept, but this research has focused on the religious conversion issue in the Khulna Division by examining the Christian missionary activities.³⁴

1.10 CONCLUSION

A range of literature exists that has addressed the topic of Christian missionary activities from various perspectives and backgrounds. Among the essential points covered are the historical background of the coming of Christianity to the Indian Subcontinent, East Bengal, the Pakistani period, and later in Bangladesh. Various books and articles focus on various aspects of Christian missionary activities in Bangladesh. Some focus on historical development, while others focus on preaching strategies, methods, and technologies in the country. Some focus on missionary NGOs and their services in different parts of Bangladesh. Much research has been done about missionary activities during the British period, but limited literature specifically focuses on Christian missionary activities in Bangladesh, particularly in Khulna. This research discusses the historical background of Christian missionary activities, particularly in Khulna. This research studies the significant areas of activity, the techniques, and strategies they apply for conversion. This research investigates how Muslim *du'at* and Hindu religious leaders in Khulna have responded to Christian missionaries.

³⁴ Anderson, Christian J. "Navigating the Constraints of the Ummah: A Comparison of Christ Movements in Iran and Bangladesh." *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 35, no. 4 (2018): 163-172.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSION IN KHULNA

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter two explores two critical aspects of the historical background of this region. Firstly, it highlighted the presence of Christianity in India before the arrival of the Western colonial period, discussing the coming Western colonialism in this region. Thirdly, the focus shifts to the arrival of Christian missionaries in Bangladesh. Lastly, the fourth part of the chapter examined the historical background of the Khulna Division, and this part of the discussion was further divided into two distinct phases. The first part covers the coming Catholic missionaries, who played a crucial role in spreading Christianity and their faith in this land. The second part of the historical background covers the establishment of Protestant missionary NGOs in this land.

2.2 CHRISTIAN MISSION IN BANGLADESH

Christianity was present in India before Western colonizers, dating back to the arrival of the apostle St. Thomas in the 1st century CE. Despite challenges, Christianity left an enduring impact, paving the way for religious and cultural exchange in the region before colonial times. According to Christian legends, Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, came to India in 49 CE to preach the Gospel.¹ On the other hand, Father Josef Rana Mondal mentions that Thomas came to India in 52 CE; further, he added that it is known from history that Saint Thomas came to India in the first century, but it is not known how many people converted to Christianity through his efforts.² However, based

¹ Reva Filip Majumdar, *Itihash Kotha Bole: First Shotok Theke 2000 Christabod Porjonto Shokol Mondolir Itihash* [History Speaks: From the First Century to 2000 CE, the History of All the Groups of Christians], ed. Elizabeth Majumdar (Narayanganj: Mrs Elizabeth Majumdar, 2002), 1-2.

² Ibid.

on analysis, the coming of Saint Thomas in India in 52 CE is the strongest because most historians mention this date.

However, despite historical uncertainties, their continuous presence since the 2nd or 3rd century is evidenced by inscriptions and enduring cultural practices.³ Saint Thomas established seven churches in Kerala after he arrived in 52 CE. These churches are in different locations in Kerala. His mission in Kerala included baptizing several families and spreading the Christian faith among the local population.⁴ According to Josef Rana, Saint Thomas propagated Christianity in Kerala among Hindus and was martyred by an assassin there⁵

After the initial spread of Christianity by Saint Thomas, there was a significant hiatus in missionary activities on the Indian Subcontinent. This gap lasted until the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498. The Portuguese and their priests aimed to establish trade and further propagate Christianity in India, marking a new chapter in the Christian missionary efforts in the region.

Therefore, in 1498, under the command of Vasco da Gama, Portuguese ships made landfall on the western coast of India, opening a new chapter of European exploration, trade, and colonialism in the region. This significant event not only reshaped the dynamics of Indian Ocean commerce but also sparked profound cultural and religious exchanges between Europe and the Indian Subcontinent.⁶

The second group of Portuguese sailors arrived in India in 1500 CE, led by Pedro Álvares Cabral, accompanied by clergy. In 1501 CE, the first Catholic Church and fort were established in Cochin. Vasco da Gama's second voyage in 1502 CE brought more priests. However, Afonso de Albuquerque's arrival in 1509 CE proved pivotal, as he captured Goa in 1510 CE, providing a strategic base for the Portuguese to spread

³ R. Eric Frykenberg, "Thomas Christians," Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Thomas-Christians> (accessed May 25, 2024).

⁴ "Ezharapallikal: The Seven & Half Churches of Saint Thomas," 21 July, 2021 <<https://www.heritage.in/2021/08/ezharapallikal-seven-half-churches-of.html>> (accessed May 25, 2024).

⁵ Joseph Rana Mandal, *Rar Samatate Christo Dharma* [Christianity in the Rar Region], November 19, 2011, 3.

⁶ Vasco da Gama Arrival in India, <<https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/this-day-in-history-may20/>> (accessed 26 May, 2024).

Christianity more effectively in the region.⁷ The Portuguese reached their peak of power in the mid-16th century; however, their power was limited to the western and eastern coasts of the Indian Subcontinent. Dutch, French, Danish, and English came to this Subcontinent as traders during the first part of the sixteenth century.⁸

The Christian mission in Bangladesh represents a dynamic and multifaceted endeavour that spans centuries of history and cultural exchange. Rooted in the early spread of Christianity in the region, the mission has evolved, responding to Bangladesh's diverse religious and social landscape. From the efforts of pioneering missionaries to establishing vibrant Christian communities, this mission has played a significant role in shaping the religious fabric of the country. Today, the Christian presence in Bangladesh contributes to its rich tapestry of faith traditions, embodying principles of service, compassion, and social justice. This introduction sets the stage for exploring the complex and enduring legacy of the Christian mission in Bangladesh.

Portuguese continued both the conquest and the conversion of non-Christians to Christianity. The crucifixion was inseparable from the sword, and it extended the boundaries of their empire, spreading the Christian message to the other side".⁹ From 1498 to 1510, the Portuguese became aware of the wealth of Bengal, so they intended to trade and preach Christianity there. The second royal legate of the Portuguese, Alfonso de Albuquerque, tried to spread Christianity in Bengal in 1510. To promote this mission, he encouraged the Portuguese to intermarry with native Bengalis and have them convert to Christianity. The generation of intermarriages made Cupels the first Christians in India, especially in Bengal.¹⁰ In 1517, Albuquerque commanded the Portuguese to establish a trading post in Chattogram in the Bay of Bengal, but they failed. They tried again in 1528 and 1533, with the latter attempt ending in the arrest of their leader, Martin Afonso Di-Melo, by Sultan Ghiasuddin Mahmud Shah of Gour. 1538, a political alliance was formed when the Portuguese aided the Sultan against Sher Shah. Pleased with their assistance, the Sultan released the Portuguese and allowed them to trade in Chattogram, with Martin Afonso becoming the Sultan's military

⁷ Reva, Filip Majumdar, *Itihash kotha bole*, 7-8.

⁸ Portuguese Establish Their Trade Empire In Asia, <https://factsanddetails.com/india/History/sub7_1c/entry-4120.html> (accessed 26 May, 2024).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁰ A.S.M Ziaul Islam, "Christianization and Christianity in Bangladesh: Historical Perspectives," 2.

advisor. Consequently, Chittagong Port became a Centre of Portuguese trade.¹¹ After they had a Centre of trade, they started to expand their missionary work all over Bangladesh with the development of their business and power.

In the 16th century, the most active missionaries in India were the Franciscans, Jesuits, Dominicans, and Augustinians. The Franciscans arrived first, with only 16 missionaries in 1524–1525, but their numbers proliferated to 1,635 members across two provinces, St. Thomas Province and Mother of God Province. The Jesuits began their mission in 1542, expanding to 349 members by 1584 and later dividing into two provinces: Goa in the north and Malabar in the south. The Dominicans arrived in 1548, establishing their first monastery in Goa. The Augustinians came in 1572 and established churches in Goa, Cochin, and Bassein.¹²

In 1576, Jesuit missionaries Father Anthony Vaz and Father Peter Dias arrived in Bengal, followed by Roman Catholic priests in 1580. They established a church and monastery in Bendel in 1599 and founded a convent school and the Jesuit College of St. Paul. Four Jesuit missionaries came to Chittagong in 1599, with one continuing to Chandecan. The Church of Jesus, the first Church in Chandecan, was established on January 1, 1600. The second Church in Bangladesh, St. John the Baptist, was built in Chittagong in 1601.¹³

Christian missionaries had an excellent plan for the Jashore in 1598. According to history, the King of Jashore was loyal to the Portuguese. Many Portuguese stayed under his protection, and the royal army and Christianity in Bengal stared at the efforts of those Portuguese. In 1599, the King invited the father of Goa to Chandecan, and after he came here, they converted around 200 Bengalis to Christianity.¹⁴

In 1622, the religious education programme began in earnest with the appointment of Father Peter Gomez as rector of St. Paul's College. B. Rodriquez, James

¹¹ Reva Filip Majumdar, *Itihash kotha bole* [History Speaks], 8.

¹² Joseph Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India: From the Middle of the Sixteenth Century to the End of the Seventeenth Century, 1542-1700* (Bangalore: Christian History Association of India, 1988), 6.

¹³ Encyclopedia, Bangladesh, the Catholic Church In, <www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/bangladesh-catholic-church#:~:text=In%201599%20four%20Jesuit%20missionaries,as%20the%20Church%20of%20Jesus> (accessed 11 June, 2023).

¹⁴ S.A.M Ziaul Islam, "Christianization and Christianity in Bangladesh: Historical Perspectives," *Journal of Arts and Humanities* (2016): 2.

Gómez, Simon de Figueredo, and Andre Machado made it an excellent centre for teaching and evangelizing Christianity. It is claimed that as many as ten thousand people were converted within a decade.¹⁵

Therefore, the Catholics organized their activities geographically by dividing land into dioceses. The first Diocese was formed in 1557 CE in Cochin, southwest India's coastal Kerala state. A Franciscan bishop took charge of the Diocese. The bishop entrusted the responsibility and evangelization of the churches in Bangladesh to the Augustinian priests of Goa.

In 1612, Augustinian missionaries built a church and mission Centre in Dhaka. By 1621, they had also established prayer Centres in Chittagong and Arakan. The Mylapore Diocese, formed in 1606, oversaw the Roman Catholic Church in Bangladesh. When Jesuit missionaries arrived in Chittagong in 1599, there were 2,500 Portuguese and descendants in Cox's Bazar and Arakan. Between 1621 and 1624, Portuguese pirates captured 42,000 people for slavery, with Augustinians baptizing at least 28,000 of them and an additional 5,000 Arakanese. The Jesuits and Augustinians laid the foundations for spreading Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church in Bangladesh.¹⁶

From 1573 to 1595, Christian missionaries tried unsuccessfully to convert Jalal al-Din Muhammad Akbar to Christianity despite him having a Christian wife. In 1602, Akbar decreed that anyone could convert to Christianity. After Akbar died in 1605, his son Jahangir supported Christian missionaries, allowing them to educate his sons, three of whom converted. In 1623, two more from the Mughal court converted to Christianity.¹⁷ That is how Christian missionaries entered the Mughal Empire and continued their evangelical activities inside the Mughal family.

In 1633, it was an excellent victory for Christian missionaries that, through a decree of Shah Jahan, 777 bighas of free land were donated to the Portuguese.¹⁸ This land is considered personal land for their churches. According to a Christian priest, this

¹⁵ Jubaer Ahmad, *Bangladesh Christian Missionarider Opatotprota o Amader Koronio* [The Misconduct of Christian Missionaries in Bangladesh and Our Duties] (2018), 11.

¹⁶ Reva Philip Majumdar, *Itihash kotha bole* [History Speaks], 20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

declaration was a kind of miracle of Christianity. The reason they gave this land to them was because they thought Christians would not revolt against the Mughals. On the other hand, the power of the Mughals is increasing in Bengal. Moreover, declares that Muslim royals should not impose any obstacle to practicing Christianity.¹⁹

Four European trading powers entered the Subcontinent during the early sixteenth century—the Dutch, French, Danish, and English. The British East India Company emerged as the dominant force, surpassing its competitors through strategic expansion and political influence. The Company played a pivotal role in the Subcontinent's history, eventually overshadowing other European groups and local leaders, including the Mughal Empire.²⁰

Dr Tapan De Rozario states that around 1670, a Bengali individual named Dom Antonio converted to Christianity. His influence led approximately 20,000 others to also convert to Christianity. Today, the descendants of those converted by Dom Antonio make up a sizable portion of the Catholic communities in the Dhaka and Pabna districts of Bangladesh. By 1673, these two districts had a combined Catholic population exceeding 30,000 people.²¹

In 1682, Catholics established a strong presence in Bangladesh, aiming to increase their numbers and spread Christianity. They built educational institutions and hospitals, preached the Gospel, and promoted Christian values. The Church of St. Nicholas of Tolentino, built in 1695 by the Portuguese at Nagori, northeast of Dhaka, remains a testament to their efforts. Portuguese missionaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries used Bengali to print and translate the Gospel. Jesuit preceptors played a crucial role in publishing books and journals to evangelize the indigenous people of Bengal. Fr. Antonio Claudius contributed by learning Bengali and writing

¹⁹ S.A.M Ziaul Islam, "Christianization and Christianity in Bangladesh: Historical Perspectives," *Journal of Arts and Humanities* (2016): 3.

²⁰ The advent of Europeans in India, August 8, 2023, < <https://vajiramandravi.com/quest-upsc-notes/advent-of-europeans-in-india/>> (accessed May 27 2024); The Coming of Europeans [UPSC Modern History Notes, < <https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/the-coming-of-europeans-upsc-modern-history-notes/>> (accessed May 27 2024); James Hancock, *The English and Dutch East India Companies' Invasions of India*, published on July 28 2022, <<https://www.worldhistory.org/article/2048/the-english-and-dutch-east-india-companies-invasio/>>, (accessed May 27 2024).

²¹ Tapan De Rozario, "Christian Mission and Evangelization in Bangladesh," *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology* 8, no. 1 (2011): 80.

Christian theological booklets in the early 1700s, significantly contributing to Bengali literature.²²

Later in the pre-colonial period, the Portuguese significantly spread Christianity and established churches in various parts of Bengal, now Bangladesh. Meanwhile, the East India Company was expanding its power through regional trade. In 1757, the Company gained control over Bengal after the Battle of Plassey, where they defeated Nawab Sirajuddaula.²³ This marked the beginning of the colonial period in Bengal. With the Company in power, Christian missionaries found a safe environment for evangelism and converting non-Christians. After the Portuguese era, Protestant missionaries also arrived in Bengal. Rev. John Zachariah Kiernander, the first Protestant priest, came in 1740 and established the Old Church or Mission Church in 1770.

Later, John Thomas, the first Baptist in Bengal, arrived in 1783. The Baptist Missionary Society was established in 1792 with the help of Protestant missionary ambassadors. With the advent of British (Protestant) power in Bengal, Roman Catholic evangelism declined and organized Protestant missionary societies such as the Baptist Missionary Society, the London Missionary Society, and the Church Missionary Society dominated evangelization efforts. These societies were instrumental in spreading Christianity throughout Bengal.²⁴

With the rise of British power, Bengal became the primary Centre for Protestant Christian missionary activities. Initially, the British East India Company opposed their organized work. However, after the arrival of William Carey in Bengal in 1800, the first organized missionary efforts began under his leadership. Carey established the first Baptist mission in Srirampur that year with his associates Joshua Marshman and William Ward. The London Missionary Society had already begun work in Chinsurah in 1798 under Nathaniel Forsyth, while the Church Missionary Society entered India

²² S.A.M Ziaul Islam, "Christianization and Christianity in Bangladesh: Historical Perspectives," *Journal of Arts and Humanities* (2016): 4.

²³ Mark Cartwright, "Battle of Plassey," *World History Encyclopedia*, November 18, 2022, <<https://www.worldhistory.org/article/2107/battle-of-plassey/>> (accessed 27 May, 2024).

²⁴ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "William Carey," by The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Carey>> (accessed 20 February, 2023); Jubaer Ahmad, *Bangladesh Christian Missionarider Opototprota O Amader Koronio [The Misconduct of Christian Missionaries in Bangladesh and Our Duties]*, 12.

after the Company's Charter of 1813 lifted restrictions on missionary ventures. Their first missionary, Greenwood, arrived in Calcutta in 1816.²⁵

According to Jubair Ahmad (2022), Protestant missionary activities in Bengal can be divided into three periods: 1793–1834 (Carey era), 1834–1857 (Duff era), and from 1857 to the end of the century. During Carey's period, they focused on advancing native languages, literature, and education, establishing vernacular schools in rural areas. By 1818, they had set up 103 primary schools with 6,703 students, teaching subjects like arithmetic, science, history, geography, natural philosophy, theology, and ethics in the local language. Missionaries also used publications such as *Digdarshan*, *Samachar Dorpan* (1818), *Gospel Magazine* (1819), *Christer Rajyo Briddhi* (1822), and others to disseminate Christian teachings and narratives, contributing to their missionary efforts in Bengal.²⁶

During the colonial period in Bengal, figures like William Ward promoted Christian missionary work among Bengali women from 1820 onward. Mary Ann Cooke, backed by the Christian Missionary Society, established fifteen ladies' schools with 300 pupils in Calcutta by 1823, advancing female education. Baptist missionaries founded similar boarding schools across Bengal from 1823 to 1833. Meanwhile, Catholic missions led by figures like Fr. Marietti converted underprivileged Bengali women of ethnic groups such as the Santal.²⁷

Christian conversion surged in East Pakistan due to reduced governmental obstacles and increased NGO activities. Organizations like World Vision (1950), American Southern Baptist Mission (1957), and Caritas (1967) played crucial roles in regions like Barisal, Jashore, and Khulna, collaborating with lower-caste Hindus and tribal populations to establish educational and healthcare facilities. Despite a 234% increase in the Christian population since the colonial era, estimates suggest 357,000 people in Bangladesh converted to Christianity between 1974 and 2001, with

²⁵ Ibid., 13.

²⁶ Ibid., 13-14.

²⁷ S.A.M Ziaul Islam, "Christianization and Christianity in Bangladesh: Historical Perspectives," *Journal of Arts and Humanities* (2016): 5-6.

projections indicating continued growth despite potential exaggerations in Christian sources.²⁸

Following Bangladesh's independence, Christianity's growth has emerged as a significant phenomenon, shaping the nation's religious landscape. This period marks a dynamic chapter in Bangladesh's history, characterized by the expansion of Christian communities and the evolution of their social and cultural influence. Exploring the factors driving this growth provides valuable insights into the interplay of religion, identity, and social change in post-independence Bangladesh.

After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, we can understand how fast-spreading Christianity all over the country from the speech of the Bishop of Sylhet was. He shared in a video that in 1950, there were 700 Catholics in Sylhet, but when the Diocese started in 2011 in Sylhet, after this, there were 18000 only Catholics in Sylhet. Further, he shares that there is a strong possibility of evangelization in this area because he mentions 200 tea plantations there. There are 700 thousand Hindu workers, some of them open to Christianity. According to him, there are about 250 adult baptisms every year.²⁹ Based on the bishop's speech, the Diocese was built in 2011, and he shared this video on October 24, 2017, which means that within 6 years the how fast they converted poor Hindu workers to Christianity. He did not mention anything about Muslim conversion in this video.

On the other hand, conversions from the Muslim community are also going on tremendously. According to a report by the Christian Posted on Wednesday, July 20, 2016, citing the human rights organization Christian Freedom International, approximately 91,000 Muslims in Bangladesh have reportedly converted to Christianity in the past six years. In the same report, Faruk al-Ahmed, a Christian convert from Islam who has been preaching since the mid-1990s, personally attested to the rise of Christianity in his community in Northern Bangladesh during an interview with the British news site Express. He says, "When I began my ministry in Kurigram, there was only one traditional Christian family and one Muslim background family," the pastor explained. "Almost 1,500 believers from Muslim backgrounds are glorifying God in

²⁸ Ibid., 6-8.

²⁹ Bishop Bejoy N. D'Cruze, "BANGLADESH: Bishop Bejoy's Thank You and Appeal for Support," Catholic Radio TV Net, October 24, 2011, video.

this area."³⁰ Thus, we can identify how Christianity is fast growing in post-independence Bangladesh.

