



RESEARCH ARTICLE

EMERGENCE OF MISSIONARIES IN THE DOABA REGION OF PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Christian missionaries in the Doaba region of Punjab during British colonial rule (1849–1947). With the arrival of groups such as the American Presbyterian Mission and the Church Missionary Society in the mid-19th century, Doaba became a focal point for evangelism, education, and social reform. While conversion was a central aim, the missionaries' establishment of schools, hospitals, and vocational centres brought lasting changes to the region's social and institutional landscape. Missionaries introduced Western-style education and medical care, creating new opportunities for education and healthcare access, especially among Dalit and lower-caste communities. Their work in literacy, vocational training, and public health contributed to social mobility and challenged traditional hierarchies. At the same time, missionary activities stimulated responses from local religious and social movements, leading to the growth of indigenous educational and reform initiatives. The colonial government's relationship with the missions shifted over time, from early support to greater regulation after 1857. Despite periods of local resistance, missionary institutions left a durable legacy in Doaba's educational infrastructure, public health systems, and social organization. This research argues that the missionary presence acted as a catalyst for both modernization and community-based reform, shaping a complex socio-religious landscape that continued to influence the region long after independence.

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INTRODUCTION

By focusing on Doaba, this study highlights the region's unique experience within Punjab's broader colonial history, illustrating how missionary endeavours intersected with local agency, state policy, and social change to forge a distinctive modern identity for the area. Historical Background of Missionary Activities in Punjab. "Though Punjab was a British province, there were also a number of Indian states here. In East Punjab, the largest was Patiala. Nabha Jind and Kapurthala. There were more small states, as well as twenty-one hill states with nine Feudatories."¹ The expansion of Christian missionaries was noted to begin in the 16th century². It happened with the arrival of Portuguese Jesuits. The large-scale activities started during the rule of the British in the 19th century³. The Church Missionary Society or CMS, the Baptist Missionary Society or BMS as well as the American Presbyterian Mission were some of the key organizations that have notably contributed to the promotion of Christianity. Various types of missionary work in Punjab were started

in the early 1800s⁴. The Ludhiana Mission that took place in the year 1834 was among one of the first centres (It analyzes the complex impact of Christian missionary work in colonial Punjab and the resulting social, religious, and political responses from 1849 to 1947).⁵ Christian missionaries kept the proper focus on improving the conditions of education and healthcare as well as promoting different types of social reforms. This is why they have established various schools and hospitals. There were various Christian mission stations across Punjab by the year 1855. This has included Amritsar, Jalandhar as well as Lahore⁶. The British colonial government was noted to provide huge support to the Christian missionaries. It was done by providing missionaries with land and financial aid. This generally happens for two crucial reasons. The first was to promote Western education and values. The second was to create a loyal class of Indians who were educated. The Revolt of 1857 led to the creation of various stricter government controls over the activities of Christian missionaries⁷. Despite this, their influence continued to grow taking

¹Roshan Dalal (2003), History of India, Penguin Books, New Delhi, p.20.

²Jedwab, Remi, Felix Meier zuSelhausen, and Alexander Moradi (2022), "The economics of missionary expansion: Evidence from Africa and implications for development." *Journal of Economic Growth, 27.2: pp. 149-192.*

³Basu Roy, Tiasa (2021), "Intertwining Christian Mission, Theology, and History: A Case Study of the Basel Mission among the Thiyyas and Badagas of Kerala, 1870–1913." *Religions 12.2: 121.*

⁴Pepper, Salt (2023), "Christianisation of Punjab." *Medium, 24 Sept. 2023, saltpepper.medium.com/christianisation-of-punjab-25c21759a +252.* Accessed 20 Feb. 2025.

