

Challenges of Islamic Da‘wah in Bangladesh: The Christian Missions and Their Evangelization

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***Abstract:** Although Bangladesh is the second largest Muslim populated country in the world, there are several challenges of Islamic da‘wah here. The Christian mission, taking the opportunity of people’s poverty and distress, is evangelizing them through financial assistance and other means. The rapidly increasing number of conversion to Christianity among the tribal population is alarming. The missionary activities are spreading around the country, chiefly in the intellectual arena, in educational institutions, and in other aspects of life. The influence of it on the culture, education, religion and lifestyle of people results into converting people to the Christian ideology. Particularly the young generations are inclining towards this lucrative dogma of the new age. Media, both print and electronic, are propagating and claiming the banning of the da‘wah movement. In these situation, the Islamic da‘wah movements require to explore and implement new methodology to face the enormous challenges to prevent Bangladesh from becoming a Christian country in future.*

Keywords: *Islamic da‘wah, Christian mission, and evangelization.*

Introduction:

Bangladesh has the fourth largest concentration of Muslim populations in the world with a population of about 140 billion, of which 88 percent are Muslims. However, majority of the population (74 percent according to 2001 census) reside in rural area with lower economic condition and lowest standards of living. In fact, about half of the

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population lives below poverty line set by the World Health Organization. This situation paves the way for successful operation of Christian missions through providing financial assistance towards the poverty-stricken people. Khurshid Ahmad has rightly pointed out that the methodology of Christian missions focuses upon influencing the object in a status of weakness and vulnerability. Instead of direct invitation, approaches are made to those who are underprivileged, exploiting their disadvantages for the sake of proselytism. The poor, the sick and the young are made special targets of economic support, medical aid and education.¹ The post war period during the independence movement of Bangladesh facilitated for the Christian missionaries to gain the heart of distressed people. Thus, the rapid expansion of Christian missions poses a challenge as well as a threat to Islamic da'wah in Bangladesh.

This paper aims to discuss the challenges of Islamic da'wah in Bangladesh, with particular reference to the expansion of Christian missions' activities and the increase of the ideology of secularism in culture and lifestyle of people. The multidimensional approach adopted by the Christian missions to evangelize people in all nook and corner of the country is being carried out by various churches, agencies as well as through direct espouse by numerous NGOs. Their activities are termed as 'the revived form of imperialism' and 'neocolonialism' which is obviously the huge threat and challenge for the whole nation in general and Muslims in particular.² In this situation, the Islamic da'wah movements require to explore and implement new methodology to face this enormous challenge to prevent Bangladesh from becoming a Christian country in future. This paper presents a brief outline on da'wah followed by the discussion on challenges of da'wah in Bangladesh with particular reference to the expansion of Christian missions. In addition, several recommendations are made to improve the current situation, and to enhance the spread of da'wah in Bangladesh.

Meaning of Islamic Da'wah:

Scholars have provided various meanings of da'wah. The word *da'wah* is a noun originated from the verb *da'a*, and its infinitive or verbal noun is *du'aa* and *da'wa*.³ The literal meaning of *da'wah* is desire for Allah (*raghbah ila Allah*).⁴ It can denote an appeal for aid or call for help (*istighathah*)⁵, as the Qur'an describes: "*and call (wad'u) to your aid whomsoever you can except Allah, if you speak the truth*".⁶ Another meaning of da'wah can be an invitation to a meal (*walimah*).⁷

The contemporary Muslim scholars use the word da‘wah to denote “calling or invitation to Islam”, for example Abdul Karim Zaydan offers the following meaning:

By da‘wah we mean the “call” to Allah, as Allah the Exalted says:

“Say, this is my way, I call on Allah with sure knowledge, I and whosoever follows me.”⁸

So what is meant by “call to Allah” is the call to His religion, and that is Islam: “*Indeed the religion with Allah is Islam*”⁹ which Muhammad (pbuh) brought from Allah (swt). Thus, Islam is the object of da‘wah and its reality, and that is in fact the first basic or root of da‘wah.¹⁰

In the technical sense, Muhammad al-Ghazālī refers da‘wah as “A perfect program consists of all required knowledge of mankind needed in order to know the purpose of their life and trace his path of life according the experience of guided people”. According to Ghazali Darusalam, da‘wah Islamiyyah is not just to inform others of the *alġĒm* (judgments) contained in the Qur’ān with the purpose of changing their behavior but also to help them realize the ways of Islam and guide them to the fulfillment of the commands of Allah.¹¹ In Islam, da‘wah indicates an invitation extended to humanity by prophets, as Islam professes that the religion of all the prophets is Islam, and Prophet Muġammad’s (pbuh) da‘wah was the last among prophets – known as Islamic daŅwah.¹² Ghazali Darusalam quoting Sheikh Ali Mahfuz mentions that the word da‘wah means calling and inviting for something motivating to a noble aim.¹³ From this it is obvious that da‘wah means believing and practicing the principles of Islam in our lives and then calling other people to follow them.¹⁴ Thus, daŅwah is an organized, a determined and a continuous effort to call the people towards accepting Islam as a way of life and feeling the urgency of establishing the Dġn of Allah, with the sole objective to get the pleasure of Allah.