2.3 CHRISTIAN MISSION IN KHULNA

The Christian mission in Khulna, Bangladesh, stands as a testament to the enduring commitment of believers to spread their faith in diverse cultural contexts. Khulna, a major city in southwestern Bangladesh, has been a focal point for Christian missionary activities, witnessing the establishment of churches, educational institutions, and social service organizations. This introduction offers a glimpse into the rich history and ongoing efforts of Christian missions in Khulna, reflecting the region's broader narrative of religious outreach and community engagement.

However, there are eight administrative divisions of Catholic missionaries in Bangladesh; Khulna is one of them. In 2022, it had a population of more than 17 million.³¹ Two major religious groups live there: 82.87% are Muslims, 16.45% are Hindus, and others are 0.68%.³² Christianity, which first came to Khulna in 1599, is now the fastest-growing religion in the region.³³ Foreign missionaries from Milan began their apostolic work in this region in 1855. According to history, Father Antonio Mariette reached Jashore (a district under the Khulna Division) in 1856 to preach Christianity. Later, from 1927 to 1952, the Salesian missionaries worked in this territory.³⁴

There are mainly two Christian denominations in Khulna Division: Catholics and Protestants. Both are active in doing missionary and social development work in this area. Therefore, the focus of this section was based on these two denominations,

³⁰ Samuel Smith, "Thousands of Muslims Converting to Christianity in Bangladesh Despite Rising Persecution," The Christian Post, July 20, 2016, <<https://www.christianpost.com/news/thousands-of-muslims-converting-christianity-bangladesh-despite-rising-persecution.html>> (accessed 11 July, 2024).

³¹ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, "Population & Housing Census Preliminary Report 2022," 6.

³² Banglapedia, "Khulna Division," in National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh, <https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Khulna_Division> (accessed July 9, 2023).

³³ Encyclopaedia, Bangladesh, The Catholic Church In, accessed July 10 2023, <<https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/bangladesh-catholic-church>>

³⁴ "Diocese of Khulna," Union of Catholic Asian News, <https://www.ucanews.com/directory/dioceses/bangladesh-khulna/7> (accessed June 21, 2023).

respectively, highlighting their arrival to the Khulna region and the main missionary activities.

2.3.1 Catholic Denomination in Khulna

The Catholic denomination in Khulna represents a vibrant community within the region's religious landscape. Despite being a minority faith in this predominantly Muslim country, the Catholic community in Khulna has established a notable religious and social presence. In this part of the research, there are some leading Catholic NGOs, and their main activities have been discussed.

Some important figures of Christian missionaries who worked in Khulna from the early times to the present contributed significantly to the spread of Christianity in Khulna. The first missionaries who came here to preach Christianity were **Jesuits**.³⁵ The Belgian Jesuits, associated with the Calcutta Archdiocese, engaged in missionary work among the Rishi people residing in the Satkhira-Baradal region from 1900 to 1952. In the early phase, from 1900 to 1930, they endeavoured to convert the Rishi population.³⁶

PIME missionaries worked in Jashore Simulia from 1856 to 1927, and they were the pioneers who converted the vast Rishi community to Christianity. In 1856, a year after arriving at the Central Bengal Mission, Fr. Antonio Marietti began his work in Jashore.³⁷ In addition, by 1886, Fr. Rigamonti (PIME missionary) had converted the whole village of Simulia and had visited up to fifteen other Rishi villages.³⁸

The Xavierians who came to work there. This missionary was established in 1895 in Italy, and they arrived in Jashore in 1952. The Pope granted Jashore the status of a diocese in 1952, and Monsignor Dante Batalia Leon was appointed as the diocese

³⁵ The Jesuits, a religious order of regular clerics in the Catholic Church, were founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola and his six companions with the blessing of Pope Paul III. They are headquartered in Rome. Operating in 112 countries, they dedicate themselves to apostolic service and evangelism. Engaged in academic, research, and artistic pursuits, Jesuits also lead retreats, minister in parishes and hospitals, support social and humanitarian causes, and foster ecumenical dialogue.

³⁶ Cosimo Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh: A History of Christian Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 2014), 135-136.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

administrator. Over the next few years, many Xaverian missionary groups came to Jashore and Khulna to preach Christianity. The Diocese remained in Jashore for only four years before it was shifted to the big city of Khulna in 1956. On February 25, 1953, a meeting was held where Monsignor Dante Batalia Leon took various initiatives to strengthen the Christian foundation in this region, such as renovating the Bishop's House, building homes for the Christian sisters, establishing schools, sending students to the capital city of Dhaka for higher education, and other developmental initiatives.³⁹ Xaverian missionaries included the Rishi Christian communities of Simulia and Satkhira/Baradal. This move brought the dispersed Rishi groups to the Centre of missionary attention, facilitating more significant interaction.⁴⁰

A famous Xaverian missionary priest, Father Marino Rigon, lived in Bangladesh as a missionary for sixty years to preach the Gospel. He built many Khulna schools, hospitals, clinics, and training centres. In 2009, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina granted the father honorary citizenship of Bangladesh. Moreover, in 2012, he received the Liberation War Friendship Award for his persistent efforts throughout the Liberation War of Bangladesh.⁴¹

The Salesian Missionaries worked in Khulna Division from 1927 to 1952.⁴² they worked among Rishi in the Khulna Division⁴³ In that time, they ran numerous schools, technical institutes, and vocational training centres throughout Khulna and all over the country, providing education and skills training to thousands of young people each year. They also operated orphanages, rehabilitation centres, and emergency relief programs to support those in need. One of the Salesian's flagship projects in Bangladesh is Don Bosco Technical School in Dhaka. The Salesians in Bangladesh are also involved in building water wells, providing healthcare services, and promoting environmental conservation. Through their work in Bangladesh, they significantly impacted the most

³⁹ Joseph Rana Mandal, *Rar Samatate Christo Dharma* [Christianity in the Rar Region] (Khulna: Saqib Offset Press, 2011), 193-199.

⁴⁰ Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, 185-187.

⁴¹ Dhaka Tribune, Biopic on Italian missionary priest who was honoured as 'freedom fighter' to begin filming <<https://www.dhakatribune.com/showtime/222747/biopic-on-italian-missionary-priest-who-was>> (accessed 12 October, 2023).

⁴² Catholic Bishop Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB), History Of Khulna Diocese, <<https://cpcbsec.org/diocese/Khulna/History>> (accessed June 9, 2023).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 125.

vulnerable populations.⁴⁴ They were on the front line of converting Rishi, a group of Hindus, to mass conversion in different parts of the Khulna Division.⁴⁵

The most active Catholic missionary NGO in recent times is Caritas Bangladesh. Caritas was founded in 1967 as an eastern branch of Pakistan, but after the cyclone of November 1970, it was reorganized and became known as the "Christian Organization for Relief and Rehabilitation" (CORR). After that, Caritas was reintroduced by this name again in 1967. Caritas Bangladesh is a major Catholic NGO that works for social development in the Khulna division and all over the country. This NGO has its headquarters in Dhaka and has eight other diocesan offices. It works in social and human resource development. At the national and diocesan levels, its programs are carried out by approximately 6,000 employees and volunteers. Over 80 ongoing programs are being carried out by Caritas Bangladesh around 4 primary priorities:

1. Education, formation and capacity building: pre-primary and elementary schools, training facilities, and regional technical institutions.
2. Social justice and human rights: programs for community development, microfinance, aiding at-risk youngsters, and justice and peace.
3. Health and care: aiding expectant and new mothers, their children, those who are ill with leprosy and tuberculosis, the elderly and people with disabilities, and people who struggle with addiction.
4. Sustainable livelihood and disaster management: striving to enhance horticulture and the management of natural resources, combat climate change via adaptation and risk reduction, and end extreme poverty.

They receive funds for activities from various countries, especially from Western countries.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ "About Don Bosco," Don Bosco School Bangladesh, <<https://donboscoschoolbd.com/about-don-bosco/>> (accessed 13 June, 2024).

⁴⁵ Cosimo Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh: A History of Christian Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 2014).

⁴⁶ Caritas Asia, Caritas Bangladesh, <<https://caritas.asia/index.php/where-we-are/south-asia-sub-region/caritas-bangladesh>> (accessed 16 January, 2023).

Banchte Shekha is a local NGO that works for women and children in the southern part of Bangladesh. The headquarters of Banchte Shekha are in Jashore. Dr Angela Gomes founded this NGO in 1976 with a few uneducated ladies. She begins empowering women to rescue and release the most vulnerable women from all sorts of domestic and societal violence. Her ultimate purpose was women's economic empowerment and equal dignity in the family and society so that women could live with equal dignity and access to all social rights. One of the leading organizations for developing women and children is Banchte Shekha. Its women-focused programming strategy emphasizes marginalized women to create balance and harmony between men and women in the local communities. There are four strategies to follow for this NGO:

1. To combat all social injustice and inequalities, particularly for women, children, socially disadvantaged and excluded people.
2. To improve access to and quality of essential services for the poor women, children and community people.
3. To improve food security and livelihoods through skills development, capacity building and income generation.
4. To adapt to climate change vulnerability and to mitigate disaster risk.

According to the Banchte Shekha website, since it was founded in 1976, it has assisted more than 500,000 women in the Khulna and Dhaka Divisions. Indirectly, its projects have impacted more than 2.5 million people.⁴⁷

Rural Reconstruction Foundation (RRF) is a Catholic Christian missionary NGO established in 1982 in Jhikargacha (a subdistrict of Jashore). This NGO was established by Philip Bisshash and Ms Pinku Rita Bisshash to help deprived people. They provide social development and humanitarian activities in Khulna. In detail, they provide microfinance programs, education activities, sponsorship programs, emergency relief programs, school feeding projects, healthcare programs, water and sanitation

⁴⁷ “Message from Founder Executive Director,” Banchte Shekha, <<https://banchteshekha.org>> accessed 18 April, 2023).

programs, legal aid, training and resource centres, computer education centres, training activities, shelter reconstruction, and others.⁴⁸

Community Development Society (CDS) is another Catholic Christian NGO started in 1996 by some people of Shimulia Dharmapally in Jhikargacha and promoted by Salesians to do educational activities. Mr. Joseph Biswas of Shimulia Village managed the organization from its inception. At present, the organization is working at the grassroots level for the quality of life and economic development of the rural population, handicrafts, Human rights and economic empowerment of women, pre-school preparatory education, tailoring training, interest-free home loans, medical assistance to patients and microcredit activities. However, many other Catholic-based missionary NGOs are working in the Khulna Division, some of which are mentioned here.

2.3.2 Protestant Denomination

The Protestant denomination is a branch of Christianity encompassing various groups with distinct beliefs and practices. Fundamental denominations within Protestantism include Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, and others.⁴⁹ In Khulna, the Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship (BBCF) is a critical Protestant organization that serves the Christian community. This NGO was established in 1994 as the development arm of Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship. Baptist Aid-BBCF is a registered NGO in Bangladesh (registration number 818) under the Foreign Donation (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act of 1978.⁵⁰

Baptist Aid-BBCF focuses on child development, poverty alleviation, and community well-being. It works for the welfare of all, especially children and women, motivated by Christian values. Its activities include emergency relief, education, healthcare, economic development, human rights promotion, and environmental

⁴⁸ Joseph Rana Mandal, *Rar Shomotote Christo Dhormo* [Christianity in the Rar Region] (2011), 356-357.

⁴⁹ R. H. Bainton, Martin E. Marty, James C. Spalding, E. Clifford Nelson, and W. Owen Chadwick, "Protestantism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Protestantism>> accessed 5 May, 2024).

⁵⁰ "Organization Background," Baptist Aid-BBCF, <<https://baid-bbcf.org/organization-background/>> accessed 30 May, 2024).

protection. The Child-Friendly Community Development Project aims to educate underprivileged children and establish their rights. Baptist Aid-BBCF believes in holistic community development by addressing the needs of children and the socioeconomic situation of low-income families.⁵¹

Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha is Bangladesh's oldest and biggest Protestant denomination, particularly in Khulna. Its roots can be found in the work that Dr. William Carey began in 1796. Later, Australian and New Zealand Baptist Missionary Societies started serving in East Bengal (now Bangladesh). The BBCS participates in the university, college, and high school student housing program. It is providing opportunities for disadvantaged people to pursue their higher education. The BBCS supports numerous initiatives in the field of healthcare. The Sangha operates 64 primary schools, a junior high school, and three high schools for boys and girls.⁵²

Church of Bangladesh is a united church of Anglican, Baptist, and Methodist traditions. During the British Empire's dominance over the Indian Subcontinent, the Anglican Church, or Protestant Church, began in Bengal. The Anglican Church in Pakistan is called the "Church of Pakistan,". After nine months of a deadly and protracted liberation war, Bangladesh became independent in 1971. The East Bengal Church's name was automatically changed to "Church of Bangladesh." The Church of Bangladesh operates community development programs, including vocational training centres, schools, health clinics, and emergency relief programs, to support impoverished and vulnerable communities in the Khulna region. The Church of Bangladesh now has three dioceses: the Dhaka Diocese, Kushtia Diocese, and the Dhaka Diocese.⁵³

Besides that, in 1965, the Church of Pakistan was created under the Church Union plan of North India and Pakistan. The Anglican Church, United Church, United Methodist, and Lutheran Church in Pakistan merged to form this new united Church. Before 1951, the Anglican Church in East Pakistan was part of the Diocese of Calcutta. After 1952, Dhaka became a Diocese of the Church of North India, Pakistan, Burma

⁵¹ "Introduction about Baptist Aid-BBCF," Baptist Aid-BBCF, <<https://baid-bbcf.org>> (accessed 24 May, 2024).

⁵² Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha (BBCS) "About Us," <https://www.bbcs.org.bd/about-us.html> accessed 16 January, 2023).

⁵³ Church of Bangladesh, "About," <https://churchofbangladesh.org/about/>. (accessed May 24 2024).

and Ceylon, with Rev. James D. Blair consecrated as the first Bishop of Dhaka Diocese.⁵⁴

World Vision Bangladesh is a leading protestant evangelical missionary NGO working in Bangladesh, particularly in Khulna. This prominent Christian NGO works in 28 districts and 71 sub-districts in Bangladesh. Right now, World Vision is serving around 5 million children in Bangladesh. When Bangladesh was hit by the disastrous tidal waves of Cyclone Bhola in 1970, World Vision first got involved by helping the victims. Later, in 1971, the organization conducted relief efforts in refugee camps in India.⁵⁵ This NGO serves around 5 million children with health, nutrition, wash, education, livelihood, child protection, sponsorship, and community engagement in 28 administrative districts with 55 area programs, 25 private non-sponsorship, and 36 grant-funded projects. This organization aims to achieve sustainable well-being and build a brighter future for 5 million vulnerable children in Bangladesh by tackling causes and addressing the effects of poverty, inequalities, and injustices.⁵⁶ Beautiful, vital strategies of the work Vision Bangladesh are:

1. To work for street children and child workers.
2. Improving maternal and child health and nutrition.
3. Protection of children and speedy confirmation.
4. Building people's resilience.
5. Community engagement and sponsorship management.

World Vision ensures local partnerships through area development programs and plays a supportive role in helping parents, families, and communities fulfil their responsibilities towards children.⁵⁷ They support and sponsor youth and child forums

⁵⁴ Church of Bangladesh, "Foundation," <https://churchofbangladesh.org/about/foundation/>. (accessed May 20 2024).

⁵⁵ World Vision International, "World Vision Bangladesh's Impact," <https://www.wvi.org/publications/brochure/bangladesh/world-vision-bangladeshs-impact>. accessed 10 May, 2023.

⁵⁶ World Vision, Annual report 2022, <<https://www.wvi.org/bangladesh>> (accessed 10 May, 2023).

⁵⁷ World Vision Bangladesh, <http://ngosmymensingh.com/?page_id=3002> (accessed 10 May, 2023).

in Khulna. For example, the child forum and youth forum of Khulna.⁵⁸ How youths motivate and engage with this evangelical Christian missionary is very important, as it tremendously impacts youth norms and values. Because they are working with them, many of them (boys and girls) are Muslims. Long-term impact: they may not tolerate Islamic ideology and values because these youths are working and getting ideologies from such missionaries who are opposed to Islam and its values. Moreover, this will affect their future generation, which many Muslim scholars are warning about.

The Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) was founded in 1973 as the successor to the Bangladesh Ecumenical Relief and Rehabilitation Services (BERRS), established by the World Council of Churches (WCC) for post-war relief. Operating under the National Council of Churches of Bangladesh (NCCB) and governed by an inter-faith body, CCDB focuses on development rather than evangelism, providing services irrespective of caste, creed, race, or religion. Over the decades, its work has developed from relief and rehabilitation to community and human resource development and sustainable, people-centred initiatives. CCDB aims to empower the poorest, support women's initiatives, maintain gender equity, and aid disaster victims through education, health, food security, income generation, and disaster preparedness programs. It operates in 22 districts, serving 136,595 families, with support from diverse international donors.⁵⁹

Liebenzell Mission International is a non-denominational international missionary organization with 230 missionaries serving in 26 nations worldwide. This NGO has been active in Bangladesh since 1974, cooperating with various local partner organizations.⁶⁰ They build churches, offer training aid, and assist individuals in becoming self-sufficient.⁶¹ They also engaged in pastoral ministry, education,

⁵⁸ Shishu Forum Khulna (Children's Forum Khulna) <https://www.facebook.com/childforum.khulna?comment_id=Y29tbWVudDo2ODgwMTkwNTc5NjA3MTdfNjg4MTk0Mjc2NTI5> (accessed 10 May, 2023).

⁵⁹ Banglapedia, Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh, https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Christian_Commission_for_Development_in_Bangladesh (accessed May 28 2024); CCDB Website, <<https://ccdbbd.org/www/introduction/>> (accessed May 28 2024).

⁶⁰ Liebenzell Mission International –Bangladesh (LMI BD), < <https://www.lmi-bangladesh.org/lmi-bangladesh/>>, (accessed 30 May 2024).

⁶¹ LIM Bangladesh, Liebenzell Mission International, accessed 8/6/2023. https://www.lmi-bangladesh.org/?page_id=53

evangelism, pastoral training, media outreach, medical care, and community development. This NGO runs the Baptist Children's Village Khulna.⁶²

Bangladesh Assemblies of God is an evangelical missionary NGO that started unofficially in 1895. They officially launched their missionary activities in 1933 by forming a team with Rev. Abdul Wadud Munshi from Faridpur to provide treatment and operate small churches in this region. In 1939, they bought their first property of 12 acres of land at Pagladaha, Jashore. They have a sub-NGO called "Ashirbad". Currently, they plan to build one Church every three weeks.⁶³ This protestant missionary is very active in evangelizing and converting people to Christianity all over Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Lutheran Church Mission (BLCM), Pastor Monotosh Banarjee established this Church in 2016 and works in various parts of the Khulna Division.⁶⁴ They help poor people, for example, by giving them bicycles and motorbikes. This missionary is a very evangelical missionary who preaches Christianity in Bangladesh, especially in Khulna. Following their Facebook page, it is evident that many people are converting to Christianity through their efforts. Their primary mission is to preach Christianity.⁶⁵ This NGO experienced significant growth, now consisting of 14 congregations and 6 schools spread across 8 districts in Bangladesh. Most of its 1,400 believers are converts from Hinduism. Pastor Banarjee, as the leader, spends most of his time travelling to visit the various BLCM congregations and provides them with preaching and the administration of the sacraments. Recently, he has gathered elders and schoolteachers from different districts to provide them with Bible training. Having translated many online theological courses he completed, Pastor Banarjee is using these lessons to train more faithful preachers and teachers to spread God's word across the BLCM congregations and schools.⁶⁶

⁶² SHED, Baptist Children's Village Khulna, accessed 10/5/2023. <http://www.shedboard.org.bd/baptist-childrens-village-khulna.html>

⁶³ Bangladesh Assemblies of God, http://www.bangladeshag.com/?page_id=17, (accessed January 17, 2023).

⁶⁴ Lutheran Mission Bangladesh, < <https://lutheranmissions.org/nation/bangladesh/>> (accessed 30 May, 2024).