⁵Pervaiz, Huma(2023), "Unravelling the Dynamics of Christian Missionary Evangelical Activities in Colonial Punjab (1849-1947)." *Al-Irfan 8.15: 1-11.*

⁶Kaur, Gurpreet(2021). "Socio-Religious Cultural Reform Movements in Promoting Education in Punjab." *International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research, Volume:06, Issue:10 "October2021" p 3863.*

⁷Shah, Naira Nisar. "British Government as Proselytizing Auxiliary of Christian Missionaries. "the British government directly enabled missionary

the help of Christian schools and institutions. This is how Christian Missionaries have contributed to shaping the sociocultural landscape of Punjab. This specific background has set the stage for different types of missionary activities in the Doaba region of Punjab where they played a key role in the matter of creating urbanization and social upliftment. The activities of Christian missionaries had further expansion between the time period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries⁸. This fact was particularly evident in various rural areas of Punjab. This also includes the Doaba region. On the other hand, the Christian missionaries have also put a significant effort in the matter of establishing the printing presses. The printing presses were established with the aim of increasing the distribution of various Christian literature in different types of languages that were common in the contemporary local area. This specific effort has contributed to making the approach of religious teachings more accessible for the locals. The Christian missionaries have also effectively introduced vocational training in mission schools⁹. This specific advancement made by Christian missionaries in Punjab has contributed to helping students in the matter of acquiring skills beyond the boundary of the basic education system. On the other hand, missionaries have also played a great role in the process of translating the Bible into the Punjabi language¹⁰. This is how they further strengthened their influence on the Doaba region and allover Punjab. There were several Christian communities in Punjab that were formed during the time of early 1900s¹¹. This change was particularly noticed among different types of marginalised groups who consider the aspects of effective education and healthcare as an opportunity for uplifting their social status. The impact that was created by the Christian missionaries was noted to be long-lasting. This was evident in the fact that many Christian missionaries have continued to do their operation on uplifting society and education in Punjab even after the independence of India in the year 1947¹². The advent of missionaries in Doaba made significant developments in this region. Education and health services in the rural areas were focused. Multiple responsibilities were met like upliftment of the marginalized, urbanization of the rural area and task facing challenges.

The Arrival of Missionaries in the Doaba Region: Doaba region in Punjab started facing Christian missionary activities in the mid-19th century. This establishment was followed by notable expansion in the whole of Punjab. The American Presbyterian Mission and the Church Missionary Society or CMS were noted to be among the first organizations that established centers in Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur¹³. It was done around the years between 1855 to 1860. There were various key figures who played a crucial role in keeping the focus on the matter of education and social reforms¹⁴. On the other hand, the Ludhiana Mission also expanded to the area of Doaba to promote the

conversion efforts (it was an "auxiliary") before the 1857 revolt forced it to adopt a more neutral public stance.

⁸Ardener, Shirley, Fiona Bowie, and Deborah Kirkwood, eds. (2021), *Women and missions: Past and present: Anthropological and historical perceptions*. Routledge,

⁹Mohabbat, Mohammad Dilshad, Muhammad Hassan, and Muhammad Ayaz Rafi(2021), "Blessing in Disguise: Recommendations of Indian Education Commission (1882) and Christian Missionaries' Educational Policy in the Colonial Punjab." *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 2.4: 873-887.

¹⁰Green, Nile. "Christian Missionaries, Pashtun Middlemen, and the Attempt to Convert Kafiristan." *The Roots of Peristan* (2024). pp by Nile Green connects the translation efforts in Punjab to a broader regional strategy of using print and local cultural brokers (like Pashtuns) to spread Christianity, highlighting missions as complex cultural translation projects.

¹¹Pervaiz, Huma (2023), "Unravelling the Dynamics of Christian Missionary Evangelical Activities in Colonial Punjab (1849-1947)." *Al-Irfan* 8.15: 1-11.

¹²Ibid 1-11.

¹³Kaur, Gurpreet. *Development of Higher Education in Colonial Punjab (1880-1920)*. Diss. Panjab University Chandigarh, 2021.cites Kaur's dissertation to establish the chronology and key missionary organizations (American Presbyterian and CMS) that first institutionalized evangelical and educational work in the Doaba region.