Islamic da‘wah means invitation to Islam as a faith and as a way of life, as *al-Dġn*. It is an invitation to participate in a dynamic and continuous process of understanding, training, and social action, towards the renovation of human life through *tarbiyyah* and *tazkiyah*, to advocate the appropriate Islamic values, because human being is not self-sufficient, but in need of divine guidance. The DaŅwah to Allah is the duty of the Muslim Ummah. Every Muslim is charged with this mission, as Allah (s.w.t) says:

“Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is Ma‘rūf (right) and forbidding what is Munkar (wrong). And it is they who are the successful¹⁵.”

Every Muslim by virtue of his faith is a missionary of Islam.¹⁶ Ibn KathĒr in his *TafsĒr* points out that the responsibility of daŅwah falls on all Muslims and everybody should be engaged in daŅwah from one’s ability.¹⁷ QurĒubĒ in his *TafsĒr* mentions that fulfilling the obligation of daŅwah is for Ulama because of their Islamic knowledge. While Abu Zahrah in his book *Al DaŅwah il’a al-IslĒm* states that all Muslims shall contribute in daŅwah, but there should be a group specialized in daŅwah to perform the duty more proficiently.¹⁸

History of DaŅwah in Bangladesh:

The advent of Islam in Bangladesh or Bengal is said to be in around year 620 CE (around 10th year of prophethood). MuĒaddith Imam Abadan Marwazi (R), in his book, wrote that the Companions of the Prophet (pbuh) like Abu Waqqas, Malik ibn Wahaib, Qays bin Huzayfah, ‘Urwa ibn Athathah, Abu Qays ibn al-Ēarith (R) and some other Companions, in the seventh year of prophet hood, went on a voyage from Ethiopia (after the first migration) towards China. During their long journey on the ocean for nine years, they stopped over at the ports of Bangladesh, or Bengal. By their influential characters, many a one accepted Islam there.¹⁹ This event is assumed to be in Chittagong, as the major port prevalent in Bangladesh is the port of Chittagong. In an account, Qureishi mentions about the initiation of Islam during the reign of ‘Umr bin al-Khattab (R) through Chittagong, which was, thus, known as ‘Islamabad’ previously.²⁰

Another instance reports about some of the traders who were shipwrecked beside Arkan (a state in Myanmar) in the second century of Hijrah. Those who survived asked for asylum from the Arkan king and later they were able to please the king with their marvelous character and descent behavior, which paved way for them to make abode in Arkan permanently. Later on, a few groups dispatched to propagate Islamic DaŅwah activities where many reached till “*Ukhiya*,” a town in the Cox’s Bazar district, South of Bangladesh.²¹ It is also mentioned about the Sultan of Balkh, Sultan Mahmud Mahi Sawar, who is acknowledged for his contribution for the propagation of Islam from ‘*Swandwip*’ in Chittagong, while he reached up to ‘*Hariramnagar*’ and at last settled down in ‘*Mahasthangarh*’. It is evident through built mosques and Islamic education centres there.²²

Likewise, the Islamic glimpse availed in '*Netrakona*' in the hands of the great sheikh Shah Sultan Muhammad Rumi (R) in the eleventh century. His teachings reached as far as '*Madanpur*.' In twelfth century, another da'ee of Islam named Adam is said to have fought against a Hindu king known as Ballal Sen and martyred in around 1119 CE. This incident occurred in 'Rampal' village near '*Bikrampur*.'²³ Shah Makhdūm Ruposh was another saint who devoted his life in preaching Islam in '*Rajshahi*' a North-Western district of Bangladesh in around 1184 CE.²⁴

Mainly those who brought Islam in Bangladesh were the Arab traders. It was almost a tradition of the then Arab traders to propagate the teachings of Islam wherever they have been, as a result, Islam could laminate the world rapidly. First among the Sufis who came to Bangladesh is said to be 'Abu Yazid al Bistami' (d. 292 AH) from Iran, in the third century. His presence in Chittagong is still evident by the mosque. Next Sufi to come was 'Shah Sultan Mahmud' of Balkh in 439 AH and 'Sayyid Shah Sarkh al-Antiyyah' in 445 AH.²⁵