⁶⁵ Bangladesh Lutheran Church Mission (BLCM), < <https://www.facebook.com/TheBLCM/>> (accessed 17 January 2023).

⁶⁶ Lutheran Mission Bangladesh, < <https://lutheranmissions.org/nation/bangladesh/>> (accessed 30 May, 2024).

The Salvation Army (TSA) is a protestant missionary NGO with its global charitable organization's headquarters in London. The organization claims to have approximately 1.7 million members worldwide. They provide help to the hungry, impoverished, and homeless people. It is present in 133 nations, runs charity shops, homeless shelters, and disaster relief centres, and provides humanitarian aid to poor nations. In Bangladesh, their activities are limited to Dhaka and Jashore City. They have various programs in Jashore, like a daycare centre, a polli Shasta candro (village health centre), education for older people, a primary school, a clinic, and others.⁶⁷

Inspired by Christian principles, the YWCA of Bangladesh began to work in Dhaka in 1961 to empower women, young women, girls, and children, irrespective of background, through collective action affirming women's universal human rights. An affiliate of the World YWCA since 1979, it is part of a global network driving social and economic change across 120+ countries. With around 2,500 members and 700 staff across 13 branches in 12 districts, YWCA Bangladesh implements community development programs benefiting 90,000+ people. Its motto, "By Love Serve One Another," reflects its vision of a dignified, inclusive society. Its mission centres on fostering peace, justice, education, health, sustainable livelihoods, and environment through women and youth leadership. Core values include gender equality, diversity, volunteerism, transparency, integrity, and belief in God.⁶⁸ In addition, it is implementing a project titled "Improving the sexual and reproductive health and resilience of young people, in particular of vulnerable young women, in four districts of Bangladesh" in partnership with Y Care International and funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) from January 2016 to December 2018. The project aims to support 3350 young women and 1600 young men, aged 15-24, in Barisal, Pabna, Comilla, and Jashore districts by promoting positive choices about their sexual and reproductive health, empowering women to delay first pregnancies and space births through income-generating activities, rights awareness, gender equality promotion, and training health providers to improve services for young people, especially vulnerable young women.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Reva Filip Majumdar, *Itihash kotha bole*. 307.

⁶⁸ YWCA, <<https://ywcabd.org/about/>> (accessed 29 May, 2024)

⁶⁹ YWCA, Employment Opportunities with YWCA of Bangladesh, <<https://hotjobs.bdjobs.com/jobs/ywca/ywca4.htm>>, (accessed 29 May, 2024).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is an Adventist Protestant Christian sect that stands out for its observance of the Sabbath on Saturday, which is the seventh day of the week according to both the Christian (Gregorian) and the Hebrew calendars, its emphasis on the impending Second Coming (advent) of Jesus Christ, and its annihilationist soteriology. The denomination was formally founded in 1863 and developed from the Millerite movement in the United States in the middle of the 19th century. This NGO has another name, which is the Bangladesh Adventist Union Mission. This Christian missionary NGO was established in 1906 in Bangladesh, and since then, they have been working in various parts of this country, especially in Khulna.⁷⁰ It is a very active evangelical protestant NGO that converts several people, especially from Santals (one group of tribal people in Bangladesh). They have converted a large population to Christianity. Their activities include education, providing humanitarian assistance, social development work, campaigns about social problems, evangelization, and conversion.⁷¹ Their strategies are to provide education and make them highly educated, like doctors, engineers, and others. They made them rich and created a competency with the majority community that can be understood from an interview taken by Mufti Zubair, a leading preacher of Islam in Bangladesh, in 2015.⁷²

Love Without Borders Church is an evangelical missionary who is actively converting people to Christianity, not only from a non-Muslim background; instead, they have a mission into the Muslim community as well. Their headquarters are in Sahapara village of Keshabpur police station in Jashore District of Bangladesh. From there, the Love Without Borders Church is conducting its activities in different districts of Bangladesh. They provide health care, housing, food, clothing, a Sunday school camp, relief activities, and gospel preaching.⁷³ This NGO is very active in providing their activities in the Satkhira district.

Christ Soldier Youth Fellowship is an evangelical NGO established in 2000 and is very active in evangelical activities in Khulna. They primarily work for youth,

⁷⁰ BAUM <<https://www.adventist.org.bd/about/>> (accessed 10 June 2023).

⁷¹ <https://www.facebook.com/SDAChurchBangladeshHeadquarters/>

⁷² Jubaer Ahmad, "Bangladesh Christian missionarider opotoprota o amader koronio." (2018). pp 83-89

⁷³ LWB Helping In Bangladesh, <<https://www.lovewithoutborders.ngo/lwb-helping-in-bangladesh/>> (accessed 15/4/2023).

children, and women. They have made various groups for youth, women, and children to study the Bible. They convert many the population to Christianity from Hindu backgrounds. They plant churches in various parts of Khulna division.⁷⁴

Peace Church Bangladesh is a Presbyterian denomination in Bangladesh. The organization was established in 2009. There are currently 13 cell churches and 2 preaching fields in this country. The Muslim group owns one field, while the Hindu community owns the other. The Westminster Confession and the Apostles Creed are acknowledged. Members of the World Reformed Fellowship include Peace Church. This missionary has another group named Win Bangladesh, which works similarly and in complementary ways.⁷⁵

Isa-e Church Bangladesh is a very active evangelical protestant Christian missionary founded by Abdul Mabud Chowdhury, who converted to Christianity in 1985. Bangladesh is a majority Muslim country where there was a barrier to converting Muslims to Christianity. Hence, Abdul Mabud tried to overcome this barrier and spread the message of Christianity through various conspiracies and by creating doubts about Islam. He was successful in enabling various church planting activities consequently, which is more acceptable to Muslims, especially uneducated ordinary Muslims.⁷⁶

Australian Baptists missionary: In 1882, the first Australian Baptists, Ellen Arnold and Marie Gilbert, were sent out to serve among the predominantly Hindu Bengali communities of East Bengal (now Bangladesh). The following decades saw Australian Baptist intercultural workers establish a hospital, several dispensaries, pastoral training programs, and community development work, now entirely run by Bangladeshi nationals. 2019 marked the significant centenary of establishing the Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship, where there are now over 500 faith

⁷⁴ Christ Soldier Youth Fellowship, <<https://www.facebook.com/people/Christ-soldier-youth-fellowship/100064799286540>> (accessed 15/4/2023).

⁷⁵ Win Bangladesh, <<https://www.facebook.com/WinBangladesh.Org>> Facebook Page, (accessed April 20 2023).

⁷⁶ Isa-e Church Bangladesh, Background Of ICB, <<https://www.isaechurchbd.org>> (accessed 11 April, 2023).

communities. We continue to partner with them through training and providing some financial support.⁷⁷

Church of Bangladesh is a joint missionary NGO. Under the church union plan of North India and Pakistan of 1965, the Church of Pakistan was created on November 1, 1971. The Anglican Church, United Church, United Methodist, and Lutheran Church in Pakistan combined to form the Church of Pakistan by the plan. Finally, after the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, the Church of Bangladesh came into existence as the outcome of the separation from Pakistan on April 30, 1974.⁷⁸ They provide vital activities such as education, medical facilities (they have 3 hospitals), theological training for women and youth fellowship, publications, and bible school. Since its inception, The Church of Bangladesh has prioritized rural poor children with little access to public or private educational facilities by adopting an education program. With 9,864 students and 310 employees, the Church of Bangladesh's education program currently operates 35 elementary schools, 3 junior high schools, and 6 high schools across 7 deaneries and 1 city pastorate.⁷⁹ This is one of the most prominent protestant missionary NGOs working in three primary divisions of Bangladesh: Dhaka, Kushtia, and Barisal.

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). In 1971, when the country was devastated by a nine-month-long war, the Seventh-Day Adventist World Service (SAWS) started a voluntary non-governmental organization to operate in Bangladesh. It took initial activities on relief and rehabilitation by rebuilding villages, roads and bridges. Later, this name was changed by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) to respond to every significant disaster relief activity in 1984. Moreover, in 1988, the operational direction focused on humanitarian development projects. It is registered as a prominent NGO by the NGO Affairs Bureau of the government of Bangladesh.⁸⁰ This NGO is one of the leading ones working in Khulna.

⁷⁷ <https://www.baptistmissionaustralia.org/Serve/People-Groups/Ongoing-Relationships/Bangladesh> (accessed 11 April, 2023).

⁷⁸ Church of Bangladesh, <<https://churchofbangladesh.org/about/foundation/>> (accessed 30, July, 2023).

⁷⁹ Church of Bangladesh <<https://churchofbangladesh.org/ministry/education/>> (accessed 15 June, 2023)

⁸⁰ Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA <<https://www.adrabangladesh.org/our-history>> (accessed 15 June, 2023)

Dipshikha Bangladesh: This is a well-known NGO established in 1978. Their head office is in Mirpur 1, Dhaka. They work for socioeconomic development among poor people in the country. This NGO provides agriculture and farming training, education and cultural awareness, health facilities, human skill development training, women empowerment, human rights and good governance, emergency relief and rehabilitation activities, and monitoring and reporting.⁸¹ Mufti Zubair Ahmad, a well-known preacher familiar with Christian missionary NGO works, mentions that Dipshikha does evangelical activities under their social development work. This work aims to convert people in Bangladesh to Christianity.⁸² Similarly Md. Saidul Islam mentions that this is identified by the government NGO Bureau as engaged directly in converting people to Christianity.⁸³

Heed Bangladesh: This NGO is one of the most significant development organizations in this country, and they have many employees. This organization was established in 1974. Presently, they work in 32 districts of Bangladesh.⁸⁴ Heed Bangladesh provides its activities in three major areas: education, health, and economic development.⁸⁵ This NGO was identified by the government NGO Bureau as engaged directly in converting people to Christianity.⁸⁶

Christian Service Society (CSS). This is a humanitarian and socioeconomic development organization working in Bangladesh since 1972, soon after the liberation war, which claimed 3 million lives and severely damaged the nation's infrastructure. A Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), CSS works in a variety of fields, including disaster relief, primary and secondary health care, formal and non-formal education, technical and vocational education, microenterprise development, women's empowerment, gender equality, water and sanitation, childcare homes and orphanages, child labour and trafficking, HIV/AIDS, and more. The organization's overarching goal

⁸¹ Netz Kraft Movement, <<https://www.netzkraft.net/profil.php?teilnehmer=2111&lg=en>> (accessed 15 June, 2023).

⁸² Jubaer Ahmad, "Bangladesh Christian missionary rider opototprota o amader koronio." (2018). 31.

⁸³ Saidul Islam, "The Creeping March of Christianity: The Widespread Evangelization in Bangladesh." (2004).

⁸⁴ Heed Bangladesh, <<https://heed-bangladesh.com>> (accessed 20 March, 2023).

⁸⁵ Heed Bangladesh, Message from Executive Director <<https://youtu.be/3s0GSLpEbnY>> (accessed 25 June, 2023).

⁸⁶ Saidul Islam, "The Creeping March of Christianity: The Widespread Evangelization in Bangladesh." (2004).

is to help the poor and marginalized people. It also envisions a society devoid of injustice and prejudice, where men and women equally contribute to the nation's growth.⁸⁷ This NGO was identified by the government NGO Bureau as engaged directly in converting people to Christianity.⁸⁸

Church of Christ Bangladesh: A US citizen, Charles Scott, was a Christian preacher from Monteagle, Tennessee, USA, who explored the possibility of preaching the Gospel in Bangladesh in 1985. After that, a seminar was held from where this missionary started their work in Bangladesh. They have 54 churches in this country. There are more than four thousand people in these churches.⁸⁹ According to the Church of Christ website in Bangladesh, "The principle aim of the Church of Christ is to establish churches and spread His kingdom over 147,570 sq. KM (the total area of Bangladesh), constituting a political division of 66 districts with 68,000 villages." Their mission is to reach out to every person in Bangladesh with the Gospel. They have established churches in different parts of Bangladesh, including Dhaka, Naogaon, Khulna, Jashore, Mymensingh, Gopalganj, and Chittagong Hill Tracts Area.⁹⁰

Bangladesh Free Baptist Church (BFBC) started to work in this country in 1975. They started their work by building a library and renting a home on Jashore Jeel Road. From the library, they started preaching Christianity in Jashore. They extended their evangelical work to another subdistrict, Keshabpur Jashore. Later, Keshabpur became their main centre to extend their evangelical mission. They preached Christianity to lower-caste Hindus, and they responded more to accepting Christianity. In 1983, BFBC converted 25 people in Keshabpur. They built male and female hostels in Jashore City. By building a hostel, they officially started to work for education as well.⁹¹ However, under their education banner, they spread Christianity.

Bangladesh Methodist Church: The Bangladesh Methodist Church movement began on August 12, 1984, when Rev. Nibaron Das started a small church of 12

⁸⁷ Christian Service Society (CSS), <<https://www.cssbd.org/about-us.php>> (accessed June 25 2023).

⁸⁸ Saidul Islam, "The Creeping March of Christianity: The Widespread Evangelization in Bangladesh." (2004).

⁸⁹ Father Josef Rana Mondol, Rar shootout Christo Dhormo, November 19 2011. 274.

⁹⁰ Church of Christ in Bangladesh, "Focus On The Aim Of Church Of Christ In Bangladesh", <<https://sites.google.com/view/cocbd/activities?authuser=0>> (accessed 4 July, 2023).

⁹¹ Father Josef Rana Mondol, Rar shootout Christo Dhormo, November 19, 2011. 273.

believers in his residence. The Church persevered in its vision of spreading the Gospel through rural evangelism and church planting efforts, aided by support from Korean Methodist churches. A significant milestone was achieved in 1997 with the consecration of the four-story Dhaka Central Methodist Church building, where Rev. Das was ordained as the nation's first Methodist Bishop. Prioritizing theological education, the Kumnan Bible School (later Methodist Theological Seminary) was established in 1991 to offer diploma and bachelor's programs in training pastors. The Church's outreach grew rapidly through its church planting initiatives, reaching 155 congregations with 18,000 members by the time of writing, with a focus on evangelizing unreached Muslim, Hindu, and tribal communities and operating schools, hostels, and development projects, the Bangladesh Methodist Church aimed to continue expanding, including plans to begin a Master of Divinity program in 2015 to further strengthen pastoral leadership. In 1993, they managed to build five dioceses; under these dioceses, there were 4601 Christian followers. They had 13 churches and three sub-churches in Jashore.⁹²

Christian Aid is an international organization that supports sustainable development, eradicates poverty, strengthens civil society, and provides disaster relief in South America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. In Bangladesh, Christian Aid has been active since 1972.⁹³ They are very much concerned about spreading the Christian faith through providing humanitarian assistance and doing social development activities.⁹⁴ According to their website, building churches worldwide is their top priority.⁹⁵ They support children, provide materials and tuition for school, support their

⁹² History of Bangladesh Methodist Church <<https://bangladeshmethodistchurch.org>> (accessed 4 July, 2023).

⁹³ Christian Aid in Bangladesh, 2.

⁹⁴ Helios Consultancy, <<https://www.facebook.com/heliosconsultancy/>> (accessed 4 July, 2023).

<<https://www.facebook.com/heliosconsultancy>

<<https://www.christianaid.org/statement-of-faith/>>

<<https://www.christianaid.org/bangladesh/>>

<https://www.christianaid.org/prayerline/2023-05-help-children-know-christ-in-bangladesh/>> (accessed 7 July, 2023).

⁹⁵ Building Christ's Church, <<https://www.christianaid.org/evangelism-discipleship/>> (accessed 7 July, 2023).

Bible teachers, and operate a quarterly spiritual camp, Sunday schools, and a hostel in Bangladesh, especially in Khulna.⁹⁶

2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has concluded that four parts of the historical background of Christian missionaries and their activities in the Subcontinent from their arrival to the present have been discussed accordingly. First, briefly mention the coming of Christianity in India in the first century. Second, this research discussed the second coming of Christianity in India. Third, the historical background of coming Christianity in Bangladesh, especially in Khulna. Finally, this research has identified the leading Christian missionary NGOs in Khulna. The early history of Christianity in India dates to Saint Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, who arrived in India in 49 CE. After him, there was not much presence of Christianity in India for an extended period, yet there was some presence of Christianity in India, but that was not in significant numbers. Later, Portuguese sailors Vasco da Gama and Pedro Álvares Cabral played a significant role in the spread of Christianity (Catholicism) in India. After the arrival of William Carey in 1793, the protestant mission emerged rapidly and spread over the Indian Subcontinent. 1947 divided India and Pakistan, and later, in 1971, there was a nine-month war between West and East Pakistan, and East Pakistan gained independence. However, Christianity significantly increased in Bangladesh more than any other time before, even more than the 200-year colonial period. According to history, Khulna is a significant place where Christian missionaries are active. They built their first Church in this region. There are eight dioceses in Bangladesh, and Khulna is one of them. The Catholics and Protestants are among the two Christian groups that are very active in the Khulna region, having several NGOs working in various fields, such as education, health care, sharing the Gospel, providing social services, offering humanitarian aid, engaging in inter-religious dialogue, leadership training for youths,

⁹⁶ Christian Aid Mission, Help Children Know Christ in Bangladesh <<https://www.christianaid.org/prayerline/2023-05-help-children-know-christ-in-bangladesh/>> (accessed 7 July, 2023).

and many more. Also, this research attempted to discuss some of the leading Christian NGOs actively working in the Khulna Division.



CHAPTER THREE

THE ACTIVITIES OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES USE TO PROPAGATE CHRISTIANITY IN KHULNA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Christian missionaries engage in various social and religious activities to spread Christianity worldwide. Bangladesh is a targeted country where thousands of Christian missionary NGOs work actively. Khulna is one of the eight divisions of Bangladesh where missionary NGOs actively provide services to propagate Christianity and its values and cultures. They primarily target poor, uneducated people and rural poor areas to provide social services. In this chapter, the five leading activities are described and analysed accordingly: education initiatives, healthcare and medical services, poverty alleviation and humanitarian aid, interfaith dialogue, evangelization, and conversion. However, the researcher makes it clear that Christian missionaries conduct other activities. However, this chapter of the thesis focuses mainly on these five activities, not including all. In addition to that, this chapter covered the targeted population of Christian NGOs. Finally, this chapter concluded with a brief discussion of the critiques and views of Muslim scholars in Bangladesh about Christian missions and their activities in general.

3.2 OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN BANGLADESH

Many Christian missionaries are working all over Bangladesh; among them, the NGO Bureau of the Bangladesh Government identified 52 NGOs as engaged in converting people to Christianity.¹ Moreover, under those NGOs, many sub-NGOs are working in the local communities in Bangladesh. This research discusses some of the most essential

¹ Mohd Saidul Islam, "The Role of NGOs in Promoting Christianity: The Case of Bangladesh," *Intellectual Discourse* 9, no. 2 (2001): 186.

NGOs selected and their activities in the Khulna Division. For example, Caritas Bangladesh is a prominent Catholic ideology-based NGO that has networks all over the country. Likewise, World Vision Bangladesh is a protestant, ideology-based NGO with an extensive network all over Bangladesh. Moreover, under those NGOs, many sub-NGOs are working in the local communities in Bangladesh. Their leading activities are education, medical services, poverty alleviation and humanitarian aid, interfaith dialogue, evangelization, and conversion.

3.2.1 Educational Initiatives

Before going into the details of the education discussion under the Christian missionaries, it is essential to understand the aims of Christian missionary education. Its aim is mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Ghost".² By the command of the Bible, they built thousands of schools, colleges, universities, and vocational training centres worldwide, including Bangladesh. Wherever they build such institutions, they also build churches.