¹⁴Gill, Daljit Kaur(2023). "Impact of Socio-Religious Reform Movements on Education in Punjab (1849-1947)." It points to research on how socio-religious reform movements, spurred by missionary activities, responded by founding their own educational institutions in the late 1850s, with key indigenous reformers leading this effort.

aspects of literacy and healthcare. There was a mixed reception received from the locals. But people who belonged to different types of lower castes as well as marginalised groups were more accepting of the reforms created by the Christian missionaries¹⁵. This was happening because of the promise of education as well as the upliftment created. On the other hand, the people who belonged to the elite class of Sikh and Hindu resisted the efforts created by missionaries in Punjab¹⁶. This specific resistance was drawn by the fear of cultural erosion. Despite these, missionary schools as well as hospitals managed to gain higher acceptance over the period of time. These changes within the society in Punjab have notably influenced the social and educational development in the Doaba region. Table 1 provides the presentation of key milestones in the arrival as well as the establishment of missionary activities in the Doaba region of Punjab. Research has found that there was a crucial role played by Christian missionaries in the process of introducing English education. On the other hand, they have also promoted literacy and established services of healthcare. The specific contributions made by the Christian missionaries in the Doaba region of Punjab have expanded throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. This specific fact has led to the establishment of different significant institutions. Some of these include St. Stephen's College¹⁷. Different types of challenges were posed by the aspects of partition in the year 1947. This influence of partition has transformed the education as well as the society in the Doaba region.

Table 1. Key milestones in missionary activities in Doaba region

1.	1834	First Missionary Activities	The first Protestant missionaries arrived in Punjab, including the Doaba region.
2.	1848	Establishment of Missionary Schools	The first missionary schools were established, focusing on English education and local languages.
3.	1850s	Expansion of Missionary Work	Missionaries expanded their efforts into various towns within Doaba, promoting education and healthcare.
4.	1864	Formation of the Church Mission Society	The Church Mission Society began formal operations in Punjab, including the Doaba region.
5.	1870s	Growth of Educational Institutions	Several schools and colleges were founded, contributing to the literacy and educational advancement of local populations.
6.	1900	Establishment of St. Stephen's College	One of the notable institutions established by missionaries, focusing on higher education.
7.	1947	Post-Partition Changes	Many missionaries left due to partition, but their educational legacy continued to influence the region.

Missionary Influence and Key Contributions in Doaba Region: The contribution of Christian missionaries is very precious in the matter of properly shaping different aspects of Indian society¹⁸. It also includes the Doaba region of Punjab. Christian missionaries have made significant changes in the factors of education, social reforms as well as cultural transformation since their arrival in the Doaba region

¹⁵Rashid, Muhammad. "Christian minority of Lahore: Socio-political challenges and options (2001-2014)." *Journal of Emerging Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities* 2.1 (2024): 39-48.

¹⁶Singh, Kirit James (2023). *Sikh Patronage of Hindustani Music and Šabab Kirtan in Colonial Punjab, 1857-1947*. Diss. SOAS University of London, It illustrates how elite Sikh patronage of their own religious and cultural traditions (like ſabab kirtan) was a key strategy of resistance, reinforcing community identity against missionary influence

¹⁷Shafiq, Aiman (2025). "Foundation of Modern Education: The Establishment of Punjab University and the Role of Anjuman-I-Punjab in Shaping Regional Education in Colonial Punjab." *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)* 8.1: 1207-1216.