But Islam, as a political ideology, was first established in Bengal (Bangladesh) through the victory of Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1203 AD, during the reign of Qutb Uddin Aibek of Delhi. It seems to be quite obvious from the historical facts that he only took control over the Western part of Bengal, leaving aside the Eastern side. Later in around 1330 AD, Tughluq Shah of Delhi spread his rule up to the Eastern region setting capitals in 'Satgaon' and 'Sonargaon.'²⁶

The wholesale conversion to Islam of the population of what was to become Bangladesh began in the thirteenth century and continued for hundreds of years.²⁷ Conversion was generally collective rather than individual, although individual Hindus who became outcastes or who were ostracized for any reason often became Muslims. Islamic egalitarianism, especially the ideals of equality, brotherhood, and social justice, attracted numerous Buddhists and lower caste Hindus. Muslim missionaries and mystics, some of whom were subsequently regarded as saints (usually known as *pirs* in Bangladesh), and who wandered about in villages and towns, were responsible for many conversions.²⁸

The Christian Missionary activities as the great threat for Islamic Da'wah in Bangladesh

Although Bangladesh is the second largest Muslim country in the world where 88 percent people are Muslims, there are numerous

challenges for preaching the message of Islam to the people belonging to other religions. This is due to several reasons. The constitution of Bangladesh guarantees all citizens the right “to profess, practice, or propagate any religion” (Article 41). Therefore, the Christian missionaries took this opportunity to evangelize the vulnerable people through various means. As mentioned before, The Christian missionary through a large number of NGOs under the banner of “development partner” working to remove poverty and to bring education, progress and enlightenment to the country are largely engaged in evangelization.²⁹ In the following, we will explore those challenges of da‘wah in detail.

a. The Expansion of Christian Missions:

As far as the depth of faith in Christianity is concerned, each individual feels the necessity to convert people into the religion of Jesus. Arne Rudvin has rightly pointed out that mission is seen to be the personal duty of every individual Christian, who is called as part of his or her faith to witness and to evangelize.³⁰ The concluding verses of the Gospel proclaim:

“Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”³¹

Therefore, it is evident that the command to proclaim the Gospel and to make disciples extends to all nations, to the ends of the world, to the whole creation; there can be no limitation, for the Gospel is for all people.³² The faith of New Testament is that Jesus is Lord and that everything and everybody rightly belongs to him. Mission, therefore, is to bring all mankind to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, because he owns us all, and has a just claim on us all.³³ The task of mission is overwhelmingly thought of as being the commission to proclaim the good news – evangelization.³⁴ Because the main task of the twelve disciples and of the other apostles (**Barnabas, Paul** etc.) was to evangelize.³⁵

However, after the Renaissance in Europe and America, there is a drastic shift of evangelization towards the countries in the south of the world, particularly in Asia. As Andrew Walls states,

“At the threshold of a new age of Christianity, its main base will be in the southern continents, and where its dominant expressions will be filtered through the culture of those countries.”³⁶

Especially after the World War II, the missionaries are very dynamic in the activities. In this strategic point new missionaries have dedicated their life to full-time service with a Christian missionary moving across cultural and linguistic borders.³⁷ For example, a great missionary Mother Teresa was able to win the heart of destitute in the streets of India.

The history of Christianity in the Indian subcontinent from the early times is unrecorded up to the arrival of Vasco Da Gama at Calicut in 1498 followed by the Portuguese rule in Goa and surrounding areas.³⁸ In 1537 they were allowed to settle and open custom houses at Chittagong of present day Bangladesh. In 1577, Mughal Emperor Akbar permitted Portuguese to build permanent settlement and churches in Bengal. Within one hundred years they brought merchants from their own country to trade here. The history of the next hundred years is one of exploitation, plunder and deadly conspiracy on the part of the Christian missionaries and merchants. They advanced a step further from their original target of business and missionary work. They drove the Bengali people into conflicts and clashes. They incited Hindus and Muslims against each other. In 1757 the Christian merchants and the missionaries trampled the sovereign entity of the country by holding out the temptation of the throne to the power-hungry political merchants.³⁹

Bangladesh has a long history of missionary activities. To deflect the vanquished people from their religion the Christian missionaries descended on the villages of Bangla with the Bible in one hand and the weaponry of voluntary service in the other. When the Muslim entity was facing its great crisis, an impoverished, noble, wise and meditative sage, Munshi Meherullah, began his struggle against the royalty-assisted Christian missionaries, and saved the religion of his fellow countrymen and women from them.⁴⁰

The Protestants launched their missionary assault on the language and culture of Bangladesh with the arrival of William Carey in 1773. His missionary activities were financed by the Baptist Missionary Society of England. He devoted himself to the rendering of the Bible and other Christian literature in Bengali.⁴¹ Bengali language and literature were first known and appreciated in Europe through the work of missionaries such as William Carey and his colleagues, who became conversant with the Indian culture and made effort to understand Indian mind in order to translate Scripture.⁴² William Carey and his colleagues concentrated on the production of Christian literature,

published several dictionaries and grammars of the Indian languages, translated the Bible into Bengali and other Indian languages and set up of innumerable schools all over the country.⁴³ He wrote a dictionary named *A Dictionary of Bengali Language*.