3.2.2 The Aims of Christian Missionary Education and its implication in Bangladesh

Christian missionary education in non-Christian nations, as articulated in a seminal study from the 1910 World Missionary Conference, serves three primary goals. First, Christian missionary education aims to convert students to Christianity, as is emphasized by Dr. Mackichan and Rev. W. A. Stanton, who assert that the ultimate purpose of missionary education is to bring individuals to Christ. Secondly, it seeks to develop a thriving Christian community, as highlighted by Rev. W. L. Ferguson, emphasizing the importance of education in producing an intelligent Christian community capable of establishing churches, exerting influence, and nurturing leaders. Lastly, missionary education serves the purpose of preparation and leavening, as noted

² Matthew 28:19, King James Version.

by Rev. James Caruthers Rhea Ewing, aiming not only at conversions but also at the diffusion of Christian influences and ideas, ultimately laying the groundwork for the spread of Christianity. These aims underscore the integral role of education in evangelisation and the cultivation of Christian communities, shaping the mission and objectives of Christian missionary endeavours.³

However, from the aims mentioned above, it is clear that the goal of Christian missionary education is to evangelise and convert people to Christianity, and this is also true in Bangladesh, where all educational institutions run by Christian missionaries guided by the 1910 World Missionary Conference's objectives, focuses on evangelisation and community development through conversion, community building, and Christian principles.

Numerous elite missionary-led schools in Bangladesh reflect this dual emphasis on education and spirituality, demonstrating the significant impact of Christian missionary education in the country. Christian missionaries establish and manage thousands of elite schools and colleges in cities and across the country. Examples include Holy Cross School and College, Notre Dame College, and the University of Notre Dame in Dhaka; Sacred Heart School and Saint Louis School in Jashore; St. Paul's High School in Mongla; Reverend Paul's High School in Khulna; and Saint Joseph's High School in Khulna, among others. Catholic Christian missionaries operate these institutions and are highly coveted by the wealthiest and most elite parents, who vie to enrol their children. According to a 2019 report by The Daily Sun, "a total of 1,500 educational institutions are run across the country by the Christian church."⁴ Among them are 600 Catholic educational institutions, of which 10% are from Catholic backgrounds and 90% are from non-Catholic backgrounds. Catholics have one education board, the "Bangladesh Catholic Education Board Trust." Under this board are one university, 12 colleges, 579 secondary and primary schools, and 13 vocational training institutes. The number of students they serve is 143,500. On the other hand, protestants are not organised well in their educational institutions. Different

³ World Missionary Conference Edinburgh. Education about the Christianisation of National Life; with Supplement: Presentation and Discussion of the Report in the Conference on 17th June 1910 Together with the Discussion on Christian Literature. Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1910, 17-20.

⁴ Daily Sun, Missionary-run schools to follow set rules, <<https://www.daily-sun.com/post/404805/Missionaryrun-schools-to-follow-set-rules>> (accessed 21 April, 2023).

denominations have their institutions they run. Bangladesh Baptist Church Shingha (BBCS) runs several primary schools at one, secondary schools at four, and integrated schools for the blind at one and one college of theology. Similarly, another famous protestant missionary NGO, "Church of Bangladesh," has 45 primary schools, 2 junior secondary schools, 4 secondary schools, and 9864 total students under them.⁵ Likewise, other protestant groups have their own institutions.

3.2.3 Missionary Education in Khulna

In Khulna Division, Christian missionaries established hundreds of educational institutions from both communities: catholic and protestant. However, according to my findings, in the education sector in Khulna, Catholics are more advanced than Protestants. For example, between 1953-2017, Father Marino Rigon, an Italian (Xaverian) missionary, set up about 50 schools and hostels for poor children as well as sewing centres for uneducated rural women in Mongla, which is located in the southern part of Bangladesh under Khulna Division.⁶ Educational institutions run by Christian missionaries in Khulna can be divided into:

1. Schools that follow the national syllabus are like other schools, colleges, and universities; the students in these schools are of various religions.
2. Vocational training centres: the students in these schools are of various religions.
3. Christian theological schools: the students in these schools are only Christians.
4. Christian boarding schools: the students in these schools are only Christians.

⁵ 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, 11-12.

⁶ UCAnews, Bangladesh remembers prominent Italian missionary priest, <<https://www.ucanews.com/news/bangladesh-remembers-prominent-italian-missionary-priest/80594>> (accessed 14 August, 2023).

In the first type of schools mentioned above, there are different religious subjects with different religious backgrounds in addition to the components of the national syllabus. They studied together in the same classroom for general subjects, but classes were separated according to their religion for religious subjects. However, it is essential to mention that the Notebooks and other materials that would typically have plain covers have pictures of Jesus and Mary printed on them in such schools. The buildings have pictures of them hanging on the walls, quotes from the Bible and statements of popes. Another critical issue is the morning prayer assembly, which all students from different religious backgrounds must attend.

In the second type, Christian missionaries provide vocational training programs to help individuals in the community acquire new skills and improve their employment prospects. These include training in sewing, computer skills, agriculture, or other trades in demand in the local job market. The program would empower individuals to become self-sufficient and provide for themselves and their families. The missionaries also incorporate teachings and values based on their faith to help individuals develop personally and professionally. Through these vocational training programs, the missionaries can positively impact the lives of the people in Khulna. Illustrative of these efforts is the noteworthy contribution of organizations such as the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) and Caritas Bangladesh, prominent missionary NGOs with multifaceted projects geared towards training residents and students. Through these initiatives, these missionary organizations are actively engaging with the community in Khulna, seeking to address not only immediate economic needs but also broader aspects of individual development while fulfilling religious motives.

The third category is Christian ideology-based boarding schools. For example, The Baptist Children Village (BCV) was established by the Social Health Education Development Board (SHED) to provide residential facilities for orphans, semi-orphans, and the poorest children of the villages and urban churches of the BBCS (Bangladesh Baptist Church Shanga) along with access to education despite their socio-economic disadvantages. The BCV is located at the Baptist Church in Khulna and has been run

with the financial and technical support of Liebenzell Mission International since 4th August 1995.⁷

Fourth are seminaries where Christian theology is taught and which provide training for preachers. A prominent example is Khulna Bible College, founded in 1996 near the village of Tilak to educate Bangladeshi church leaders and preachers. It offers only one major: Bible studies, in the context of a liberal arts paradigm. Each graduate must complete 126 semester hours in the Bible, religion, ministry training, and some general education courses such as geography and world history. As of spring 2019, it had produced 51 graduates, all men.⁸ Students come from different parts of Bangladesh every semester and prepare themselves for missionary work. According to the 2022 report, graduates have made great efforts to gain converts and establish churches in various parts of Bangladesh. It may be noted that Khulna Bible College has other centres besides its main campus in Khulna.

3.2.4 Secularisation or De-Islamisation

Conversion from Islam to Christianity can be socially and culturally challenging in Bangladesh due to the society's predominantly Muslim identity. However, altering Muslim perceptions and understanding of Islam is not difficult because of the country's secular education system. According to Md. Saidul Islam, "If conversion is not possible through missionary education, they can be secularized or de-Islamized."⁹ A Muslim teacher by the name of S. M. Rakib, who was teaching at Saint Louise School in Jashore, mentioned in a journal the story of a woman who suffered and faced difficulties from her father-in-law's family. He writes:

Why should women be confined to the four walls of the veil? Why have women been deprived of the light of education for ages? Why has the

⁷ Baptist Children's Village Khulna, <<http://www.shedboard.org.bd/baptist-childrens-village-khulna.html>> (accessed 30 November, 2023).

⁸ Khulna Bible College (KBC), Bangladesh / Nepal Missions, <<https://highlandparkcoc.com/missions>> (accessed 29 November, 2023).

⁹ Md Saidul Islam, "The Creeping March of Christianity: The Widespread Evangelization in Bangladesh," 5.

woman tied her hands and feet and burned them on the pyre of her husband? Why is it shown in the scriptures that men **lust** for beautiful virgins after death? The answer is not unknown to anyone. The answer is, "This society and religion have adopted such ideologies so that women cannot go forward and establish themselves in society (like men).¹⁰

As mentioned, the author's name here seems to indicate he is Muslim, but his presentation of the story is contradictory to Islam! Yes, there are many ignorant practices in this society, which some people wrongly attribute to Islam, whereas Islam has given very prestigious rights to women. The only way this author found to criticize bad cultural practices and misconceptions in society was to criticize Islam and the Quran, which mentions that believers who enter paradise will have beautiful, untouched women. This is a solemn statement. If a Muslim expresses such a view, he has endangered his Islam. He becomes an apostate if he insists upon it after being properly advised and educated on how gravely mistaken it is.

An evangelical Christian missionary NGO, "World Vision Bangladesh", targets youth from schools, colleges, and universities. It promotes and finances youth groups who campaign for social programmes like opposing marriage under 18, anti-drug drives, promoting girls' education, planting trees, fighting global warming, and feeding poor people. Numerous youth leaders emerge from such groups, many of whom are Muslims. However, their opinions and worldviews have been shaped and altered by the intellectual environment in which they conduct these activities. They have fallen prey to Western secular ideas, particularly feminism. Many of these ideas oppose Islamic faith, law, culture, and values. Under the cover of these programmes, they are creating a generation of Muslim youths who are against Islam and Muslims. These movements are found throughout Bangladesh, and Khulna is no exception.¹¹

¹⁰ *The Louisiana, Yearly Magazine*, 2nd issue 2021, 40-41.

¹¹ Shishu Forum Khulna (Children's Forum Khulna) <https://www.facebook.com/childforum.khulna?comment_id=Y29tbWVudDo2ODgwMTkwNTc5NjA3MTdfNjg4MTk0Mjc2NTI5> (accessed 10 May, 2023).

3.2.5 Incorporation of Christian Faith and Values

Mufti Jubair Ahmad, an expert on missionary activities in Bangladesh, sheds light on the perspective of the president of the Christian Missionary Society in his book. According to him, the primary objective of Christian missionaries is to shape the minds and intellects of students distinctly graduating from their schools. He quotes the president, emphasizing the development of students' cognitive capacities within the framework of their educational approach.

He mentioned the conversation with the president of the Christian Missionary Society: "The main objective of the Christian missionaries is to develop the mind and brain of the students who are graduating from our school in our style." The president asserts that such an individual, while outwardly adhering to Islamic rituals like Jumu'ah prayer and Eid prayer, would gradually distance their mind, emotions, thoughts, and ideas from Islam. Despite outward religious practices, the president envisions these students becoming inadvertent supporters of Christian missionaries, contributing to the subtle propagation of Christian values and ideals. Christian educational institutions often include Bible studies and religious education in 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.¹²

3.2.6 Financial Assistance and Scholarships for Educational

Christian educational institutions extend scholarships or financial aid to students, focusing on those from economically challenged, marginalized, and disadvantaged backgrounds. According to Saidul Islam (2001), The isolation enforced by boarding schools fostered a sense of dependence on the mission among the pupils. Many of these schools were deliberately located to separate children from their parents, exemplified by the Oxford Mission's decision to establish a school in Barisal.¹³ Notably, the Rishi Community represents a marginalized group within the Khulna Division. Caritas Bangladesh, with support from Kindermissionswerk, Germany, collected a substantial

¹² Jubaer Ahmad, "Bangladesh Christian Missionary Oportoprotota o Amader Koronio," 70-74.

¹³ Mohd Saidul Islam, "The Role of NGOs in Promoting Christianity: The Case of Bangladesh," *Intellectual Discourse* 9, no. 2 (2001): 191.

donation amounting to 2,810,649 takes between January 2021 and December 2022 specifically for the benefit of this community. It is noteworthy that historical records indicate a significant conversion to Christianity within the Rishi community, underscoring the impact of such financial assistance in fostering educational opportunities and community engagement.¹⁴ Hundreds of Christian NGOs play a significant role in offering substantial financial support to marginalized students.

World Vision Bangladesh collaborates with various small NGOs, extending financial assistance to promote youth leadership and education initiatives. Their website details that World Vision Bangladesh allocates 16% of its resources specifically for educational programs. This collective effort underscores the extensive support provided by Christian NGOs to uplift and empower marginalized students, fostering educational opportunities and leadership development.¹⁵ According to the annual Report of HEED Bangladesh 2022-2023, they provided scholarships of 2,16,09,000 for meritorious students who obtained GPAs of 4 and 5 in the SSC and HSC exams.¹⁶ According to the Report of Daily Star 2009, Father Marino Rigon was an Italian-Bangladeshi Xaverian missionary priest who contributed to the establishment of many educational institutions in the southern region of the country in Khulna, directly benefiting thousands of impoverished students through his sponsorship programs.¹⁷ A clear indication of this leading NGO that advances Christianity through educational and social development services is evident when examining its website. Their mission, as stated, revolves around "Witness to Jesus Christ by life, deed, word and sign that encourages people to respond to the Gospel."¹⁸ This declaration underscores their commitment to actively promoting Christian values and principles through various avenues, emphasizing the integral role of education and social development in fulfilling their mission.

¹⁴ Caritas Bangladesh, *Annual Report (2021-2022): Extension Program for the Educational Support for the Children of the Indigenous Rishi Community in the Diocese of Khulna*, 115.

¹⁵ World Vision Bangladesh, "Education and Skills Building," <<https://www.wvi.org/bangladesh/education-and-skills-building#:~:text=World%20Vision%20Bangladesh%27s%20Education%20Program,fees%20and%20educational%20institutional%20support>> (accessed 5 May, 2024).

¹⁶ Heed Bangladesh, Annual Report 2022-2023, 48.

¹⁷ Bangladesh honours Father Marino, 4th January, 2009, <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-69949>> (accessed 5 May, 2024).

¹⁸ World Vision Bangladesh, <<https://www.wvi.org/about-us/our-vision-and-values>> (accessed 5 May, 2024).

In summary, Christian missionaries in Bangladesh use education to spread Christianity, focusing on spiritual and community-building. They aim to create a Christian community capable of contributing to church and secular life. Institutions like Holy Cross School and College, Notre Dame College, and the University of Notre Dame in Dhaka reflect the widespread influence of Christian education, particularly in the Khulna Division.

3.3 MEDICAL SERVICES

Missionaries provide medical assistance and treatment to local communities, often using it as an opportunity to promote Christianity. They offer superior medical care to those who convert to or attribute healing to Jesus, thus encouraging conversion. They have several hospitals, clinics, especially family planning clinics, and dispensaries in the country.¹⁹

For propagating Christianity and its values, their hospitals and clinics positively impact the country's local community.²⁰ In Jashore, there is a famous hospital named Fatima Hospital, which started in 1957 and is led by Catholics. According to Mufti Jubaer Ahmad, every day, about 500 Muslims go to that hospital for treatment. In this case, they use various techniques to attract conversions. For example, there was a case of a patient who went to the hospital for treatment. The nurse on duty gave him a pill and said, "Take this in the name of Allah." The woman took the medicine per the nurse's advice, but the disease was not cured. When he went again the next day, he gave him another pill and said, eat it in the name of Jesus and see if it cures. This time, his disease was cured by taking medicine (initially, he gave the right medicine in the second stage). Thus, the missionaries are misleading the simple-minded Muslims of the country.²¹

A leading Christian missionary NGO, Isa-e Church Bangladesh (ICB), provides a rural doctor program. They help people in the local church areas with rural medical services. They intend to provide medical services to build bridges between other faiths

¹⁹ Mohd Saidul Islam, "The Role of NGOs in Promoting Christianity: The Case of Bangladesh," *Intellectual Discourse* 9, no. 2 (2001): 193.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 193-194.

²¹ Jubaer Ahmad, "Bangladesh Christian Missionary Opototporota o Amader Koronio," 12.

and rural doctors.²² Thus, providing medical services gives them access to the local community, which attracts them to conversion. According to their website, their primary mission is to convert Muslims, as the founder of this NGO is a convert from Islam to Christianity.²³ This NGO is funded and supported by the international NGO Advancing Native Missions (ANM), an American-based NGO. According to the ANM website, the main work of this missionary is to plant churches, care for children and families, help communities, and more in 100+ countries.²⁴

Another example is the Damien Hospital in Khulna, where Christmas was celebrated on 22nd December. Celebrations were conducted on the facility's terrace and were organized by the medical staff, both Christian and Muslim, with the involvement of leprosy and tuberculosis patients. Sister Roberta Pignone mentions it. "We do not proclaim the Gospel directly but preach it through our lives. It is nice that our collaborators can bring the message of Jesus to others as they see him in what we do."²⁵ Thus, they built hospitals, provided treatment, and preached the Gospel.

Khulna's healthcare sector is primarily supported by several NGOs, including Caritas Bangladesh, Rural Reconstruction Foundation (RRF), World Vision Bangladesh, Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB), Dipshikha Bangladesh, Heed Bangladesh, and the Christian Service Society (CSS). These organizations provide healthcare services.

3.4 POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMS

Christian missionaries in Bangladesh are implementing microfinance programs to empower underprivileged communities, focusing on economic empowerment, skill development, and women's empowerment. These organizations, including Christian

²² Isa-e Church Bangladesh, <[²³ Background of ICB, <<https://www.isaechurchbd.org>> \(accessed 11 April, 2024\).](https://www.facebook.com/isaechurchbd.org/photos/a.522735017762529/3646432875392712/?type=3&_se_imp=0hFbWISmlUC7EiB6J&paipv=0&eav=AfZXxi3G3cwXNTSYGFETbus_ftX0mHI3innK505LIWjkqPu8M6CCtV5Q10EkToYzrgU&_rdr#> (accessed 17 August, 2023).</p></div><div data-bbox=)

²⁴ Advance Native Mission (ANM), "Who We Are: We Are Committed to the Gospel," <<https://advancingnativemissions.com/our-story/about-us/>> (accessed 11 April, 2024).

²⁵ "PIME Sisters Celebrate Christmas with Lepers in Khulna," *Herald Malaysia*, published December 30, 2017, accessed September 2, 2023, <https://www.heraldmalaysia.com/news/pime-sisters-celebrate-christmas-with-lepers-in-khulna/40185/1> (accessed September, 2023).

Service Society, Banchte Shekha, CCDB, Caritas Bangladesh, and World Vision Bangladesh, provide financial assistance and training with significant funding from foreign sources, particularly Western countries, which are directed towards missionary activities. They received significant financial support from foreign embassies, with a considerable portion of these funds directed towards missionary activities.²⁶

3.4.1 Providing Loan Facilities and Women Empowerment

Christian missionary NGOs or secular ideology-based NGOs often target women to provide microfinance or loan facilities to empower them. Women's employment is an excellent issue that Christian missionaries mainly focus on. According to the annual Report of Banchte Shekha 2022-2023, in the years 2020-2021, they provided loans of TK 35,69,93,000; in 2021-2022, 43,53,70,00; and in 2022-2023, 66,69,19,000. Moreover, they profited from the amount of loan provided, respectively: 81,50,485 in 2020-2021, 98,23,017 in 2021-2022, and 1,15,87,696 in 2022-2023.²⁷ On the other hand, Heed Bangladesh, one of the most significant development organizations in the country, operates in 32 districts, including Khulna, focusing on education, health, and economic development. Despite concerns about their evangelical activities, their work aims to uplift disadvantaged communities and contribute to poverty eradication efforts by providing a loan of BDT 9,077,958,174.²⁸ Caritas Bangladesh, a prominent Catholic NGO, is dedicated to social development, particularly in Khulna and nationwide, and it focuses on sustainable livelihoods and disaster management to combat poverty. Primarily funded by Western countries, their initiatives aim to elevate vulnerable communities by increasing household income, providing environmentally friendly housing, ensuring social security and human rights, and empowering marginalized groups such as senior citizens, the disabled, street children, transgender individuals, Dalits, and urban poor. Their objectives also include improving the quality of life for slum dwellers, promoting socio-economic development for migrants both domestically (such as beauty parlour workers, garment workers, domestic workers, transgender

²⁶ Mohd Saidul Islam, "The Role of NGOs in Promoting Christianity: The Case of Bangladesh," *Intellectual Discourse* 9, no. 2 (2001): 196.

²⁷ Banchte Shekha, *Annual Report 2022-2023*, 40-43.

