

Roots and Fruits

Retrieving Scotland's Missionary Story in **Pakistan**

A personal account by Margaret Nutter

Background

Pakistan was not in existence at the time when the Church of Scotland began its work in the area of the Punjab (1857) which is now in Pakistan. In common with other work in the Indian sub-Continent there were three main strands to the missionary story - Evangelism, Education and Medical work. In the West Punjab perhaps one of the most significant events of early work was the death of Hunter in the war of 1857 -one of the main churches in Sialkot is a memorial to him -more of that later. Evangelism certainly included the preaching of the Gospel but in modern terms might have been described as Church Planting. It also covered work among women and children, micro credit schemes, orphanages, provision for converts and literature in various languages. Education provided schools for boys and girls including boarding facilities and tertiary education in Murray College (founded 1897) to degree level, and later in the Seminary in Gujranwala. Medical work was conducted mainly through two hospitals one in Gujrat and one in Jalalpur Jattan.

My Appointment

In 1966 as one of the first physiotherapists appointed by the Church of Scotland I joined the staff of the hospital in Jalalpur Jattan at that time under the Medical Board of Sialkot Church Council (part of the United Church of North India and Pakistan). I remember wondering about this place Jalalpur Jattan before I accepted the appointment. Where was it, what was it like? No-one told me that the founder of the Hospital Dr Lechmere Taylor had been challenged by the Mission Board for building a rural retreat for himself in Jalalpur Jattan! It was rural even in the 1960s. By that time it was the only medical work organised by Sialkot Church Council as the Dow Memorial Hospital in Gujrat had already closed. I arrived to set up a Physiotherapy Department - the only indication that this might be a useful move was the fact that many older people came in crowds twice each year for cataract surgery. Like all missionaries at that time I was expected to complete at least two years of Language Study which I did part-time in Jalalpur Jattan in the winter months and full time in Murree in the summer months, and forty years later in 2007 I saw the Murree Language School continues to flourish.

Let's look at the situation then, reflect back to how it had been and forward to how it is now.

The Church

I read recently that in 1927 there were only three Kirk Sessions in Sialkot District. Considerable work must have been undertaken for the work of the mission to be handed over to The Sialkot Church Council in 1953 which was to all intents and purposes a Presbytery of the United Church of North India and Pakistan and had about 40,000 members. By the time I arrived in 1966 work was well under way for the further union which took place in 1970 when the Church of Pakistan and the Church of North India were formed.

I became involved in Church Council as I was for a short time Secretary of the Medical Board. That was an interesting experience but on reflection not one I should have had to undertake so early on in my missionary career. It was fine to record minutes and write reports but it was very difficult to both understand and keep out of the politics of the situation. Although I regret having been in that situation I sometimes also wonder if things would be better now if expatriates were involved in Boards and Committees.

While I was in Pakistan much time and energy in the church was spent on internal politics. Nevertheless there were and are many very faithful Pastors and Bible Teachers and Evangelists who helped the Church develop. It was a time when Sunday Schools were thriving helped by United Bible Training Centre in Gujranwala, later Sunday School work did lapse but I it has a new lease of life as I saw on a visit in 2006.

Evangelism

Christians are a minority group in Pakistan. The main piece of Evangelism I was aware of while in Pakistan was the big Sialkot Convention (somewhat after the style of the Keswick Convention). There was also distribution of literature particularly by the daily ministry by the pastor of the local church and Bible Teacher within the Shilokh Hospital and Bible Correspondence Courses.

I understand that more overtly evangelistic work has been undertaken in recent years notably the Peace Train organised a number of years ago by Operation Mobilisation but supported by local congregations.

Education work

The Education Board was responsible for a number of Christian Schools (all vernacular) till 1973 when they were nationalised. Christian teachers transferred to Government service but some new schools (Cathedral Schools) have emerged which are English Medium. It was a difficult time as I remember as I happened as manager to have responsibility for the small school in Jalalpur Jattan at the time. Some institutions notably Forman Christian College in Lahore (where former President Pervaiz Musharraf received some of his education) have been handed back to the church. The Girls Boarding School at Barahpathar Sialkot continued initially as St Columba Girls RTC with girls going to local schools for education but has again become a teaching facility with several hundred children on its books and has just achieved affiliation with the Gujranwala School Board (2008). There is discussion from time to time regarding returning control of Institutions to the churches which previously owned them.

Medical work

I went out primarily as a physiotherapist to work in Shilokh Hospital. I did succeed in setting up a small department but contrary to expectation my greatest input was in paediatrics and orthopaedics not elderly care. There was no other Children's Ward (for about one hundred miles in any direction) so our children's ward was usually more or less full. Some of my happiest memories are of working there. For various reasons I also became involved in teaching physiotherapy in Rawalpindi at St Joseph's Hospice and helping out in other Christian Hospitals when they had a need of a physiotherapist (like visiting Orthopaedic Surgeons) these included Bach Christian Hospital, Abbottabad and Christian Hospital, Sahiwal. This allowed a young man I had trained as an assistant to work without continual supervision. The work I helped with in St Joseph's Hospice in Rawalpindi continues to thrive (I visited it in 2006). However there is no longer physiotherapy department in Jalalpur Jattan as the young man I trained died. While I was in Jalalpur Jattan a rural clinic was set up in Youngsonabad a Christian Village some 100 miles distant. This was serviced by a doctor and nurse from Jalalpur visiting for two days once in two weeks and the rest of the time being looked after by a trained nurse/midwife who was the wife of the local Pastor.

I visited the Shilokh Hospital in Jalalpur Jattan in 1998 and was disappointed to see how little work was being done and have not returned since. I also hear that some of the property has been sold.

Hunter Memorial Church (1857)

I said I would return to Sialkot and Hunterpur Church and this is the time to do so. This church has been extended in the past and they are collecting money to extend it further for it cannot accommodate all who wish to worship there. Indeed from the memory of Thomas Hunter there is a thriving Congregation.

Pakistan now?

I have been fortunate to return three times and have an invitation to go back again. The Christians are a minority community and are often persecuted, yet they continue to

witness to Jesus Christ. Many people have served the Church both foreign and national and we can only hope and pray that this little church will continue to grow.

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