¹⁸Ashraf, TP Muhammad (2023). "Preaching Islam in a Migratory Context: Sermons, Migrant Spaces, and Religious Practices among Keralite Sunni Muslim Migrants in Qatar." *Practices of Islamic Preaching*: 131-152.

of Punjab during the period of the 19th century. Several schools, colleges as well as hospitals were established with the involvement of Christian missionaries. This is how they contributed to providing strength to the backbone of modern education as well as healthcare in the region. The primary focus of these Christian institutions was to spread formal education among all in the Doaba region¹⁹. There were a notable number of institutions that have played a crucial role. Some of these institutions include Christian Medical College, Ludhiana which was founded in 1894, and St. Mary's School in Jalandhar²⁰. Apart from that, the Christian missionaries were also noted to provide education on vocational skills. These have influenced the improvement of the socio-economic status of communities from marginalised groups. These include the Dalits and rural populations in Doaba. The role of Christian missionaries in providing various job opportunities to marginalised communities in the Punjab Doaba region was notable. These specific job opportunities have helped the marginalised communities in Punjab to achieve independence in the financial matter. There were many such schools that were run by missionaries who provided vocational training to the marginalised group in Punjab²¹. These trainings were especially on various types of crafts like carpentry, weaving as well as tailoring. These trainings have provided the opportunity for individuals to secure stable livelihoods among the restrictions of the contemporary society. On the other hand, there were women from various lower casts who benefited from the knowledge of crafts like sewing and embroidery. This training provided them with the opportunity to initiate their earning. The facilities of healthcare that were provided by the Christian missionaries also made a notable contribution to the socio-economic upliftment of these communities from the lower castes of Punjab²². These were done by making a significant reduction in the rates of mortality rates. On the other hand, the overall well-being was also enhanced. Mission hospitals in Punjab in the contemporary society provide affordable or sometimes free treatments. These specific efforts have made sure that people who belong to the groups that are underprivileged get easy access to proper medical care. On the other hand, Christian missionaries in Punjab also promoted the approach of land ownership²³. They have also made advancements in agriculture among rural populations. This was done with the help of equipping them with better techniques of farming. These efforts collectively worked on reducing the aspects of social inequalities. On the other hand, they have also provided opportunities for marginalised communities to be integrated into mainstream society²⁴. It was noted that many individuals who were educated in missionary institutions secured government jobs over time. This is how they further enhanced their social mobility in the Doaba region. The contribution of Christian missionaries to social reforms in Punjab is another notable contribution²⁵. This fact was clearly evident in their active

participation in different types of campaigns that were designed against practices like female infanticide, child marriage as well as caste discrimination. Christian missionaries have provided invaluable efforts in the matter of promoting the rights of women²⁶. It was particularly done with the help of establishing schools for girls as well as different types of healthcare facilities. On the other hand, there was also a crucial role of The American Presbyterian Mission and the Church Missionary Society in the matter of advancing the practices of gender equality²⁷. This is how they provided various crucial opportunities for women in Doaba. Christian missionaries also noted to effectively collaborate with various Indian reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy in abolishing evil practices like Sati in 1829²⁸. This fact clearly showcases the broader role of Christian missionaries in social justice movements. Research has identified that Christian missionaries significantly combated different types of social evils in India from the year 1834²⁹. Some of these include Sati, child marriage as well as untouchability. The missionaries have campaigned against these specific practices that were harmful to society. It was noted that the efforts that were made by Christian Missionaries in the abolition of sati led to the rise of the Sati Regulation Act of 1829³⁰. On the other hand, Missionaries also worked on the task of preventing the marriages of children with the help of promoting the opportunities of education for girls. These specific efforts provided significant help in shifting the attitudes of society toward early marriage. They also have noted to challenge the discrimination of the caste system. This is how they advocated equality on the basis of Christian teachings. It is now very clear that the role of Christian missionaries was very significant in the process of enhancing the quality of life for Dalits as well as various other marginalised communities in the Doaba region of Punjab³¹. They have provided various types of vocational training along with the formal education. These specific approaches have offered the opportunity for marginalised communities to break the cycle of poverty and continuous suffering. There were many such missionary schools and institutions that have heartily welcomed students from all castes. This is how they have openly challenged all the rigid caste-based discrimination that was prevalent in the contemporary society of Punjab. Missionaries at that time also encouraged different small-scale industries, introduced various modern techniques of agricultural as well as helped local individuals in the matter of developing sustainable sources of income. On the other hand, Christian missionaries in Punjab also established various orphanages and shelters³². These specific shelters gave protection to the widows or the children who were abandoned. This is how the missionaries have marked their efforts in the matter of providing safety as well as a way to a better future. These specific impacts were long-lasting. They were also evident in the gradual social upliftment