²⁸ Heed Bangladesh, *Annual Report 2022-2023*, 57.

individuals, sex workers, and street children) and internationally, as well as supporting undocumented returnees.²⁹ Similarly, the Rural Reconstruction Foundation (RRF), a catholic Christian missionary NGO, provides a range of social development and humanitarian activities in Khulna, including microfinance, training, agriculture value chain, fisheries, skills Development employment creation and shelter reconstruction, all of which aim to uplift deprived communities and combat poverty.³⁰

Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB), established by the World Council of Churches, focuses on poverty alleviation and socio-economic Development in Khulna and beyond, notably through programs like People's Participatory Rural Development (PPRD), which offers marginalized communities access to credit, training, employment, and essential support.³¹

Most NGOs aim for women's empowerment and equal rights in society. They have taken woman empowerment as a challenge to break the Islamic and Muslim cultural heritage that has dominated this country for decades. It is a kind of cultural conversion from dominant Muslim to Christian occidental cultures. They have taken the initiative to break Muslim women's lifestyles and moral and cultural values. They establish schools, vocational training centres, and adult education programs to empower women, improving their employability and well-being. However, it should be noted that those are their leading slogans. However, they convert people's minds, especially Muslim boys and girls, towards secularity and modern liberal-minded people who are not severe about religious obligations and activities. For example, World Vision Bangladesh is one of the leading NGOs focusing mainly on youths; they actively prevent child marriage and encourage female students to establish themselves in society like men by being more educated.³² It can be considered that they can work for women's well-being, but how can they prevent mature girls from getting married? It is important

²⁹ Caritas Bangladesh, *Annual Report 2021-2022: Social Welfare for Vulnerable Communities, Eradicate Poverty and Socio-Economic Development of Vulnerable Communities*, 4.

³⁰ Rural Reconstruction Foundation (RRF), "Family Farming Knowledge Platform," Food and Agricultural Organization of United Nations, <<https://www.fao.org/family-farming/network/network-detail/en/c/177316/>> (accessed 11 May, 2024); Father Josef Rana Mondol, *Rar Shomotote Christo Dormo*, 356.

³¹ Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB), *Annual Report 2022: Comprehensive Poverty Reduction Program*, 5.

³² Dr. Sayeed Ferdous, Pushpita Saha, and Farida Yeasmin, *Preventing Child, Early, and Forced Marriage in Bangladesh: Understanding Socio-Economic Drivers and Legislative Gaps*, published 2019, 20-25.

to note that they say child marriage, and they define a child as female until the age of 18 and male 21. According to their annual Report for 2023, 119 child marriages were prevented by child and youth forum members, faith leaders, and child protection (CP) committees that were led, patronized, and funded by them.³³ On the other hand, according to Banchte Shekha's 2021–2022 annual report, they prevented child marriage 1076.³⁴ Not only those NGOs but most Christian and secular NGOs do the same.

Missionaries promote women's rights and gender equality in local communities through workshops, seminars, and campaigns. They offer legal assistance to women experiencing discrimination, abuse, or violence. They establish shelters for vulnerable women, provide microfinance for business start-ups, and enhance the skills of local women's groups and organizations to ensure sustainability and continuation of empowerment efforts within communities.³⁵

Therefore, helping women is not the problem, but how they approach women's rights is a problem that even contradicts Islamic ideologies. Furthermore, Christian missionaries offer training and support for income-generating activities, such as handicrafts, sewing, farming, or small business development, to help women become financially independent. According to the ADRA website, "to contribute to their self-reliance, ADRA is strengthening women's social and economic status." More than 7,000 women are empowered through micro-finance support, training, and enhanced income."³⁶

3.4.2 Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation

The Khulna division in Bangladesh is supported by numerous NGOs, including Caritas Bangladesh, Banchte Shekha, Rural Reconstruction Foundation, Community Development Society, World Vision Bangladesh, Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Salvation

³³ *Annual Report 2023*, World Vision Bangladesh, 12.

³⁴ *Annual Report 2021-2022*, Banchte Shekha, 10.

³⁵ Banchte Shekha, <<https://banchteshekha.org/>> (accessed 3 September, 2023).

³⁶ The Adventist and Development Relief Agency (ADRA), "Economic Development," <<https://www.adrabangladesh.org/economic-development>> accessed 1 May, 2024).

Army, World Vision, and Christian Service Society, which are instrumental in disaster relief and promoting social and economic Development in the region.

The standard strategy of Christian missionaries is providing relief and rehabilitation. According to Saidul Islam (2001), during stressful times such as the 1970 cyclone and the 1971 civil war in Bangladesh, NGOs have effectively used relief and rehabilitation programs to build goodwill and trust with the local population, paving the way for missionary work. Christian organizations like Seventh Day Adventists and the World Council of Churches contributed to relief efforts in the 1970s, but tensions arose in 1991 over alleged religious conversion links.³⁷

Caritas Bangladesh stands out for its extensive engagement in assisting communities impacted by natural calamities such as cyclones, floods, and storms. According to the annual Report of Caritas Bangladesh for 2021-2022, the project titled "Emergency and Recovery Assistance to Cyclone Yaas affected people in Bangladesh" began on 15th July 2021 and concluded on 14th March 2022. It was funded by Caritas Denmark, Caritas Singapore, CAFOD, Caritas Spain, Caritas France, Caritas Japan, and Caritas Taiwan, with a total contribution of Tk. 20,430,122. The project focused on four unions within the Kalapara, Hatiya, and Dacope upazilas (sub-districts) of Patuakhali, Noakhali, and Khulna districts within the Caritas Barisal, Chattogram, and Khulna regions. This initiative aimed to provide critical support and recovery assistance to communities severely impacted by Cyclone Yaas.³⁸

Similarly, the project "Strengthening the Vulnerable Urban Dwellers for multi-hazards in Khulna City" ran from January 2020 to December 2021. Funded by Caritas Germany with Tk. 1,572,660, it aimed to build a network between the community and service providers to improve access to essential services in urban areas. It directly benefited 29,766 people and indirectly impacted 20,172 more by covering three wards in the Khulna City Corporation area.³⁹ According to A. K. M. Hedayetul Huq (2009),

³⁷ Saidul Islam, "The Role of NGOs in Promoting Christianity: The Case of Bangladesh," *Intellectual Discourse* 9, no. 2 (2001): 195.

³⁸ Caritas Bangladesh, *Annual Report 2021-2022*, 190.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 208-209.

Catholic Organization that came to Bangladesh twenty- five years ago to help in the rehabilitation work of the war-devastated country. It is one of the largest NGOs in the country, and it spreads its programs over seventy-nine sub-districts. It boasts an impressive number of 12,467 development groups and 13,245 volunteers. In 1993-4, it had forty-three projects financed by twenty-nine foreign donors and the government of Bangladesh. The Annual Report of Caritas. Which refers to the details of foreign assistance, records that it spent a total amount of Taka 493,947,083.06 on forty-three projects; of this, Taka 3,834,171.18 was received from local donations, mainly with the collaboration of the government of Bangladesh. As many as twenty-seven donors from different organizations from abroad helped Caritas.⁴⁰

Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) is another pivotal organization actively involved in disaster response and rehabilitation across Khulna and other districts. Responding promptly to disasters, CCDB provides emergency relief assistance encompassing food, shelter, clean water, and medical care. Simultaneously, they implement sustainable recovery programs to facilitate the reconstruction of lives and infrastructure in affected areas.⁴¹ Similarly, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) natural disasters and the threat of climate change are increasingly complicating lives. In response, the agency is active in Khulna, where it implements modern agricultural technologies and income-generating activities. ADRA has helped thousands of people adopt methods such as vermicomposting, fish culture, and cow and goat rearing. Additionally, community-based organizations have been established and strengthened to ensure sustainable benefits for many years.⁴² The

⁴⁰ AKM Hedayetul Huq, "Aspects of Christian NGO Work in a Muslim Society: Challenges and Response in Bangladesh," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 22, no. s1 (1999): 209-220, 212.

⁴¹ "Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh," *Banglapedia*, <https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Christian_Commission_for_Development_in_Bangladesh> (accessed 15 May, 2024)

⁴² The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), "Climate Resilience," <<https://www.adrabangladesh.org/climate-resilience>> (accessed 15 May, 2024).

Rural Reconstruction Foundation (RRF) is instrumental in providing emergency assistance and undertaking long-term development projects to enhance community resilience and preparedness against future disasters.⁴³

Further enhancing the spectrum of support are organizations like World Vision Bangladesh,⁴⁴ Community Development Society (CDS), Christian Aid,⁴⁵ Heed Bangladesh,⁴⁶ Christian Service Society (CSS),⁴⁷ and others. Each entity brings unique expertise and resources, contributing to disaster-stricken communities' holistic recovery and rehabilitation. Whether through microfinance initiatives, education programs, healthcare support, or livelihood assistance, these NGOs play a vital role in addressing the multifaceted challenges of disasters in Khulna and beyond.

3.5 INTERFAITH ACTIVITIES

Khulna's Missionaries promote Christian values and beliefs through interfaith dialogues, inviting students and teachers from diverse backgrounds. They have established an interreligious dialogue centre to foster unity among Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. This practice has gained popularity, with high-profile government figures and religious leaders participating in seminars and programs.

Interfaith dialogue holds a prominent position in the priorities of the Khulna diocese, as articulated by their statement: “The ongoing formation of the Catholic faithful and interreligious dialogue are the priorities of the pastoral plan of the diocese of Khulna.”⁴⁸ Through these dialogue initiatives, there is a deliberate effort to provide a secure space and valuable opportunities for individuals to acquaint themselves with

⁴³ Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), *Bangladesh Capacity Statement 2023*, 3-4.

⁴⁴ Bangladesh, *World Vision International*, <<https://www.wvi.org/bangladesh>> (accessed 15 May, 2024).

⁴⁵ Christian Aid in Bangladesh,” <<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/our-work/where-we-work/bangladesh>> (accessed 15 May 2024).

⁴⁶ Heed Bangladesh,” <<https://heed-bangladesh.com>> (accessed May 15, 2024).

⁴⁷ Christian Service Society Bangladesh, "Special DMER Program," <<https://cssbd.org/special-dmer.php>> (accessed 15 May, 2024).

⁴⁸ "Asia/Bangladesh - Formation and Interreligious Dialogue: The Priorities of the Diocese of Khulna," *Fides News Agency*, <http://www.fides.org/en/news/67243-ASIA_BANGLADESH_formation_and_interreligious_dialogue_the_priorities_of_the_diocese_of_Khulna> (accessed 13 November, 2023).

Christian teachings, culture, and values at every level of society, from the upper echelons to the grassroots.

A crucial outcome of interfaith dialogue is the normalization of Christian education, teaching, culture, and values within the predominantly Muslim community. This is particularly evident in Christian educational institutions where students predominantly hail from Muslim backgrounds. Remarkably, these institutions actively participate in the celebration of Christian holidays and events like Christmas that open the door to the integration of Christian culture and traditions into the local Muslim community.

According to news shared by Caritas Bangladesh's Facebook page, on 13th May 2024, Caritas Khulna Region, under the HOPE Phase-II project funded by Caritas Italian, organized a dialogue program with various religious leaders to promote harmony and peaceful coexistence. The theme "Ensure Peaceful Coexistence, Build Harmonious Society" featured speeches from Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism representatives. Dr Maulana Md. Kabir Hossain, Rev. Fr. Uday Simon Mondal, and Mr. Pobitra Kumar Mondal shared insights from their respective religions. Dr Suman Kumar Malaker presided over the program, emphasizing mutual understanding, respect, and societal enrichment. Twenty participants (8 male and 12 female) from different religious backgrounds attended the event.⁴⁹ However, it is essential to mention that the representative of the Muslim community who attended this interfaith dialogue is not recognized as a famous Alim among the Muslim community in Khulna. Moreover, this dialogue is usually arranged to normalize Christianity and its values. Moreover, the participants are primarily women, which is not a culturally positive sense in majority Muslim society. Based on these three key points, it can be said that this is not a helpful program that can benefit Muslims in Khulna.

⁴⁹ Caritas Bangladesh, Facebook post, <[https://www.facebook.com/Caritasbangladesh2016/posts/861447739355333?_cft__\[0\]=AZVa8hLqIJKpflLmt6W6yOL5nO3YNmmdHBaOsGx7e4B1kC93WQsruz-xa6AVuNiHJdg4Nt95Btxxw1c_cChNQnE31vG9L7OqBZ_dvteoO0oGi6A20xJbipXfhtPxd_PhzJYVduIktchM3Br-s_SPsvslWL7Jv9J4-IZISPqQFGKPWSVA5Hta2jggHAWapJPvF3-Jji1Fmr0E72-Jz4_hN9F&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/Caritasbangladesh2016/posts/861447739355333?_cft__[0]=AZVa8hLqIJKpflLmt6W6yOL5nO3YNmmdHBaOsGx7e4B1kC93WQsruz-xa6AVuNiHJdg4Nt95Btxxw1c_cChNQnE31vG9L7OqBZ_dvteoO0oGi6A20xJbipXfhtPxd_PhzJYVduIktchM3Br-s_SPsvslWL7Jv9J4-IZISPqQFGKPWSVA5Hta2jggHAWapJPvF3-Jji1Fmr0E72-Jz4_hN9F&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R)> (accessed 14 May, 2024).

3.6 EVANGELIZATION AND CONVERSION

Missionaries use various tactics to convert Muslims, including using Muslim terminology designs and changing the name of the Bible. They publish Bibles in Bangladesh by changing the name such as the Bible, first published in Bengali under the name 'Dharma Book' in 1963 by the Pakistan Bible Society. After independence, the Bangladesh Bible Society changed the name to '*Pobitra Bible*'. Later, a Christian missionary by the name of '*Masihi Jamat*' published the Bible by the name of '*Kitaab al Muqaddas*'. They took the first of the '*Kitab al Muqaddas*' Old Testament as *Tawrat, Jabur, and Nobider Kitab*, and the second part of the New Testament they gave as *Injil Sharif*. Mufti Zubair Ahmad mentions in his book that I have 20 Bibles written in Bengali that do not resemble each other.⁵⁰ This is how they use tactics to spread the Bible to the people of Bangladesh.

Some Christian missionaries deceive Muslims by using new techniques to convert Muslims. For example, one group of Christian missionaries named them "*Isae Jamat*," and another Christian missionary named "*Mosih Jamat*." This is how they erred in naming their group. Importantly, they are very successful in converting Muslims through fraud. It is also acknowledged by the founder of "*Isa-e Church*." It was founded in 1999 by Abdul Mabud Chowdhury, an ex-Muslim convert to Christianity. This group of Christian missionaries is working more in the Muslim community. They have taken various steps to spread Christian literature. First of all, they are very successful in using Islamic terminologies in their Christian literature. They have newly arranged Christian literature in the Islamic style, such as how they design the cover pages of their books and pamphlets. They use forest (angel), Nobi, Musa, Isa, mahfil (a Muslim religious program), and Ameen after their special prayer, and many others. They use all the Islamic terminologies in their writings and speeches. For example, nowadays, they name their books looking completely Islamic, making

⁵⁰ Jubaer Ahmad, "Bangladesh Christian missionary opototporota o amader koronio." (2018).

Muslims, especially those who are not Islamic educated, confused and buying them. Mufti Zubair Ahmad, a great Muslim preacher of Islam, mentions that there are some names of their books that have been written by Christian missionaries that directly use Islamic names and terminologies, even Arabic names that only use Muslim. Here are only 10 names:

1. *Gunahgarder jonno behest jawar path* (The way to go to Jannah for sinner)
طريق الجنة للمذنبين.
2. *Quraner aloke behest jawar path.* (The way to go to Jannah in the light of the Quran) .
الطريق إلى الجنة بنور القرآن.
3. *Allahor kalamer nirvorjogota o bishuddhota* (the authenticity and accuracy of the word of Allah).
4. *Quraner alo* (the light of Quran)
النور للقرآن
5. *Imamder jonno Kitabul Mukaddas* (Kitabul Mukaddas for Imam).
6. *Allahor banda* (the slave of Allah).
7. *Allaho taalar Muhabbat* (the love of Allah).
8. *Ismail er Iman* (the Iman of Ismail).
9. *Behesti manush* (people of Heaven).
10. *Jibon japone Iman* (Iman in the livelihood)

They have many books, like mentioned here, 10 of them. From the 10 books mentioned above, some key points have been made clear.

1. Using an Islamic name
2. Frequently use of Islamic terminologies

3. Given Arabic little
4. Making suspicion about Islam and the Quran

Not only do they have these four, but they also design their books like Muslims design Islamic books. Such a conspiracy frequently happens in Bangladesh's Islamic Muslim/Islam Church.⁵¹ This is a case of distributing such books and small letters to the poor, vulnerable, and uneducated, especially from the Muslim community.

Second, Christian missionaries have training centres, Bible correspondence schools, and colleges from which they provide training for preachers of Christianity to evangelize and convert people to Christianity. For example, Khulna Bible College, the Christian Discipleship Centre Bangladesh,⁵² Baptist Theology Academy (BTA),⁵³ College of Christian Theology Bangladesh (CCTB),⁵⁴ Bible School and Brigade.⁵⁵ And many more.

There is a book called "25 Stories in the Light of Kitab al Muqaddas" written by Youra Milar and edited by Abu Taher Chowdhury. This book is a Christian book written for kids, and they distribute it not only to the school-going children; instead, they distribute it in the very fundamental Islamic institute that is called Qawmi Madrasa.⁵⁶ Not only this book, but they distribute many books like this to kids. For example, shishuder kitabul muqaddas (Kitabul Muqaddas for kids).⁵⁷ Their main goal is to change the kids' minds from their childhood.

Similarly, recently, the news has been spread that Christian-educated people coming from western counties in Bangladesh are getting married to Muslims as they have fallen in love with each other for a couple of years. All mainstream media, national or local, broadcast this news vigorously, showing it as a symbol of true love. For

⁵¹ Jubaer Ahmad, "Bangladesh Christian missionary opototporota o amader koronio", 41-62.

⁵² The Christian Discipleship Centre, Bangladesh (CDC)," <<https://world-outreach.com/web/2000/04/18/christian-discipleship-centre-bangladesh/>> (accessed 29 May, 2023)

⁵³ Bangladesh Baptist Church Shanga (BBCS)," <<https://www.bbc.org.bd/institutions/baptist-theology-academy-bta.html>> (accessed 29 May, 2023).

⁵⁴ College of Christian Theology Bangladesh (CCTB). "Leadership Development." <<https://www.leadev-langham.org/leaders/cctb>> (accessed 29 May, 2023).

⁵⁵ Church of Bangladesh. "Bible School and Brigade." <<https://churchofbangladesh.org/ministry/bibleschool/>> (accessed 29 May, 2023).

⁵⁶ Ahmad, Jubaer. "Bangladesh Christian missionary opototporota o amader koronio," 55.

⁵⁷ *Shisuder Kitabul Mukaddos*. Bangladesh Bible Society, 2010.

example, there is widely published news about an American engineer who came to Bangladesh in Keshabpur Jashore Khulna and married Rahima Begum. According to national TV channel news, "American engineer Chris Hogle fell in love with Rahima Khatun from Bangladesh and left his country. Rahima and Chris have started a family together. Not only that, but the American engineer has now become a farmer."⁵⁸ Similarly, all daily TV channels and national and local news are published nationwide. Moreover, his wife, Rahima Begum, says that he accepted Islam.⁵⁹ However, according to an interview published on YouTube by the same news portal (Dhaka Post), Rahima Begums, while she is speaking, clearly shows and appears on the chest the symbol of Crush, and it is prominent. So, the viewers primarily comment like this: "One thing I don't understand. The girl's name is Rahima, which means she is Muslim. So why does she have a tattoo of a cross, a symbol of Christianity, on her neck?" another person asked: "Religion has been sold for money; journalists should have asked which religion Rahima now follows."⁶⁰ This man built four storage buildings on his wife's land, and according to RTV News, "Chris Hogle has now bought land in Meherpur village. He owns about 8-12 bighas of land. He is cultivating himself."⁶¹ Now, his main intention is being coming out. According to the Dhaka post:

After coming to Meherpur village in Keshabpur, Jashore, following his love for Rahima, Chris Mark started the construction of a four-story house. Nearly 60% of the work has been completed so far. However, there was a change in Chris Mark's decision even before the completion of the roofing of the four roofs of the house. Due to the distance from the medical facilities in Meherpur village and the upazila health complex, he

⁵⁸ RTV News. "Driven by his love for Rahima, an American engineer comes to Bangladesh and immerses himself in farming." February 14, 2021. <<https://www.rtvonline.com/country/119431/>> (Accessed 14 May, 2024).