William Carey waged a systematic campaign from the Fort William College of Calcutta, the first Anglo-Indian College of the sub-continent and the Sreerampur Missionary Press to de-Islamize Bengali literature by the wholesale replacing of Arabic, Persian and Islamic vocabulary with Sanskritized Hindu religious vocabulary.⁴⁴ The mission activities then spread to other towns like Dinajpur (1795), Jessore (1805), Dhaka (1816), Barisal (1828), Khulna (1860), Chittagong (1881) and Rangpur (1891). Over the years missionary activities have increased. Missions were established between 1900-1947 and also between 1947-1971.⁴⁵ Although promotion of Christianity was one of the objectives of the colonial powers, their most important objective was economic and political exploitation, such as the East Indies Company.⁴⁶

New Missions have been very successful after the creation of Bangladesh because the Christian involvement in their struggle for freedom changed the attitude of the government towards them. Islam became the state religion of Bangladesh only in 1988. Long before that, during the period 1971-1975, eight new missions entered the country and the government's attitude has been especially favorable to them by extending to them facilities which help their objectives.⁴⁷ The churches, missions and Christian agencies have been very happy with their work under such conditions. The objectives of all, apart from helping their own community, have been evangelization.⁴⁸

b. Various Churches, missions and agencies in Bangladesh:

According to David Barrett, the specialist recorder of missionary activity, 420,000 Christian missionaries are involved in trans cultural mission around the world today, and the annual income of global foreign mission amounts to 12 billion U.S. dollars.⁴⁹ From this we can assume the trick of Christian missions around the world. In the context of Bangladesh, we find Protestant churches, Roman Catholic churches and different other agencies for evangelization. Some of the important Protestant churches are: 1) All One in Christ, 2) The Assemblies of God, 3) The Association of Baptists for World Evangelism, 4) Bangladesh Baptist Union, 5) The Bangladesh Northern Evangelical Church, 6) The Baptist Union of Bangladesh, 7) The Church of

Bangladesh, 8) The Church of God, 9) The Churches of God, 10) The Garo Baptist Union, 11) The Evangelical Christian Church, 12) The Khristo Dharmashava, 13) The New Life Centre, 14) Seventh Day Adventists, and 15) The World Missionary Evangelism.⁵⁰ Some of the important Roman Catholic churches are: 1) Congregation of Holy Cross (from USA), 2) Congregation of Holy Cross (from Canada), 3) Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, and 3) St. Francis Xavier.⁵¹

The NGO Bureau of Bangladesh Government has identified 52 NGOs as engaged in converting people into Christianity in one way or another, those are: 1) World Missionary Evangelism, 2) The Salvation Army, 3) Bangladesh Foreign Mission Board, 4) Main-Night Central Committee, 5) Seven-Day Adventist Church of Bangladesh, 6) Adventist Development and Relief Agency International, 7) New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society, 8) Bangladesh Luther Mission (Venice), 9) International Christian Fellowship, 10) Baptist Mid Mission Bangladesh, 11) New Life Center, 12) Baptist Missionary Society, 13) Social and Institution Board, 14) Church of God Mission, 15) Christian Service Society, 16) Community Health Care Project, 17) Finnish Free Foreign Mission, 18) Association of Baptist, 19) Christian Reform World-relief Committee, 20) World Vision of Bangladesh, 21) Bangladesh Luther Mission (Finnish), 22) Young Women's Christian Association of Bangladesh, 23) Bangladesh Bible Society, 24) College of Christian Theology, 25) Christian National Evangelism, 26) The Australian Baptist Missionary Society, 27) World Alliance of YMCA Bangladesh, 28) National Council of YMCA Bangladesh, 29) New Apostolic Church of Bangladesh, 30) Calvary Apostolic Church, 31) Assemblies of God Mission, 32) *Santal* Mission (Norwegian), 33) Presbyterian Plebes in Bangladesh, 34) Bangladesh Luther Mission (Norwegian), 35) *Jatio Church Parishad*, 36) The Church of Bangladesh Social development Program, 37) Friends of Bangladesh, 38) Rainbow House International, 39) Christian Life Bangladesh, 40) Connie, 41) Life Bangladesh, 42) Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB), 43) CARITAS Bangladesh, 44) Swedish Free Mission, 45) Hid Bangladesh, 46) BCRS Foundation Homes, 47) Action aid, 48) World-vision Prayer League, 49) Ideas International, 50) *Rangpur-Dinajpur* Rural Service, 51) *Dip-Shikha*, and 52) World Vision.⁵²

c. Methodologies of Evangelization and Target Population:

The poor of the world are the great missionary force of the present phase in mission history, and churches are growing with astounding vitality in

the world of poverty.⁵³ Since the economy is not self-sufficient, poverty, death and disease plague Bangladesh; precisely this factor attracts missionaries, by using their various skills in education, aid, medical treatment etc. such a society offers many opportunities which they can influence according to their way of thinking. The main thrust of the missionary is also in rural areas because of the concentration of population in these areas.⁵⁴ Churches are being built in the midst of Muslim villages and rice fields, and in strategic corners of big towns, out of all proportion to the Christian presence in the area.⁵⁵

Allocation of the development sector funds for various districts involved many areas, such as agriculture, irrigation, fisheries, health, training and scholarship, agricultural repair, education, cottage industries, rehabilitation, etc. Allocation for the welfare sector took care of destitute, the handicapped, orphans, the sick, under-privileged children, assistance to Tribal, youth groups, poor women and widows, etc. The expenditure layout itself suggested that the thrust of the missions was in rural areas and that it was spread and well organized all over Bangladesh.⁵⁶ In fact, social activity is one of the principal aims of evangelism because it can break down prejudice and suspicion, open closed doors and gain a hearing for the gospel.⁵⁷

The Christian missionaries followed an even more repugnant policy. There were complaints against them that on the one hand they were helping the Bengalis who had left the country, and on the other hand they were the source of secret information to Pakistan's military government. Christian missionaries were also accused of assisting in the dispatch of plundered wealth to West Pakistan.⁵⁸ What is certain, however, is that Christian missions are intensively concentrating on evangelization of Muslims, because the success of their mission in Bangladesh lies in converting its majority population.⁵⁹

After independence in 1971, War-ravaged Bangladesh provided unprecedented opportunities to the Christian World to come in aid of distressed humanity. Unimaginable devastation and countless deaths in the civil war turned the unfortunate country into a fertile soil for the propagation of the message of Jesus among the hungry masses of the new-born state of Bangladesh.⁶⁰ They adopted new methodology of propagation of faith through economic development through the NGOs.⁶¹ The Christian missionaries started to provide funds to the NGOs. In some cases they are directly implicated in the preaching of the Gospel, especially in the rural areas and the tribal belt.⁶² Professor Ruhul Amin mentions: "According to our survey, by 1984 they have

already converted five hundred thousands to Christianity. Their annual target of conversion is 5 million. Its initial symptoms are already manifested in Chittagong Hill Tracts.”⁶³

The Christian missionaries are moving forward and with their assistance, open or tacit, 30,000 NGOs are operating in an area of approximately 54,000 square miles. This concentration of NGOs has resulted in an assault on the customs, culture and religion of the poverty-stricken people of the nation. Society has been destabilized, the social fabric destroyed, families broken up, and religious ideologies subdued in the name of economic liberation, yet the declared objective of poverty alleviation has not been achieved. No significant improvement due to NGO activity has been recorded in any economic sector. Instead there are reports of increased dependence by the poverty-stricken people on the NGOs.⁶⁴ Nuruzzaman poses the question: “Could a single Western country show an example of poverty alleviation through assistance to micro-industry and small credit network? What they did not like for themselves, how could they impose it on others under glamorous slogans of economic development, poverty alleviation, empowering women, and so on?”⁶⁵

Twenty years of diligence on the part of Christian NGOs and missionaries has resulted in an alarming rise in the Christian population to more than 5 million. The Christian missionaries have chalked out an ambitious plan to convert to Christianity one in every three Bangladeshis by 2015. Bangladeshis are heading towards the worst crisis in their history. A situation such as that prevailing in Indonesia may engulf the country at any time.⁶⁶ Deceit, force and financial bait are openly used by the Christian missionaries and their NGOs for the conversion of the Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus to Christianity. An illustration will clarify the ultimate aim of the Christian donor agencies. World Vision of Bangladesh dismissed 500 non-Christian employees for not accepting Christianity.⁶⁷ Another report has mentioned that the World Vision of Bangladesh has chalked out a plan to convert 100,000 Bangladeshi children to Christianity.⁶⁸

More than half the population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts is now Christian. A Christian belt has been deliberately created along the Indian borders.⁶⁹ It is obvious that the NGOs were assisting the separatist movement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Under pressure from the Christian donor nations, missionaries and Christian NGOs, the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina signed a peace accord with the tribal insurgents of the Chittagong Hill Tracts on 2