¹⁹Jodhka, Surinder S(2024). "Sikh Religion and Contentions around Caste." *Religions* 15.10: 1219.

²⁰Kaur, Maninder (2022). "Church Missionary Society in Colonial Punjab: Educational and Medical Welfare Work (1850-1920)." *Editorial Board*: 155.

²¹Kakkar, Ankur(2021). *The Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School of Lahore: A Study of Educational Reform in Colonial Punjab, ca. 1885-1925*. Risktaker provides a comparative context, showing that the vocational education offered by Christian missions was part of a larger competitive landscape of educational reform, which included indigenous movements like the Arya Samaj establishing rival institutions (like the D.A.V. schools).

²²Patras, Ayra Indrias (2024). "Examining Pakistan's Relationship with Religious Minorities: A Case Study of the Christian Community." *NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability*: 80-94.

²³Bangash, Yaqoob Khan. "Missionaries and the Development of Education in the Punjab, 1849-1855." *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 58.1 (2021): 1. Focuses on the foundational period of missionary-led education, not their later medical or social work, which are the subjects of your paragraph.

²⁴Tabassum, Ammara, and Naudir Bakht. "Socio-Economic Status of Minorities of Punjab: A Critical Analysis of Christians." *Journal of Politics and International Studies* 6.2 (2023). Tabassum and Bakht provides contemporary data and analysis on the socio-economic outcomes of these historical missionary efforts, critically examining the long-term status of the Christian minority community in modern Punjab.

²⁵Gill, Dr Daljit Kaur. "Impact of Socio-Religious Reform Movements on Education in Punjab (1849-1947)." (2023). Gill's work analyzes how local socio-religious reform movements, in reaction to missionary influence,

established their own schools and colleges to promote their own religious and social agendas, creating a competitive educational landscape.

²⁶Patras, Ayra Idris(2024) "Examining Pakistan's Relationship with Religious Minorities: A Case Study of the Christian Community." *NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability* (2024): 80-94.

²⁷Sharkey, Heather J(2021). "American Missionaries in Egypt, Gender Relations, and the Professional and Social Formation of Women, 1854-1967." *Social Sciences and Missions* 34.1-2 (2021): 62-91.

²⁸Kumar, S. Vijay. "Raja Ram Mohan Roy-A Great Reformer-Analysis. "Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and his broader role in abolishing Sati in 1829, a campaign that occurred primarily in Bengal before the annexation of Punjab.

²⁹Rao, Parimala V. "The Colonial State, Protestant Missionaries and Indian Education, 1790-1858." *Missionary Education: Historical Approaches and Global Perspectives* 1 (2021): 147.

³⁰Blunn, Suzanne Amanda (2024). *Sati and its abolition in British social and political discourses c. 1832-1895*. Diss. Birkbeck, University of London, pp Blunn analyzes how the abolition of Sati in Bengal (1829) was debated in London, framing it as a precedent used later to justify broader colonial social interventions in places like Punjab.

³¹Deol, Amrit P(2021). *Waves of Revolution: Interrogations of Sikh Political and Spiritual Subjectivities in Punjab and the American West, 1900-1928*. University of California, Merced, the University of California, Merced, connects missionary influence on Dalits in Punjab to the formation of new political and spiritual identities, including those that shaped Sikh and Punjabi diasporic activism in North America in the early 20th century.