⁵⁹ Dhaka Post, District Correspondent, Jashore "American Chris Mark, who came to Bangladesh for love of Rahima, is now in trouble" 2nd August, 2022, < <https://www.dhakapost.com/country/132572>>. (accessed 14th May 2024).

⁶⁰ YouTube, Dhaka Post, Rahima, "an American engineer who came to Bangladesh for love, Chris Mark is in trouble", 2nd August, 2022, < <https://youtu.be/AQATNSvJKMo?si=kQHgYmS5JjSImxJo>>.

⁶¹ Rtv news, Jashore Correspondent, RTV News, *driven by his love for Rahima, an American engineer comes to Bangladesh and immerses himself in farming*, 14th February, 2021, <<https://www.rtvonline.com/country/119431/>> (accessed May, 2024)

wants to create a private hospital in his under-construction house. He wants to name the hospital Rahima Soldiers. American and Bangladeshi doctors will serve at this hospital.

From that news, it has been evident that he intends to build a hospital, and he also wants to bring his American children from his ex-wife (divorced) and mother from America here with him.⁶² From a historical perspective, it is proven that Christian missionaries came from Western countries and settled here in Bangladesh. Slowly, they start to Christianize the local community through evangelization and conversion. They also apply another technique, which is giving loans to the local people, especially those who are poor. That has also been done by this man, Chris Mark. According to the Report of Dhaka Post 2022, "Chris Mark claims that he is owed a total of 777,500 taka by the neighbours in Meherpur village so far."⁶³ So, based on the techniques applied by Christian missionaries, the people of Bangladesh, especially Muslims, already had three techniques. 1) Getting married to a Muslim and converting her to Christianity. 2) Providing loans for local poor and needy people. 3) Building a hospital and bringing his family here to settle.

However, Christian missionaries focus on marginalized and vulnerable groups such as illiterate, poor, and tribal communities like Santal, Garo, Morang, Chakma, Khasia, and Polia, as well as lower caste Hindus like Namasudra and Rishi. According to the 2022 census of Bangladesh, the Hindu population is 13.1 million out of 165.1 million, which is 7.95 per cent of the total population. According to the 1991 census, the Hindu population was 10.5 per cent. That means 2.10 per cent decreased their percentage. By analysing the data, it is shown that Christian missionaries targeted Hindus more than Muslims from the beginning of Christianity to the Indian subcontinent. According to Saidul Islam (2001), in terms of providing jobs and other

⁶² The daily Inqilab, "An American white citizen is now in Keshabpur for the love of 'Krishnokoli'." 16 February, 2021, < <https://m.dailyinqilab.com/article/358361/কৃষ্ণকলির-প্রেমে-আমেরিকান-শেতাঙ্গ-নাগরিক-এখন-কেশবপুরে>>.

⁶³ Dhaka Post, District Correspondent, Jashore "American Chris Mark, who came to Bangladesh for love of Rahima, is now in trouble" 2nd August, 2022, <<https://www.dhakapost.com/country/132572>>. (accessed 14 May, 2024).

facilities, Christian missionaries give more priority to Muslims since it is easier for them to disseminate the Christian culture among Hindus than Muslims.

There was a conversion on 22/12/2022 with a Christian man named Kishor, whose family lineage goes back to Hinduism. He shared that his forefather was Hindu and then converted to Christianity. He took the research team to the place where they lived. He shared that around 700 families are living there who are primarily Christian, only 5 families are Muslim, and 5-6 families are Hindu. More importantly, he was sharing that Muslims who are living there are not strong in their one identity and Islamic faith and values. There is a village in Jashore Jhikargacha called Shimulia where many Christians live. They also converted from Hinduism to Christianity.

More than 200 NGOs are working directly or indirectly for evangelization. However, a Christian website claims it, "Mission Network News", that the Bangladesh Government has indirectly shut down 200 Christian NGOs evangelizing in this country. According to their Report, the Bangladeshi government has indirectly shut down 200 operating Christian NGOs since the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Bill, 2016 (FDRB) was passed into law in October 2016."⁶⁴ According to the Report of Christians Today (15th March 2017), "In the last 12 months, more than 20,000 Muslims have converted to Christianity, and this is becoming a real problem for the Muslims".⁶⁵ Another report in the Christian Times (20th July 2016), "According to Christianfreedom.org, recent estimates indicate that about 91,000 Muslims across the country have converted to Christianity over the past six years".⁶⁶ However, another research was published where Isa-e Muslim Jamat converted thousands of Muslims. According to this Report:

Bangladesh, we find another significant movement of people to Christ from a Muslim background but who remain within the ummah, calling

⁶⁴ Mission Network News. "Bangladesh cracks down on religious NGOs." August 7, 2017, <<https://www.mnnonline.org/news/bangladesh-cracks-down-on-religious-ngos/>> (accessed 11 April, 2023).

⁶⁵ Christian Today. "Christianity is on the rise in Bangladesh as tens of thousands of Muslims are turning away from Allah to embrace Jesus." March 15, 2017, <<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/christianity-rising-fast-in-bangladesh-as-tens-of-thousands-of-muslims-are-turning-away-from-allah-to-embrace-jesus/105712.htm>> (accessed 10 April, 2023)

⁶⁶ The Christian Time, Thousands of Muslims converting to Christianity in Bangladesh amid intense persecution, (20th July 2016), <<https://www.christiantimes.com/news/muslims-converting-to-christianity-in-bangladesh-amid-persecutions.html>> (accessed 10 April, 2023).

themselves "Isai Muslims"⁵⁰ (isa meanders). 51 Isai Muslims in Bangladesh were first identified as "insider movements" in Western missiology discussions in the 1980s.⁵² Since then, the movement has grown: the World Christian Database estimates that by 2015, most Muslim-background believers in Bangladesh were members of insider movements—100,000 out of 180,000.⁶⁷

In summary, the practice of evangelization and conversion in Bangladesh is characterized by various strategies employed by Christian missionaries. This includes the publication of scriptures and literature tailored to the local context, often utilizing Islamic terminology and design to appeal to Muslims and others in the community. Renaming the Bible as '*Pobitra Bible*' and other variations underscores an effort to make Christian teachings more accessible and familiar to the local population. There is also a focus on targeting marginalized groups, including Hindus and tribal communities, with the intent of spreading Christian beliefs. This practice has raised concerns and controversies, particularly regarding allegations of fraud and manipulation in conversion tactics. The presence of numerous NGOs and training centres highlights the significant efforts being made to expand the Christian faith within Bangladesh. Despite governmental regulations and the closure of several Christian NGOs, reports suggest a growing number of conversions, predominantly from the Muslim community, which has become a contentious issue within the country.

3.7 MUSLIM SCHOLARS VIEWS ON CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN BANGLADESH

Muslims have varied responses to Christian missionary activities. Muslim *Du'at* (preachers) and scholars generally view these activities negatively. Many ordinary Muslims are not well-informed about the missionaries and their methods, making them more vulnerable to conversion efforts. Several books and articles by Muslim scholars and preachers voice strong opposition to missionary activities. One such book by Mufti Jubaer Ahmad, "The Misconduct of Christian Missionaries in Bangladesh and Our Duties" (translated from Bengali), discusses various issues related to Christian

⁶⁷ Anderson, Christian J. "Navigating the Constraints of the Ummah: A Comparison of Christ Movements in Iran and Bangladesh." *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 35 (2018): 117-125.

missionaries and exposes the fraudulent tactics used by missionary NGOs to convert people to Christianity.⁶⁸ Mufti Jubaer Ahmad, a prominent *Du'at* in Bangladesh, openly criticizes and debates Christian missionary activities. Another respected Muslim scholar, Dr Abdullah Jahangir (RA), highlighted the deceitful practices of Christian missionaries in Bangladesh. He wrote two books critiquing the distortions and corruption in the Bible and warned Muslims about missionary activities in his sermons.⁶⁹ Dr Abubakar Muhammad Zakaria definitively stated that it is not allowed to send Muslim children to Christian missionary schools and provided strong arguments to support that view. Moreover, he said if they cannot turn their children into Christians, then, at a minimum, they will make them secular.⁷⁰ Similarly, another great Muslim scholar, Shaikh Ahmad Ullah, stated that studying in Christian missionary schools creates negative attitudes towards Islam. Even those Muslim children who do not become hostile to Islamic faith and values become lukewarm in their commitment to Islam. He concluded by stating that it is not permissible to send Muslim children to missionary schools.⁷¹ Likewise, Dr Manzur-e Elahi ruled that Muslim children should not be sent to Christian missionary schools, explaining how missionary schools pose a threat to Muslim children's Islamic faith and values.⁷²

Dr Enayet Ullah Abbasi strongly condemned Christian missionary activities in Bangladesh, and he further pointed out that those who work against Christian missionary activities end up in prison. He interprets that as a threat to the sovereignty of the country. He mentioned that in the Chittagong hill tracts, where missionary NGOs are most active in evangelizing people, there is a dream to make this part of Bangladesh

⁶⁸ Jubaer Ahmad, "Bangladesh Christian missionarider opototprotota o amader koronio." (2018). (The Misconduct of Christian Missionaries in Bangladesh and our Duties).

⁶⁹ Abdullah Jahangir, "Pobitro Bible: porichiti o porjalochona." (2016); Abdullah Jahangir, "Kitabul Muqaddas, Injil shorif, and Isa-e dormo." (2013).

⁷⁰ As-Sunnah, "Some horrible aspects of educating children in Christian missionary schools." 1st July, 2020, <<https://youtu.be/nU0PMx5ujqU>>.

⁷¹ Save Bangladesh Mission, "Is it haram to teach children in a Christian missionary school or college? What did Sheikh Ahmadullah say about this?" 16th January 2022, <<https://youtu.be/jfTY5Ya8MzE>>.

⁷² Save Bangladesh Mission, "Whether missionaries can go to school. Dr Manzur -e Elahi", 16th January 2022, <https://youtu.be/IqGaO1dWPgw>

an independent Christian state eventually.⁷³ He claims that Christian missionaries are enemies of Bangladesh's independence.⁷⁴

Another famous writer and scholar, Dr A. F. M. Khalid Hossain, gave a lengthy statement against Christian missionary activities and warned the people. The title of his statement is in English translation: "Conspiracy to promote different foreign cultures in the hilly areas of Bangladesh." He introduces that NGOs, the International Christian Lobby, and foreign NGOs have been carrying out various conspiracies for a long time to propagate Western cultures and Christianity around the hilly areas of Bangladesh. By performing medical, social, and humanitarian services, they mainly try to attract the poor people of the hill area to the European way of life and philosophy. He brought up long historical and geopolitical issues in his statement, and he feels threatened that if the situation continues this way, Bangladesh will face the same situation as South Sudan and East Timor one day.⁷⁵

Based on the above views of Muslim scholars, it can be concluded that Mufti Jubaer Ahmad, Dr Abdullah Jahangir, Dr Abubakar Muhammad Zakaria, Shaikh Ahmad Ullah, Dr Manzur-e Elahi, and Dr Enayet Ullah Abbasi have voiced strong opposition to missionary activities, highlighting the deceitful practices and potential threats to Islamic faith and values. They argue against sending Muslim children to missionary schools, fearing it leads to secularism or weakens Islamic commitment. Dr A. F. M. Khalid Hossain and other scholars warn of a broader conspiracy by NGOs and international Christian lobbies to promote Western culture and Christianity, particularly in Bangladesh's hilly areas, posing a threat to the country's sovereignty and cultural integrity.

⁷³ Saidul Islam, "The Role of NGOs in Promoting Christianity: the case of Bangladesh," *Intellectual Discourse* 9, no. 2 (2001): 188.

⁷⁴ Save Bangladesh Mission, "Enayet Ullah Abbasi shouted against the Christian missionaries," 28th December 2021, <<https://youtu.be/1u1w4OM7lo8>>.

⁷⁵ Dr AFM Khalid Hossain, "Conspiracy to introduce foreign culture in the hilly areas of Bangladesh!" Ahle Haq Media, <<https://ahlehaqmedia.com/বাংলাদেশের-পার্বত্য-এলাক/>>.

3.8 CONCLUSION

Christian missionaries in Khulna focus on education and healthcare as primary means of propagating Christianity and their values. They establish schools, colleges, vocational training centres, and theological schools to convert and build Christian communities. Missionaries also provide healthcare services, such as hospitals and clinics, to local communities, promoting Christianity. They also engage in community development initiatives, such as vocational training programs and financial assistance for marginalized students. NGOs like Banchte Shekha, Caritas Bangladesh, Heed Bangladesh, and World Vision Bangladesh address poverty, improve livelihoods, and provide essential services. However, their interfaith activities, mainly through dialogues, have sparked debate and scepticism. Missionaries also target marginalized communities, using their socio-economic vulnerabilities to disseminate Christian teachings. Missionary tactics, such as interfaith marriages, raise suspicions within the Muslim community due to visible religious symbols and potential proselytization implications. Furthermore, Muslim scholars and du'at strongly warn people about Christian missionary activities, as these are threats to Muslim identity as well as the sovereignty of the country.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS OF INTERVIEWS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter was prepared through the interview responses with two expert groups from different religious backgrounds: Islam and Hinduism. The interviews were conducted with two expert Muslim Du'ats and two Hindu religious leaders. Then, the discussions focused on three main questions: (1) What factors lead Muslims to leave Islam and embrace Christianity? and (2) What are the appropriate remedies to protect Muslims from converting to Christianity? Moreover, (3) what are the steps Hindu religious leaders take to prevent Hindus from converting to Christianity? Their responses have been thoroughly examined and analysed.

4.2 INTERVIEWEES PROFILE

4.2.1 Details Interview Candidates

The research findings are based on interviews with four experts from two religions, Islam and Hinduism: two Muslim du'at and two Hindu leaders in Khulna. The two Muslim du'at are (1) Mushahid Ali Chomokpuri, Head of the Department of Higher Da'wah and Comparative Religion at Ja-miatus-Sunnah, Jhenaidah, and (2) Mufti Abdullah, Principal of Da'watul Quran Madrasa in Jhenaidah, who is also a preacher of Islam and an expert on Christian missions. The two Hindu religious leaders are (1) Swami Gyan Prakash Nanda Maharaj, Principal of Jashore Ramakrishna Ashram, and (2) Dev, Vorommosari from Sri Sri Roop Sanatan, Smriti Tirtha Dham.

This qualitative research employed content analysis methodology. The interview data were examined and categorised through hand coding as follows: The first Muslim preacher (Da'ee) is Mushahid Ali Chomokpuri, referred to as M.D. 1. The second

Muslim preacher (Da'ee) is Mufti Abdullah, referred to as M.D. 2. The first Hindu religious leader is Swami Gyan Prakash Nanda Maharaj, referred to as H.R.L. 1. The second Hindu religious leader is Dev, referred to as H.R.L. 2. After audio-recording the interviews, they were transcribed. The resulting transcripts were then carefully reviewed and analysed.

4.2.2 Methods of Interview

The interviews were conducted at various times and locations:

1. M.D. 1: Interviewed on January 1, 2023, from 9 pm to 10:30 pm, lasting one hour and two seconds. The session occurred in a classroom at the Department of Higher Da'wah and Comparative Religion, Ja-miatus-Sunnah, Jhenaidah. He later provided a written document in Bengali, translated into English.

2. H.R.L. 1 (Swami Gyan Prakash Nanda Maharaj): Informally interviewed on April 18, 2024, at his office in Ramakrishna Ashram, Jashore. The approach was covert, with a comparative religion expert posing as a student of Hinduism. The total duration was 41 minutes and 19 seconds, conducted between 9 am and 11 am, with the relevant portion lasting about one minute.

3. M.D. 2: Interviewed on February 18, 2024, from 2 pm to 3 pm, for 27 minutes and 19 seconds at the Da'watul Quran Madrasa office in Jhenaidah. The interview responses were later typed in Bangla and then English.

4. H.R.L. 2: Secretly interviewed on February 22, 2024, from 12:30 pm to 1:40 pm, lasting 32 minutes and six seconds. The same covert method as with H.R.L. 1 was applied. The interview was conducted inside Dham.

Note: The covert interview techniques were employed due to concerns that direct requests might be denied, given the topic's sensitive nature in Bangladesh.

The selection of these two Muslim Du'at was based on my research, which indicated they are the most knowledgeable and expert in this field. Similarly, the chosen

Hindu religious leaders were selected for their extensive experience in Hindu missions, religious activities, and high-ranking positions within their respective organisations. This careful selection ensures that the insights gathered are from highly informed and influential figures in their domains.

4.3 THE FACTORS BEHIND CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY IN KHULNA

In the religious landscape of Khulna, the responses of Muslim *Du'at* and Hindu leaders to Christian missionary activities reveal many themes that shape the dynamics of religious conversion. From socio-economic influences driving religious shifts to the intricate interplay of psychological appeals and ethical considerations in evangelism, each theme offers a unique perspective on the processes of religious conversion.

4.3.1 Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Religious Conversion

From the perspectives of Muslim *Du'at*, both M.D.1 and M.D.2 emphasise that Christian missionaries strategically target vulnerable populations, such as the illiterate, poor, and tribal communities. They highlight how missionaries provide essential services like education, medical, and humanitarian aid. They underscore the missionaries' long-term approach, which starts with humanitarian aid and gradually introduces religious teachings, ultimately leading to conversions. The Muslim preachers also note that missionaries focus on education and medical services as channels for conversion. On the other hand, Hindu leaders present different viewpoints. H.R.L.1. expresses scepticism about religious conversions, attributing them to greed, manipulation, and material incentives rather than genuine spiritual conviction. Conversely, H.R.L.2. Offers a more nuanced perspective, acknowledging the influence of socio-economic factors on conversions and mentioning the targeting of lower-caste individuals by Christian missionaries through aid programs.¹ However, Muslim *Du'at*

¹ M.D.1: (1) “They work in the illiterate, poor and tribal population. (2) They work in remote and distant rural, forest, border, coast, island and river areas. So that separate Christian states can be built in those

and Hindu religious leaders acknowledge the influence of socio-economic factors on religious conversion.

4.3.2 Psychological and Emotional Appeals in Religious Conversion

Christian missionaries employ various psychological and emotional tactics to attract converts, including providing emotional support, instilling a sense of belonging, and promising spiritual fulfilment and salvation. M.D.1 mentioned various tactics used by Christian missionaries to convert people. Christian missionaries provide the wrong medicine for Muslim patients. In the first stage, they provide wrong and low-class medicine and tell them to Pray to Muhammad for a speedy recovery. Hindus used to say to patients, "Ask Ramakrishna for speedy recovery. The patient was not cured with

areas. One of the Christians working in Bangladesh has a common tendency to form, develop and expand their society. In the meantime, they have established themselves well in different parts of the country. From the capital Dhaka too far and isolated villages, islands, hills, and tribal areas, Christians have taken various steps including their administrative offices, hospitals, educational institutions, social service activities, development schemes and agricultural activities. There is no field where the Christians have no position and role".

M.D.2: "One is a place in Mongla in Bagerhat district. There, we saw a father named Lewis, who is called there by the people as Father Lewis and who came there 50 years ago. He came there and established a hospital first. Established pre-primary school. People there are in great danger from natural disasters. He established the Cyclone Centre. He established many schools and service institutions, including primary and high schools. Through this service, he is first introduced to the people who believe that Father Lewis is a good person. Another came with him, Father Marino Regan. He worked the same way. They did not invite anyone at first; they only served greatly". According to Abdullah, they talk about religion in three steps after providing service.

H.R.L.1: "There are some who are greedy. No one is converted to religion. Who convert to others either for money or for physical needs. It turns out that a Christian is behind him; he once told him about Christianity with his wealth."

H.R.L.2: "Muchi" refers to those who work with leather, making drums and tablas; they are called "Rishi" or "Muchi" and are considered lower caste. People from this caste are generally not well-educated. For example, if you go to Keshobpur, you will find about twenty N.G.O.s in the Dalit neighbourhood of Pholida. You will find them there but will not find educated people there. The Rishis, who are uneducated, are very poor. The N.G.O.s go there, build houses for them, and provide rice and lentils—they do all these things to feed them. Khulna Division has remote areas such as Satkhira Shyamnagar. There are some areas adjacent to the Sundarbans. An area is named Bansipur. In that area, we got their activity, and another place is inside the name "Garage". Already they are working on the company there. From there, there is another place crossing the river, Gabura, Gorilla, etc. The areas initially went to the Queen of Finland, and missionaries came from Romania and other countries. They are inviting people to those areas. After that, the last Khulna area of Satkhira started. Many remote sea areas.