December 1997. By the so-called peace accord, the NGOs have sown the seeds of separatism in one-tenth of the country from the rest. After the signing of the so-called peace accord, the NGOs are reportedly resorting to the forced conversion of tribal to Christianity. If this trend is not resisted strongly, then CHT will become a Christian homeland.⁷⁰ The Chittagong Hill Tracts is an important area for Christian evangelization. Regarding the tribes in that area, McNee writes:

The greatest gift we can give to Bangladesh is a Christianized Hill Tracts population. The Tribals are under pressure from many directions... The necessity for this change is near bursting point. Christians now number 5 percent of the population. The Hill Tracts is a top priority for evangelistic effort.⁷¹

The Christian missionary converted the tribal people living below the poverty line in the Lama sub-district of Bandarban district. The Christian missionaries also converted the Marma tribe by promising housing facilities and other benefits for them. By giving poor people money, the Christian missionaries have thus destroyed the religion and culture of the aborigines.⁷² The Christian missions and NGOs work among the illiterate, slum-dwellers and ordinary villagers, and they never hesitate to have meals alongside the half-naked aborigines of the Morong tribe in the thick forest of Bandarban. To understand the villagers' mentality properly and to communicate with them, they learn Bengali by attending a short course for three months at the Christian-run institute for the Bengali language in Dhaka and Barisal.⁷³

Conversion among the Muslims is also achieved by taking advantage of their poverty and vulnerability.⁷⁴ People are accepting Christianity to save them from starvation. Christian missionaries have made a deep thrust into the least-developed areas of the country populated by ultra-poor population. Starving illiterate people lose the moral sense of right or wrong and Christian missionaries exploit such painful economic situations. They organize the starving people into different target groups and give them some money. After some time, they openly declare that if the group members become Christian, they will be given jobs, accommodation, more economic benefits, and so on. Finding no alternative, these ultra-poor illiterate people become Christians. Nuruzzaman poses the question: "Is it Christian morality to convert such poor people to Christianity in this way?"⁷⁵

In April 1999, the Home Ministry of the government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh had made strong allegations of large-scale

conversion of lower caste Hindu Santals to Christianity by the Christian missionary-run NGOs. The home ministry pointed out that monetary gain was the main reason behind the conversion of 200 Hindu lower caste families in the districts of Nilphamari and Naogaon. The Lutheran Mission (Danish) and sixty other Christian NGOs are spending billions of dollars for converting poor illiterate Bangladeshis to Christianity. There are allegations against the Christian missionaries and their NGOs that they are totally unfit for socio-economic development, that is, the alleviation of poverty. These organizations are spending charity money collected in the name of the poverty-stricken people of Bangladesh for the construction of churches and hostels for the newly converted Christians, and stipends and jobs for the Christian community. They are using the charity money for high-salaried consultants and experts with expertise only in the evangelization of poor Bangladeshis.⁷⁶

Christian missionaries and NGOs are building houses for the newly converted people, arranging jobs for them, digging wells and sanitary latrine, and giving them allowances for health care and education. Muslims have changed their names, their children attend Christian schools, and they attend Sunday prayers in newly built churches.⁷⁷ The direct or indirect inclusion of Christian missionaries in the economic development of Bangladesh has resulted in many problems. Since the ultimate objective of the Christian missionary-sponsored NGOs is the 'evangelization of the people of Bangladesh', their economic development programs do not aim at benefiting the rural people. To the NGOs and their subsidiary organizations all over the country the economic development of the suffering rural people is not an end in itself, rather it is a means to an end.⁷⁸

The idea is to create an economically and educationally influential community of converts who would control all the key sectors of power.⁷⁹ The claim of the NGOs for development and the removal of poverty were negated when a case study was conducted in a locality where NGOs had been working for some years and where people still die of diarrhea resulting from malnutrition and eating poor and harmful food.⁸⁰ The much-publicized participation of NGOs in the development of rural Bangladesh has neither increased the per capita income of the people nor reduced the level of poverty. It highlights the ineffectiveness of the development strategy adopted by them. From the angle of the economic development of Bangladesh, the NGOs have been a great failure.⁸¹ Since the Christian missionary-run NGOs have

come to Bangladesh with the noble intention of serving humanity in distress by improving economic conditions, the mismanagement, corruption and economic exploitation of people negate their declared aim.⁸²

The methods used by those NGOs are corruption, seduction and conversion through many policies, like the policy of employing Muslims last and to favor those who convert.⁸³ The Christian missionaries utilize different strategies, tactics and approaches to facilitate evangelization, some of which are: a) People's Movement, b) Education, c) Evangelization of women, d) Christian literature, e) Bible correspondence schools and reading rooms, f) Medical services, g) Orphanages, h) Direct preaching, i) Bible reading groups, j) Relief and rehabilitation, and k) Other emergency aid programs.⁸⁴