³²Pervaiz, Huma (2023). "Unravelling the Dynamics of Christian Missionary Evangelical Activities in Colonial Punjab (1849-1947)." *Al-Irfan* 8.15 (2023): 1-11.

of many of the marginalised groups in Punjab Doaba. The role of Christian missionaries was also significant in doing the cultural transformation in Doaba. Christian Missionaries were reported to have introduced the practices of Western education as well as the technology of printing³³. This fact has influenced the local literature as well as the religious discourse. Research has found that The Punjab Religious Book Society which was founded in the year 1835 has significantly contributed to the translation as well as the publication of various religious as well as educational texts in Punjabi³⁴. This is how they contributed to promoting literacy. The actual aim of the Christian missionaries was to do the religious conversion and upliftment. But, it was noted that the broader impact of their work significantly contributed to the hybridization of cultural norms as well as the development of a distinct Punjabi Christian community. There were many evidences of resistance to this advancement by individuals in Punjab. Despite this criticism, Christian missionaries have founded various institutions including Guru Nanak Mission Hospital in Jalandhar³⁵. These specific reforms as continued to influence the aspects of education, healthcare as well as social welfare in Doaba today. Christian missionaries developed mission schools to make education easily accessible to women and lower-caste individuals. These institutions mainly focused on improving the reading and writing skills of marginalized individuals so that they are able to establish an empowered position in Indian society. The missionaries also brought on Western literary forms and ideas. In this way, they spread a distinct literary culture in India that combined traditional Indian narratives with Christian themes. This cross-pollination of ideas made a unique body of literature in which a reflection of both Indigenous traditions and Western influences has existed.

Apart from these, another significant contribution of the missionaries is the introduction of print culture across India³⁶. The prime aim of missionaries behind the establishment of Printing presses was to spread Christianity by printing religious texts in local languages.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of Christian missionaries in the Doaba region of Punjab during the colonial era initiated a profound and complex transformation. While their primary objective was religious conversion, the methods they employed establishing schools, hospitals, and vocational training centres fundamentally altered the socio cultural and economic landscape. Their work created vital avenues for education, healthcare, and social mobility, particularly for Dalits and other marginalised communities, directly challenging entrenched hierarchies of caste and gender. However, this influence was not unidirectional or uncontested. The missionary presence acted as a catalytic force, provoking significant indigenous responses. The establishment of rival educational and religious institutions by Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim reform movements underscores a dynamic of competition and appropriation, leading to a pluralistic and hybridised modern Punjabi identity. The colonial state's shifting stance from early patronage to post-1857 regulation further complicated this landscape. Ultimately, the legacy of missionary activity in Doaba is multifaceted. It laid critical infrastructure for modern education and public health, fostered a distinct Punjabi Christian community, and inadvertently stimulated socio-religious reforms that strengthened other community identities. This historical episode, therefore, is best understood not as a simple narrative of imposition or benevolence, but as a key dynamic in the contested making of modern Punjab, whose institutional and social echoes continue to resonate today

³³Gathogo, Julius(2023). "The Missionaries' Engagement with Science and Technology in Colonial Kenya, 1887–1963." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 53.3-4(2023): 383-406.

³⁴Chawla, Anjali (2023). "Education Policies During British Period in Punjab (1849 To 1947): Historical Importance and It's Implementation It places the Punjab Religious Book Society within the broader framework of British colonial education policies, analyzing its role in standardizing language and shaping the content of textbooks in the region.

³⁵Guru Nanak Mission Hospital Trust, It is a contemporary source that refers to the operational history of the specific hospital, not to the colonial-era motives or activities of Christian missionaries.

³⁶Pecchia, Cristina, Johanna Buss, and Alaka A. Caudal(2021). "Print cultures in the making in 19th-and 20th-century South Asia: beyond disciplinary boundaries." *Philological Encounters* 6.1-2 (2021): 1-14.