Where the Sundarbans and the Bay of Bengal are united, there is a place in the southern Vedakashi. There, they are working extensively. South Vedakashi, northern Vedakashi. Then Dacop, the driving, and the Kalabogik are the areas that are over. Then there is no other area. These are called border sides. Bangladesh and its borders are also the area of the Sundarbans and the Bay of Bengal. From here, they finished Bania Shanta and Khulna; Mongla Port started and entered Mongla. Thus, they have a centre in every district. They place people in remote areas in the name of service. As a result, when we go to ordinary people for invitation activities, they also say they are doing good things. Inviting

that inferior medicine. Then they would give the best medicine and say, "Now ask Jesus for speedy healing." With the right medicine, the patient would be cured quickly. Then the authorities would say, "Look, Jesus healed you. Since Jesus healed you, he will take you to heaven. So, believe in Jesus, believe in his religion". Similarly, he mentioned that they say bad things about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), like, "Muhammad is a wretch, so his followers are poor. If you want financial prosperity, become a Christian. Jesus will bless you." Furthermore, he said that Christian missionaries publish books, pamphlets, and handbills with attractive titles using Islamic terminologies like "*tariqul jannat lilmuznibin*", an Arabic title. However, it is their book written on their religion, whose name is Islamic, by which they cheat with Muslims, especially uneducated ordinary Muslims.² Thus, Christian missionaries psychologically and emotionally blackmail people to convert to Christianity. On the other hand, M.D.2 said missionaries' long-term investments in communities, creating dependency through services, and integrating Christian teachings into local cultures and practices.³ That means Christian missionaries provide social and humanitarian services. When they see people becoming dependent on their assistance, they propagate Christianity. In contrast, H.R.L.1 and H.R.L.2 present different perspectives on the psychological and emotional appeals involved in Hindu-Christian conversions. H.R.L.1 attributes conversion to materialistic reasons and external influences from Christian missionaries.⁴ H.R.L.2, on the other hand, emphasises the socio-economic dimension, noting that lower caste Hindus are susceptible to conversion due to support from Christian NGOs. He criticises the

² M. D. 1: (1) medical treatment: "Look, Jesus heals you. Since Jesus heal you, he will reach you to heaven. So believe in Jesus, believe in His religion. (2) "Making bad comments about the Prophet: "Muhammad is a wretched, so his followers are poor. If you want an economic prosperous life, become Christian. Jesus will bless you." (3) Using emotionally appealing leaflet titles: "Jesus for you", "A release of a rally for you", "The most beautiful story", "a friend for you", "love for you", "Jesus' love", "You are listening for you", "Solution to your problem".

³ Multi-Step Process: a. First Step (Service): "They served in the area, what do people in the area need. Through this service, he is first introduced to the people who believe that Father Lewis is a good person." b. Second Step (Religious Meetings): "Then what they did on the second step was to launch various religious meetings. Despite giving different names, including Bible classes, the services of the parents, the services of the elders, have said such good things." c. Third Step (Direct Invitation): "In the third step, they invited directly that who can give them peace in the world, liberation in the hereafter, and release in the hereafter is our Jesus."

⁴ H.R.L.1: "There are some who are greedy. No one is converted to religion. Who convert to other either for money or for physical needs. It turns out that a Christian is behind him; he once told him about Christianity with his wealth. We don't like all these things."

exploitation of temporary aid as a means of conversion, emphasising the complex interplay of socio-economic factors and emotional appeals in these conversions.⁵

Overall, the psychological and emotional tactics employed by Christian missionaries to attract converts, as well as the contrasting perspectives from Muslim *Du'at* and Hindu religious leaders, highlight the multifaceted nature of religious conversions and the varying motivations behind them.

4.3.3 Education and Interfaith Dialogue

M.D.1 emphasises that Christian missionaries use various tactics like anti-Muslim literature. They distribute many books and leaflets using Islamic terminologies and attractive headlines and titles.⁶ In addition, he shares a field experience himself: he visited a large church and school with 700 students, all of whom are Muslims. He mentioned, "The day I visited, I saw Christian teachers instructing all students from grades 5 to 8 in Christmas preparations."⁷ Similarly, M.D.2 highlighted that Missionaries in Khulna targeted education as a significant avenue for conversion, establishing institutions like polytechnic and nursing schools to expose students to Christian values and teachings. They brought students from remote areas and gradually influenced them towards Christianity through religious meetings, Bible classes, and medical camps. Missionaries employed interfaith dialogue and educational programs in urban areas to engage educated individuals and teachers, promoting Christian doctrines and unity

⁵ H.R.L.2: "Poor people, for example you will go to Keshabpur as many N.G.O.s will find them there. The sages who are illiterate they are very needy will go there and build houses, give rice, dal will give them all these things. Thus, they give for a month and they are on their rhythm but I have seen that for 6 months one year when they stop giving them. They come back to their place again."

⁶ M.D.1: "They leave a lot of leaflets, small and large leaflets, in Kaliganj (under Jhenaidah District). He came to the madrasa and told me that there was a little empty space below the door of our house. Leave small leaflets. He showed me a few leaflets. Suppose this is (1) This small paper 'Path' of the 'Valued Life' will catch it in your hand, leave it on your bag, enter the window through the window, and pass the door to the bottom of the door. (2) This is the remorse; (3) This is the path of death; (4) Jesus for you; (5) A release of a rally for you; (6) The most beautiful story; (7) a friend for you; (8) love for you. The young man, but hearing love gives profit. (9) Jesus' love (10) You are listening for you (11) Solution to your problem. In this way, we see a bundle that has such small leaflets. So let's give such small leaflets to Muslims. Gradually, the leaflets that I have shown you are "the solution to your problem." We will be found in Bangladesh, especially some people who have been educated, especially in the village. If this solves my problem, then I will go, and finally, when they go, get caught."

⁷ M.D.1: "A large church and school cater to 700 students, all of whom are Muslim. The day I visited; I saw that Christian teachers were instructing all students from grades 5 to 8 in Christmas preparations. (Christmas is a religious festival for Christians) Dinajpur."

among different religions.⁸ However, Hindu leaders did not share specific points about education and interfaith dialogue as a cause for conversion. Therefore, based on the response, it is clear that there is a consistent pattern in both accounts of using education for conversion, though the specific experiences and observations differ. Notably, commentary is absent from Hindu leaders on these educational and interfaith dialogue strategies, indicating a gap in perspectives on the issue.

4.3.4 Policies and Laws on Religious Conversion

The role of government policies and legal frameworks in regulating religious conversion activities in Bangladesh, including restrictions or protections for religious minorities and measures to prevent coerced conversions, M.D.1 shared that local Muslims are cautious about saying anything about converted Christians or making any critical remarks about them due to political support. Also, they cannot say anything about those Christian missionaries evangelising and converting people.⁹ Moreover, under the constitution of Bangladesh, they have full rights to convert, and the

⁸ Multi-Step Process: a. First Step (Service): "They served in the area; what do people in the area need? Through this service, he is first introduced to the people who believe that Father Lewis is a good person." b. Second Step (Religious Meetings): "Then what they did on the second step was to launch various religious meetings. Despite giving different names, including Bible classes, the services of the parents and the services of the elders have said such good things." c. Third Step (Direct Invitation): "In the third step, they invited directly that who can give them peace in the world, liberation in the hereafter, and release in the hereafter is our Jesus." They do another job in the Khulna Division's main centre. In an educated society, we know that Christian missionaries, including the Khulna Division, have divided Bangladesh into eight religious areas. They are called dioses in English. One of these is Khulna Dharma province. Khulna Division is the main centre of these devotees.

As much as the government-private educational institutions in this department, the teachers of these educational institutions and the students want to pull the students towards themselves; they have taken a large building with New Market, the main centre of Shiva in Khulna (before this Shiva house). Here, they take a class called interfaith. They keep the students of various Varsities in Khulna free. Those are students and batch; their job is to develop the only interfaith. That is, what is interfaith? What is inter-religious dialogue? Be it Hindu or Muslim, we call students of different religions here. After bringing students of any religion, a bishop (next to this interfaith, the Bishop House, the headquarters of the Khulna Dharm-apra, came from that poisonous house called Ashik), after arriving, he took classes from six to eight to intervention, on the inter-religious dialogue. Muslims go there. They say their religious issues and the educated boys of other religions also come. Teachers from different colleges and universities also come. They mention their religious issues. After saying that, they share that you say that the central unity of all religions is peace, which is the principle of all religions. By saying this, they gradually convert the teachers into the students. At one point, they draw them towards Christianity. It is our experience, as we have seen. Then, it spreads to the educated palace. Through these teachers and students, it slowly works in different businesses for more educated classes.

⁹ M.D.1: Local Muslims did not dare to talk about the names of the Christians, even the allegations of the converted Christians. The answer was, 'You will leave; who will handle the next storm?' Brahimpur, Jhenaidah.

administration also favours them. However, M.D.2 has not shared anything regarding this issue, but in this regard, H.R.L.2 mentioned a significant point: my uncle's son once told me that I should marry a Christian girl and get a job in the Navy.¹⁰ That means in the government job sector, they can give jobs to those who convert to Christianity.

4.3.5 Misinformation about the Religious Text

Regarding this point, only Muslim *Du'at* responded. M.D. 1 mentioned that Christian missionaries often misinterpret the Prophet Muhammad and the Quran. He said that by misinterpreting the Quran, cunning individuals are deceiving innocent Muslims. This misinterpretation often involves twisting the meanings of Quranic verses to create doubt and confusion among Muslims. Christian missionaries tell Muslims that "Muhammad is wretched, so his followers are poor. If you want an economically prosperous life, become a Christian. Jesus will bless you".¹¹

Furthermore, M.D.2 mentioned another way Christian missionaries cheated Muslims by saying that when the simple and innocent people in that remote area, who had received services from Christian missionary N.G.O.s, were invited to Christianity, many could not refuse. They accepted the invitation and accepted Christianity. However, some did not want to accept it. Their policy was that you could remain Muslim without any problem, but you should become Isa-e Muslims (Christian Muslims). As Isa-e Muslims, you can perform prayers and follow all Islamic practices, but you have to accept that your saviour is Jesus. After becoming Isa-e Muslims, these people eventually converted and became Christians. This has been our experience.¹²

¹⁰ My uncle's son once told you to marry a Christian girl and give you a job in the Navy. His father is the master of the Sheikhati school. My father is the school's master; I will not go to the school, but he would take it if he were an ordinary boy. I want to say that these people are made Christians with lust.

¹¹ M.D.1: (1) They mislead the Qur'an. "There is also a book called "The various doubts and simple answers imposed by Christians." You can read two books they wrote to learn about their misinterpretation of the Quran. 1) "The answer to your question in the light of the Holy Book". Author Edward Aiyub and (2) Christian-Muslim Dialogue, author Kangaro"; (2) Muhammad is wretched, so his followers are poor. If you want an economically prosperous life, become a Christian. Jesus will bless you."

¹² Some people in remote areas have received services; many could not throw them away when invited to the third step. Acknowledged their invitation. Many did not want to accept, so they had the policy that if you were Muslim, there was no problem; the rest of you would become Muslims. If you are a Muslim, you will be able to pray. Islam can observe everything. The rest of you will have to admit that our salvation is Jesus. It is our experience.

In addition to that, Christian missionaries often cheat and use illegal strategies to propagate Christianity, especially with ordinary, poor and uneducated people. There is a group by the name of Isa-e Jamat who use this kind of strategy to prophase Christianity through cheating.

4.4 ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS: INSIGHTS FROM THE SECOND QUESTION

Muslim *Du'at* have proposed several strategies to counter Christian missionary activities and promote Islam. These include the acquisition of comparative religious knowledge; comprehensive training programs for preachers and producing *Du'at* more and more; social awareness about Christian missionary activities and community outreach programs; widespread distribution of da'wah literature; implementing service-oriented programs; taking education initiatives and da'wah; and expanding discussions on Islam's superiority.

However, the first part of this chapter demonstrated the discussion and the analysis of Muslim *Du'at* and Hindu leaders together. However, in the second part, the responses of both groups were discussed and analysed separately due to their distinct perspectives. This separation allows for a more accurate and thorough examination of each group's responses.

4.4.1 Acquisition of Comparative Religious Knowledge

The Muslim *du'at* emphasised the importance of understanding the beliefs and practices of other religions. This knowledge helps effectively present Islam's strengths and other faiths' shortcomings during da'wah. M.D.1 said that when a preacher of Islam presents da'wah to people, knowledge of comparative religion is essential, especially when inviting non-Muslims. Without this understanding, a *date* may face difficulties presenting arguments logically and effectively. However, when a *du'at* is well-informed about the target's religion, they can highlight its weaknesses and inconsistencies,

making it easier for the *mad'u* to consider embracing Islam.¹³ Similarly, M.D.2 said that we educate youth and religious scholars to make them aware of missionary activities and to equip them with the knowledge to counter these efforts. Also, he said, we directly invite and preach Islam to those leading Christian missionary efforts, counter misconceptions, prove Christianity's invalidity, and aim to convince them through respectful debates if needed.¹⁴

In short, based on both responses, the first solution to save Muslims from conversion to Christianity is to arrange programs to provide a strong understanding of comparative religion, which is essential for practical da'wah work. By comprehending the beliefs and practices of other faiths, *du'at* can present the strengths of Islam more persuasively and highlight the shortcomings of other religions. This knowledge allows *du'at* to make logical arguments that resonate with those they invite to Islam, facilitating their acceptance of the faith.

4.4.2 Training programs for *du'at*

Both *du'at* emphasised providing training programs and workshops to prepare *du'at* to do da'wah activities effectively. M.D.1 said da'wah's work cannot be solely the responsibility of an individual or a group. Training and preparing *du'at* (preacher of Islam) on a large scale is necessary to expand this work. Further, he added ways to accomplish this, first by establishing "du'at and da'wah training courses" in every madrasa. These courses should focus on imparting knowledge of comparative religious studies and the methodology of da'wah work alongside other subjects related to da'wah. Secondly, he mentioned organising extensive *du'at* training workshops." Expert

¹³ M.D.1: Mad'u (who will be invited) can be the opposite if he is invited without knowing his faith and religious rules. They must know their religious faith, especially to invite non-Muslims. From here, the importance and necessity of studying comparative religion come out. It is challenging for him to present the argument properly if the date does not know about the religion of the intended person. Therefore, when the person is fully aware of the religion of the mad'u (the intended person for calling to Islam), it will be straightforward for him to present the proofs of religion, defects, deviations, inappropriateness, helplessness, etc. As a result, Mad'u renounces his religion and is encouraged to embrace Islam.

¹⁴ M.D.2: The last thing I do is invite them directly to shut the mouths of Christians, to shut them down. This is the last step. We invite them to Islam. We invite Islam directly to them and try to highlight the misleading aspects of Christianity and the Christian religion that has been abolished. That is not from Allah Ta'ala. It has been cancelled. Let us try to highlight it. Then, we debate with them in the context of need. We have not done it before. First, we call them, and they come. We sit at home. Alhamdulillah, we have received many benefits by direct invitation from those responsible.

individuals will discuss the importance and methodology of comparative religious studies and da'wah work in these workshops.¹⁵ Similarly, M.D.2 said they are conducting awareness workshops in areas affected by Christian missionaries. They provide training workshops for educated youth and religious scholars to make them aware of missionary activities and to equip them with the knowledge to counter these efforts. These workshops include videos and materials to highlight the impact of Christian missionary work.¹⁶

Therefore, M.D.1 and M.D.2 recognise the importance of training Islamic preachers (du'at) and missionaries to counter Christian missionary activities and propagate Islamic teachings effectively. They emphasise the need for comprehensive training programs and workshops that focus on imparting knowledge of comparative religious studies and effective da'wah methodologies and equipping the participants with the necessary skills to engage with and address the tactics employed by Christian missionaries.

4.4.3 Awareness and Outreach programs

M.D.2 outlines a multifaceted strategy to prevent Muslims from converting to Christianity in affected areas. This includes mosque-based programs, market-based programs, awareness workshops for educated youth and religious scholars, women's training sessions, courtyard meetings with families at risk of conversion, and engaging youth through Islamic quizzes and activities. These efforts awaken their consciousness

¹⁵ M.D.1: An invitation is not possible for a person or party. To make this work comprehensive and extensive, it must be done widely. Once much du'at is created, this work will spread everywhere. This will have to be provided for da'wah and du'at training. This can be done in a few ways. First, open da'wah and du'at training Courses' in each madrasah. There, among other things related to da'wah, is teaching about the methodology of comparative theology and the work of da'wah. Widespread da'wah training workshop. In these workshops, experts will discuss the importance of comparative theology and invitation work.

¹⁶ M.D.2: Who are the educated classes? There may also be an educated youth class or an educated scholar. Those who are Olam. To awaken their consciousness. Many do not know that this number of people has become Christians in our area. In our area, missionaries are working on work. Because of this, we are doing the da'wah training workshop to awaken their consciousness. We do this in the infected areas of ten districts of Khulna Division. It is managed through various experienced responsibilities. Maybe a madrasa or a school in Varsity. Youth in the area who work with activity. As a work companion, I sometimes do three-day, sometimes week-long training workshops with them. Currently, we show video images of the affected areas through laptops or projectors.

and counteract Christian missionaries' influence on youth.¹⁷ In contrast, M.D.1 emphasises fieldwork, door-to-door preaching efforts, consulting local leaders, staying within communities, and working collaboratively for effective da'wah.¹⁸ These efforts aim to raise awareness among the educated class, educated youth, and religious scholars about the extent of conversion to Christianity in the area and the activities of missionaries. However, both individuals recognise the need for multidimensional strategies, ranging from targeted awareness programs and training workshops to active field engagement and cooperation with local stakeholders, to effectively counter Christian missionary influence and strengthen the Islamic faith among Muslims.

4.4.4 Promoting Da'wah Literature

Da'wah literature is widely distributed to educate both Muslims and non-Muslims about Islam, addressing fundamental beliefs and countering misconceptions. M.D.1 emphasises the importance of promoting da'wah (Islamic preaching) literature, especially when engaging in da'wah among Muslims, which can be a challenging and long-term effort. He suggests preparing comprehensive literature covering various aspects of Islam, such as its beliefs, monotheism, prophethood, afterlife, humanitarianism, the Islamic perspective on other religions, comparative religious

¹⁷ "To awaken their consciousness, we undertake the following activities in different areas: (1) Mosque-Based Programs: Under the title of "Islahi Majlis," we organise mosque-based programs to bring the less practising Muslims to the mosque. (2) Market-Based Programs: For those who do not even go to the mosque, we organise market-based programs to bring them to the mosque. These programs are conducted in collaboration with local youths and with the permission of the market committees. (3) Awareness Among the Educated Class includes educated youth and religious scholars (ulema). Many are unaware of the extent of conversions to Christianity in our area and the activities of missionaries. To raise their awareness, we organise da'wah training workshops. We conduct these workshops in the ten affected districts of the Khulna division. (4) Women's Training Sessions: We conduct a monthly training session for women in the affected areas. We gather all the women in the area at one point and provide training from behind a curtain. (5) Courtyard Meetings: When a family is on the verge of converting to Christianity, we take action by inviting all family members and gathering them in their courtyard with village leaders and knowledgeable Islamic scholars, including those who have studied comparative religion. We listen to their reasons, provide counterarguments, and gradually help them understand why they should not leave Islam. These efforts are conducted in affected areas. (6) Engaging youth through Islamic quizzes and activities: To counteract Christian missionaries' influence on youth, we organise Islamic quizzes for children and adolescents, covering topics from the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the Quran and addressing missionary misconceptions. We conduct Q&A sessions, hold quizzes, and distribute prizes to encourage and engage them.