In addition to these, they use the opportunity of globalization to achieve their aimed target. Missionaries today go about their work making use of the globalization process.⁸⁵ New specialized agencies for Bible translation, broadcasting media, health services or mass evangelism developed in the United States, and their missionary concept and methodologies, which reflected American cultural values and mores, have become influential around the world.⁸⁶ Rene Padilla affirms: "Gospel has to be distributed among the greatest number of consumers of religion, for twentieth century has provided with the perfect tool – technology. The strategy for the evangelization of the world thus becomes a question of mathematical calculation."⁸⁷

d. Success of the Christian Missions:

It is evident that the Christian missions are operating effectively and successfully in a Muslim majority country like Bangladesh. They have been able to win the heart of the poor people through various means. They are utilizing the process of globalization to accomplish their goals. They have already converted half of the tribal people in various part of the country. They have great plan for evangelizing Hindu community as well as the Muslims. With the increase of Christian population in the hill regions of this country, problems like Lebanon may be created.⁸⁸ The following statistics will demonstrate the expansion of Christianity.

Table 1: Growth of Christian population in Bangladesh⁸⁹

Year	Catholic	Protestant	Total
1939	20,000	30,000	50,000
1970	120,000	80,000	200,000
1980	170,000	130,000	300,000
1990	n.a.	n.a.	4,800,000
1992	n.a.	n.a.	5,000,000

Table 2: Ratio of Christian population in Bangladesh⁹⁰

Year	Christian	Among the rest
1881	1	6,000
1901	1	1,000
1982	1	326
1990	1	29
1992	1	22
2000	1	11
2015*	1	3

* *Projected plan to be achieved by 2015*

A recent media report illustrates that the Christian missionary workers are quite active in their movement. On November 28, 2007, Bangladesh authorities arrested 14 ‘Chin’ Christian missionary workers as some local people complained to local authorities from Rumana village in Bardarban town in Chittagong hill tracts, Bangladesh for distributing Christian Bible tracks (Booklet) in the areas.⁹¹ It should be noted that the Chin Christian missionary workers mainly target its mission to Bawn community in Bardarban district. It is easier for those missionary workers to evangelize people as the people from Bawn tribe use the same language that used by Lai tribe in

Chin state from Burma and Mizoram state, northeast India.⁹² Thus, the missionary workers get better opportunity for spreading Christianity among people in that area.

Saidul Islam has pointed out three reasons of success of Christian missionaries in promoting Christianity in Bangladesh, those are⁹³: 1) Missionaries are incredibly hard working and sincere. 2) They have awful cooperation and collaboration with some powerful NGOs. 3) It is easy to work with the vulnerable and poverty-stricken people. In addition, their collaboration is with the political parties who are not sensitive towards Islam.

Conclusion and recommendations:

Although Bangladesh is one of the largest Muslim majority countries in the world, it has numerous challenges in the field of da'wah. From the above discussion it is apparent that the Christian missions are incredibly active in evangelizing people by taking the opportunity of their poverty and underprivileged situation. By this way, the Christian missionaries are destroying the Iman of many poor Muslims. This is alarming for the Muslims around the world because the Ummah should struggle against those missions from spreading Christianity in the world, particularly in the Muslim mainstream countries. In order to materialize this vision, the Muslim intellectuals and philanthropists must adopt proper approach in preaching da'wah to people. In the case of Bangladesh, it requires the Islamic institutions and organizations to have proper investigation on the issue and encounter those foreign funded missions from converting people into Christianity.

To facilitate this process and to face those challenges, the Muslim missions should be dynamically involved in wining the heart of people with the command of Allah (swt) *“Invite (all) to the Way of your Lord with wisdom, good advices and beautiful preaching with the best approaches (and scientific arguments)”* (16:125). The poor people entail the correct knowledge of Islam as well as the basic necessities to maintain their life with dignity. Therefore, the Muslim donors should provide them with financial assistance and material needs, and rehabilitate them with proper care so that they can become self-reliant. Similarly, the Muslim da'wah missions should offer proper supervision in solving the problems of their daily life. In this way Muslim missions can attract the mass people to inform them about the beauty of Islam so that they can follow the real teachings of Islam in all aspects of life. ISMA'IL R. AL-FARUQI correctly states that it follows from the divine

commandment that da'wah must be the end product of a critical process of intellection with tests of correspondence with reality and it should never stop.⁹⁴

Islamic NGOs must have strategic plans in order to make the multidimensional and interdisciplinary linkage of different branches of knowledge and proficiency.⁹⁵ They should establish Islamic education scholarship foundation in order to help poor students. Because education as a backbone of the society may reform and upgrade Muslim thought, society and life style and to unite them as a justly balanced Muslim Ummah and to be witnesses over the nations. The Qur'ān says: *(Thus we have made you justly a balanced Ummah, that you might be witnesses over the nations)* [2:143].

Furthermore, there is a vital necessity to change the secular curricula of Bangladesh into an integration of both revealed and conventional knowledge. The government of Bangladesh and the Muslim missions should design the curricula accordingly. In the political aspects, they should prompt people in order to uphold the basic human rights, fundamental freedoms within the Islamic paradigm and to establish justice and righteousness in favorable and neutral atmosphere towards all humanity equally. The hatred to others should be omitted from the hearts of the believers. No situation can make them swerve for committing wrong and prejudice from fairness⁹⁶. The armed forces should not be allowed to be involved in politics or interfere with the work of the freely elected government in power. Political leaders must hold the principles of morality and be dedicated to the welfare of the people⁹⁷. To Kamal Hassan,⁹⁸ leaders set the example of enlightened, knowledgeable, honest, trustworthy, virtuous, caring and incorruptible leadership. Civil servants carry out their responsibilities ethically with keeping the trust of the people and the authority. High moral principles should be available in political culture and behavior. The role of media should be to promote and upgrade moral consciousness, spiritual developments and feeling of accountability of people towards Allah (swt). Politicians and Ulama must be tolerant and listener willingly different opinions of one another. Internal conflicts should be solved within their own circle without foreign interference. Government and opposition groups should not be confrontational but cooperative and operate in the spirit of complementarily for the common interest and people's well being. People should not engage in promoting falsehood, immorality, backbiting, defamation or slander.

Muslims who are economically sound should wake up and adjust themselves with the essential knowledge on how to fully utilize the economic resources and manpower of the country so that they will not be left behind in facing challenges and obstacles towards development of da‘wah activities in the competitive society.⁹⁹ Due to this reason national and international economic institutions or organizations may play vital role for economic integration between nations with more transparency, equity and efficiency. Instead of complaining about foreign culture and media invasion of the Muslim societies, Muslims must take initiative to stop that invasion according to their material abilities.

Muslim information companies can take initiative for the investment information in order to shift from being national firms with limited reach to huge multinational conglomerates recognizing no geographical boundaries like Sky B, CNN, ABC, Voice of America, and Star TV and so on. The Media, both print and electronic, should become the means not only of providing information but also of promoting the public good moral consciousness and spiritual development. They should also promote to develop inter-ethnic and inter-religious relationship between Muslim and others, which are based on religious, moral and ethical principles in all areas of common interest and concern for general welfare of humanity. The reason is that the media should be morally responsible and should not engage in promoting falsehood, immorality, backbiting, defamation and slander. The Islamic websites, chat rooms, Islamic CD, VCDs and DVDs can be utilized as apparatus for disseminating Islamic thought, culture and lifestyle.

In addition to this, the increase of Christian missions by diverse modes, poses an obvious challenge for the da‘wah movement in Bangladesh. As globalization influences the religion and lifestyle of people, Muslims need to utilize this process as the prime opportunity to spread the message of Islam to people around the world. Moreover, the Muslim Ummah must have a powerful media to transmit the Islamic entertainment, from which Bangladeshi people can be benefited. The Muslim Ummah must extend the helping hand to overcome the challenges endeavored by Bangladeshi Muslims to facilitate spreading the message of Allah in every corner of the country. Therefore, da‘wah ought to take practical steps to strengthen the Islamic front academically, socially, and economically.¹⁰⁰

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- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Hud:13, It can also refer to an appeal to Allah or prayer, as the Qur’ān says: *When a wave covers them like the canopy (of clouds), they call to Allah, offering Him sincere devotion* (**LuqmĒn**: 32)
- 7 *Ibid.*
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- 15 SURAH AL-IMRAN: 104
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- 17 SHAFIQ, MUHAMMAD (1996); *Islamic Da‘wah: A Message for All*, (Rawalpindi: Universal Books), PP. 16
- 18 *Ibid.*, Da‘wah is to invite mankind to worshiping Allah alone, follow His Straight Path, and keep away from all sorts of disbelief and evil. The Qur’ān tells us, “*And We sent not before you any messenger except that We revealed to him that, ‘There is no deity worthy of worship expect Me, so worship Me’.*” Da‘wah is regarded to be the Muslim responsibility to invite others to accept Islam as a way of life. It is also a process of reviving the Islamic ways and its system in individual and societal life. Da‘wah is often referred to as the act of *preaching* Islam. It can be applied to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. For example, in the

Qurʾān, Surah An-Nahl: 125 states “Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are best.”

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