¹⁸ M.D.1: Fieldwork da'wah, door-to-door preaching efforts like the prophets, consulting local leaders, staying within communities, and working collaboratively for effective da'wah.

studies, and the shortcomings of other religions. He highlights the need for literature addressing fundamental questions and objections about Islam within the Muslim community and providing reliable answers.¹⁹ However, there was no specific talk from M.D.2; instead, he shared a general emphasis on Islamic education.

4.4.5 Implementing Service-Oriented Programs:

Social services like education, healthcare, and basic amenities are provided to attract people towards Islam and counter the influence of Christian missionaries. M.D.1 emphasises the importance of conducting service-oriented programs as an integral part of Islamic teachings, such as establishing schools, hospitals, sanitation facilities, clean water supply, distributing warm clothing and educational materials, providing relief aid, housing construction, and mobile medical camps, especially among underprivileged and non-Muslim communities. These programs can be crucial tools to attract people towards Islam and counter Christian missionary efforts that employ similar strategies.²⁰ He suggested the establishment of Muslim Rehabilitation Centres to support individuals who have embraced Islam but face abandonment from their families and communities. These centres provide shelter, basic religious training, and assistance in finding employment or vocational training to ensure a stable livelihood. Regular follow-up and monitoring of their progress are recommended, along with integrating their children

¹⁹ The invitation to non-Muslims is much more complicated than other invitations. The result of this work is very late. Because it is not an easy task to attract a non-Muslim to Islam, that is why he has to target him for many days by targeting him. Many people take time to accept Islam. In those cases, an invitation is needed. The beauty of Islam, the faith of Islam, the *Tawheed*, *Risalat*, *Akhirat*, the humanity of Islam, the views of Islam on other religions, comparative theology, the benefit of other religions, etc., are created and spread among non-Muslims. Especially for the Muslims, to formulate a 'syllabus' of Islam. So that, after entering Islam, a new Muslim can gain the necessary knowledge of the fundamental issues of Islam according to his power. Besides, to formulate litigation containing authentic and logical answers to the fundamental questions and allegations of the non-Muslim community about Islam.

²⁰ M.D.1: Services are an essential section of Islam. Islam has not imposed any religious or caste conditions on the service. Islam is the religion of humanity. So, the service of Islam is also for humanity. So, the Muslims have to be very strong in this section. It can be an essential tool to attract non-Muslims to Islam. The tools that are used by Christian missionaries today make Muslims Christians. Massive service activities should be conducted among the people. Particularly among the non-Muslims of the lower classes and castes, to conduct service activities with tremendous goodwill and goodness. In this case, activities such as schools, hospitals, sanitation, pure water, winter clothing distribution, relief, distribution of educational materials, construction of houses, and mobile medical camps can be undertaken. This can be the best tool to attract non-Muslims.

into religious institutions.²¹ However, M.D.2 mentioned that they do various kinds of social and humanitarian programs in Christian missionaries affected areas, such as inviting non-Muslims for data collection and cooperative work, distributing blankets in affected areas during the winter, projecting different eating styles and scheduling appointments, creating medical camps with Muslim doctors' assistance; creating eye camps and service work in affected areas; and conquering local minds to promote Islam.²²

4.4.6 Educational Initiatives

Islamic educational centres are crucial for continuous religious education and preventing misconceptions among Muslim communities. M.D.2 mentioned the following educational initiatives: First, pre-primary centres should be established among Muslims in areas heavily affected by Christian missionaries, where Muslim teachers teach Bengali, mathematics, and English to Muslim children to keep them inclined towards Islam. Second, *maktab* (Quran education) and "Adult education" should be provided in remote areas where there are no arrangements for Quran education among Muslims. In these programs, they teach the Quran fundamental beliefs

²¹ M.D.1: After entering Islam, a neo-Muslim, most of the time, he had to leave his family, but his family and his family were out of the house. In this case, there is no one in the world to call his relatives. There is no system of eating. He has no choice but to beg on the way. At that time, Dai must emerge in front of him as the closest and nearest man. First of all, he has to arrange for shelter. You have to arrange for food. This is needed for the 'new- Muslim Rehabilitation Centre'. Also, during the invitation, Mad'u should be told that you must do some work while being non-Muslim. I will still arrange the work you used to do before. Initially, he was sheltered in the centre, which provided his initial religious training. Then, focus on the necessary systems of life. Provide financial support for it. To take the necessary measures for his children's education. Keeping his inquiry regular. The most sustainable thing in this regard is associating those functioning with any action. Provide any vocational training if needed. So that in the future, there will be a permanent living system. For this, it is best to establish the 'Vocational Training Institute for new Muslims' on the initiative of the da'wah.

Moreover, they associate their children with a religious organisation. In this case, it is essential to note that Muslims should pay more attention to 'faith and practice' rather than more financial support. They can take the initiative to earn a living from the 'faith'.

²² M.D.2: invite non-Muslims. Let them collect their data. Do their cooperative work. In the affected areas, we distribute blankets during the winter. Then, let us project different eating styles. Project the appointment. Then, with the help of our Muslim doctors, we fuck some medical camps in a small range. Some of the eye camps have been made before. We also enter their areas with some service work. I tried to promote Islam, thereby conquering the minds of the locals. It is only in the affected area.

of Islam and address misconceptions about Christianity. They conduct monthly exams to verify adults' beliefs and ensure their adherence to Islam.²³

On the other hand, M.D.1 emphasises "New-Muslim Education Centres" more. He emphasises the importance of establishing "New-Muslim Education Centres" to provide immediate religious and spiritual training to those who have recently embraced Islam. These centres should offer round-the-clock education to facilitate seamless learning of the Islamic faith and practices. Failure to provide proper religious education after conversion may lead to misconceptions and confusion between their past and present lives. He also suggests seeking support from existing traditional Islamic schools (madrasas) to provide free education to the children of new Muslims. However, establishing separate academies solely for Muslim children would be most beneficial, as integrating their education with non-Muslims may lead to cultural clashes and hinder their adaptation. If independent centres are not feasible, separate divisions within existing madrasas could be created specifically for Muslim children, akin to divisions for Fatwa (Islamic legal rulings) and Tafsir (Quranic exegesis), with a dedicated "Dawah Division" for outreach activities.²⁴

²³ M.D.1: The areas more affected by Christian missionaries are infected with the kind of work, that is, the school education system, through pre-primary education. In those areas, we are trying to launch a pre-primary centre for Muslims. It is less in our affected area, Alhamdulillah. There, our Muslim teachers read Bangla numbers in English. So that they turn away from Christians and move towards Islam. We also teach Muslim children. Another thing we do is educate Maktab. In remote areas where there is no system of teaching the Quran to Muslims, we teach them the Qur'an in the title of Maktab and older education, as well as the basic akidas of Islam and the confusion of Christianity. There is no test once a month. The elderly are tried to save by examining the Akida and Christianity of Islam. It is not everywhere in the affected places. The other thing we do is, under the leadership of the Dai brothers and the brothers who have created consciousness, especially under the leadership of the young brothers, find the church. We send seven-day, ten-day, and three-day churches to the affected spots.

²⁴ M.D.2: After the invitation of Islam, the non-Muslims who voluntarily expressed their interest in accepting Islam were immediately taught kalema. Do not delay reading Kalema. Thus, after entering non-Muslim Islam, his religious training is essential. If he is not arranged to teach his religion after teaching Kalima, he can make misconceptions about Islam without seeing any notable differences between his previous life and the next. For this, it is necessary to pay much attention to important tasks, such as the religious training of Muslims. Establishing the 'new Muslim Education Center' should be done individually. There, they will have to arrange for 24 hours. When he comes, he can learn about religion. This is the case with the elderly and the workers.

Moreover, the support of the Quami Madrasas can also be obtained for their children's education. The madrasa authorities can explain their free education there. The best is to establish a separate academy for the new Muslim children. Because of their education with Muslim children, it becomes challenging to move together as the cultures of both are different. It may hurt them. The idea of Muslims can get worse. Therefore, it is perfect if the faith can arrange their separate education until the faith is strengthened. If it is impossible to establish it individually, separate departments can be established to educate the new Muslim children in conventional madrasas. Instead, each madrasa should have a separate 'invitation

However, the data emphasises the importance of Islamic educational centres to prevent misconceptions and strengthen the Muslim faith, especially in areas influenced by Christian missionaries. M.D.2 focuses on pre-primary and maktab education, while M.D.1 proposes "New-Muslim Education Centres" for new converts. These initiatives emphasise the need for continuous, context-specific Islamic education to prevent religious dilution and maintain religious integrity.

4.4.7 Da'wah and Expanding Discussions on Islam's Superiority

The critical act of *du'at* is to engage with Christian missionaries and non-Muslims to highlight the excellence of Islam and address the flaws of other religions. M.D.2 shared his field experience. He said that they directly invite those responsible for Christianity to keep their mouths shut, to silence them. After that, they preach Islam directly to them, explain to them, counter the misconceptions of Christianity, and prove that Christianity is an invalid religion. We make efforts to convince them. Then, if necessary, they also respectfully debate with them. By doing direct dawah to Christian missionaries, they get positive reports.²⁵ On the other hand, M.D.1 directly emphasises da'wah to non-Muslim like a prophet (pbuh) and extends discussions on the excellence of Islam and the flaws of other religions.²⁶

Therefore, both M.D.2 and M.D.1 emphasise the importance of directly engaging with Christian missionaries and non-Muslims to highlight the excellence of Islam and address the flaws of other religions. M.D.2 shares his experience of inviting

section' for non-Muslim invitations. Fatwa's 'Ifta Division' has the 'Tafsir section' for interpreting the Quran.

²⁵ The last thing I do is invite them directly to shut the mouths of Christians and shut them down. This is the last step. We invite them to Islam. We invite Islam directly to them and try to highlight the misleading aspects of Christianity and the Christian religion that has been abolished. That is not from Allah Ta'ala. It has been cancelled. Let us try to highlight it. Then, we debit them in the context of need. We have not done it before. First, we call them, and then they come. We sit at home. Alhamdulillah, we have received many benefits by direct invitation from those responsible.

²⁶ The purpose of the invitation will not be achieved if comparable theologians and non-Muslims have attained scholarship on the invitation of Islam. For this, I want to go to the actual field to invite. As the Prophets have been invited to the people of the people for ages, we have to go to the doorstep of the non-Muslims and show the identity of Islam. That is why we should send churches to non-Muslim-dominated areas. They stay in a local house or mosque, where they will contact the dominant and Ulama kiram and enter the non-Muslim mahalla. The best is to bring them to the mosque or the designated place with the help of a Muslim. Before entering the non-Muslim mahalla, the local Ulama must consult with the Kiram and the influential and leading members of society. They have to come up with ideas about the purpose of the Dawati caravan. It is better to work with their help.

Christian leaders, preaching Islam to them, countering misconceptions about Christianity, and proving its invalidity through respectful debates. This approach not only silences missionary activities but also provides an opportunity to convey the message of Islam. Similarly, M.D.1 advocates for direct da'wah (preaching) to non-Muslims, following the prophetic approach and extending discussions on the virtues of Islam and the shortcomings of other religions.

4.5 HINDUS CONVERSION AND THEIR PRIEST RESPONSES

Based on the responses of Swami Gan Prakashnanda Maharaj Jashore, it seems they are not serious about this issue. According to him, they do not take any steps to prevent Hindus from embracing Christianity. He shared that they consciously avoid involving themselves in such matters. Their focus is on leading a life dedicated to spiritual practices and devotion to the divine. Further, he said, they believe in the autonomy of individuals to choose their faith, and attempting to interfere would only lead to unnecessary conflict. As the saying goes, "You can't straighten a dog's tail." He thinks the responsibility lies in living according to our principles and setting an example through our actions.

On the other hand, the second leader of Hinduism, Dev, said he tries to make them understand not to convert to Christianity. However, according to his experience as a Christian missionary, he assists those who convert to Christianity, so his request has no benefit. His answer seems like he is slightly disappointed in trying to convince them.

However, based on the responses provided, the Hindu leaders have differing perspectives regarding the issue of Hindus embracing Christianity. Swami Gan Prakashnanda Maharaj Jashore seems more passive, focusing on spiritual practices and respecting individual autonomy in faith. His approach is one of non-interference, believing that attempting to prevent conversions would only lead to unnecessary conflict. On the other hand, the second leader, Dev, appears more proactive in trying to dissuade Hindus from converting, albeit with limited success due to the assistance provided by Christian missionaries to those who convert. Ultimately, these contrasting

viewpoints highlight the complexity of the issue and the challenges faced by Hindu leaders in addressing religious conversions within their community.

4.6 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MUSLIM AND HINDU RESPONSES

The study examines the responses of Muslim and Hindu religious leaders to missionary activities, revealing their differing perspectives on conversion. Muslim preachers prioritise proactive measures, emphasising education and community empowerment to protect against external influences and preserve Islamic identity. Hindu leaders, on the other hand, exhibit a spectrum of attitudes, from fatalistic acceptance to reluctant intervention, reflecting varied approaches within their communities.

The Muslim *du'at* adopt a comprehensive and proactive strategy to counter Christian missionary influence, including training programs for preachers, community outreach initiatives, distribution of Islamic literature, social services, educational centres, and direct engagement with Christian missionaries through debates and discussions. They view Christian missionary activities as a strategic effort to convert Muslims through various means, including socio-economic incentives, psychological tactics, and educational influence. They perceive a need to actively counter these efforts and prevent conversions through targeted programs and initiatives. They also propose direct engagement with Christian missionaries through respectful debates, countering misconceptions, and proving the superiority of Islam. They also advocate for establishing educational centres, rehabilitation programs, and social services to attract people towards Islam and support new converts. However, H.R.L.1 appears more accepting of individuals' choices regarding their faith, believing that attempting to interfere would lead to unnecessary conflict. He emphasises living according to principles and setting an example through actions rather than actively preventing conversions.

Both Muslim *du'at* and Hindu leader H.R.L.2 acknowledge the influence of socio-economic factors, such as poverty, lack of education, and access to necessities, in attracting individuals towards Christianity through the assistance provided by Christian missionaries. However, Muslim *du'at* propose countering these influences through

social services, educational initiatives, and community development programs. Thus, Muslim du'at presents a comprehensive and proactive approach to counter Christian missionary activities. At the same time, Hindu leaders exhibit a more passive stance, reflecting the complexities of religious conversion and the challenges faced by different religious communities in addressing these issues.

4.7 CONCLUSION

The responses of Muslim and Hindu religious leaders to Christian missionary activities in Bangladesh reveal a complex and nuanced landscape. Muslim scholars and preachers (du'at) adopt a proactive and comprehensive approach to counter these efforts, focusing on socio-economic incentives, psychological tactics, and educational influence. They propose multifaceted strategies, such as training programs, community outreach initiatives, distribution of Islamic literature, social services, educational centres, and direct engagement with Christian missionaries. Hindu leaders exhibit a more diverse range of perspectives, with some adopting a passive stance focused on spiritual practices and respecting individual autonomy. In contrast, others attempt to dissuade Hindus from converting. Both Muslim du'at and Hindu leaders acknowledge the influence of socio-economic factors, such as poverty, lack of education, and access to necessities, in attracting individuals towards Christianity. However, Muslim du'at propose countering these influences through social services, educational initiatives, and community development programs. Government policies and legal frameworks in Bangladesh, such as the constitution providing full rights to convert and economic incentives like job opportunities, further facilitate conversions.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSION

This research pursued Christian missionary efforts in Khulna Division, examining their historical background and activities. It also explored Muslim scholars' and *du'at* views toward Muslim conversion as well as Hindu religious leaders' views on Hindu converts' reasons, highlighting the importance of understanding their activities and the reasons behind their conversion:

Firstly, this research explored the history of Christianity in Bangladesh, tracing its roots, colonial period, and growth. Thus, a study found that they came to this country for the first time in 1517. But they did. It examined missionaries' arrival, evangelization efforts, and interactions with local rulers. The chapter also discussed the impact of British colonialism on Christian missions and their social and cultural influence. It details 30+ leading Christian mission NGOs while highlighting their leading activities.

Secondly, this research explored Christian missionaries' efforts to spread Christianity in Khulna through educational initiatives, medical services, poverty alleviation programs, interfaith dialogue, and evangelization and conversion. Missionaries established institutions like Saint Joseph's High School and St. Paul's Hospital, provided medical services, and established NGOs like Banchte Shekha, Caritas Bangladesh, Heed Bangladesh, and World Vision Bangladesh to provide social and humanitarian services.

Thirdly, this research examined the responses of Muslim *du'at* and Hindu religious leaders to Christian missionary activities in Bangladesh. Muslim scholars and *du'at* view missionary efforts as strategic attempts to convert Muslims through socio-economic incentives, psychological tactics, and educational influence. They propose multifaceted strategies, such as training programs, community outreach, and direct engagement with Christian missionaries. Hindu leaders have varying perspectives, from passive acceptance to limited intervention. Both Muslim *du'at* and Hindu religious

leaders acknowledged the influence of socio-economic factors in attracting individuals to Christianity.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of the four chapters of this research, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Future Research issue: significant gaps exist in the current literature, as no prior research has specifically examined Christian missionary activities to propagate Christianity in the Khulna. By providing this perspective, the study fills a significant gap in current knowledge and provides valuable insight into the methods and techniques used in this specific geographical and religious context. However, there is still a need to study and research Christian missionary activities in Khulna because this research did not cover all the aspects of Christian missionaries there or their activities. The following areas still need to be researched:
 - Gather accurate statistics about the conversion number of their educational institutions in Khulna.
 - There is also a need to find details on other NGOs: more details are needed about which ones are most effective in converting.
 - Further, there is a need to investigate and research details about literature used in Christian schools, particularly for conversion.
 - It is also essential to research how Christian missionary NGOs incorporate their faith and values through their education and social services:
 - More detail about the relationship between social services and conversion.

- More detail about the relationship between medical services and conversion.
 - Also, there is a big issue about how these incorporate and promote Christian faith-based and Western culture in the local county of Khulna.
 - Moreover, it is crucial to examine the number of individuals who leave Islam for Christianity in that region and to analyze the underlying reasons behind such conversions.
2. Social-oriented programs: this study highlighted the significance of Christian missionary activities in Khulna. So, it is a matter of concern for Muslim preachers, scholars, and all practising Muslim communities to take a very urgent initiative to spread the message of Islam among the various religious communities by creating a positive attitude and influence of Islam through taking various social-oriented initiatives in the fields of educational initiatives, medical services, poverty alleviation, youth empowerment, relief and rehabilitation, shelter centres, humanitarian aid, community outreach programs (like campaigns against drug addiction, social justice, youth leadership programs, sanitation, and others), primary Islamic education, masjid maktab for all class people, and others in Khulna. In addition to that, Christian missionary NGOs, as well as secular NGOs, both focus on girls, women, and children, so we have to take this matter very seriously, and they have to take the initiative as well for what is essential and appropriate for a religious, social, and regional context. Through these activities, they will reach the local community more positively, which can create great opportunities to promote the comprehensive and holistic teaching of Islam. Thus, they will be able to safeguard Muslims from converting to Christianity, and they will also be able to create a positive image of Islam and Muslims among non-Muslim communities. This way, there will be a significant opportunity to convey the message of Islam to non-Muslim communities. That is precisely what Christian missionaries do, particularly in Khulna and throughout the country.

3. Religious-oriented activities: This study examined the various strategies for appropriately distributing Christian literature to different categories of people and religious communities. For example, Muslim communities publish books in Bengali with Islamic terminology. Furthermore, Christian missionaries have been using contemporary technology to reach out to children, teenagers, and marginalized groups, especially in recent years. They are spreading Christianity more and more through various media channels, such as offline media, online platforms, audio, and video. To face this challenge, Muslim preachers and scholars also have to publish and distribute literature that contains answers to all the scepticism spread by both Christian missionaries and secular NGOs against Islam and Muslims. Similarly, they have to increase da'wah activities among local Muslims as well as non-Muslim communities so that they can know the superiority of Islam.
4. Politically oriented programs: Muslim *du'at* and scholars, as well as practising Muslims, should take steps to convince the government about conspiracies and all of the traitorous activities of Christian missionaries in this country, and they have to convince political leaders as well. Similarly, they may arrange seminars and symposiums to publicize their conspiracy and warn Muslims about their activities.

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