

Role of the British and Railway Establishment for Expansion of Christianity in Rajasthan

Dr. Giriraj Sharma

Assistant Professor

Marwar Mahavidyalaya,

Degana (Nagour-Rajasthan)

MDS University, Ajmer

Abstract

The present work is an effort to study the diverse facts about Christianity in historical perspective with factual and informative sense. This is also a first effort to touch and cover this subject in Main Stream Study of Religions in Rajasthan.

In previous studies in Rajasthan, only the conversion by Christians was the main attraction for scholars. But beyond the conversion Christianity also made impact on Rajasthan. In Rajasthan Christianity entered with the help of Britishers and Railway and various Christian Missions played an important role in the field of education, health, tribal and Dalit upliftment and women welfare in Rajasthan. So this is also an effort to study Christianity as a historical process for social change in Rajasthan.

(1) Treaties with East India Company

In the beginning of the 19th century the States of Rajputana were suffering from the raids of the Marathas and the Pindaris. The raiders created havoc wherever they went. So it was necessary that the state should have protective alliance with the East India Company, which at that time was the only power that could give them protection.¹

When Metcalf sent a circular to the ruling Chiefs of Rajputana inviting them to send their agents to Delhi to accept the treaty of alliance which the British Government was proposing, the states did not hesitate for a minute but grasped the opportunity. The East India Company concluded the treaties with the States of Rajputana in 1818. There was hardly any

choice left to the Rajput Chiefs to amend the draft which was more or less the same for all of them.²

Article I of the draft treaty indicated that the treaty was an alliance of friendship between the East India Company and the States of Rajputana. But the rulers of the States were not really allies; they were definitely subordinate feudatories of the company and were not permitted to choose their friends and foes because friends and foes of the company were to be regarded as such by them. They could not tread the independent path of their own choice but had to accept the company's decision. In *Article II* the rulers of the States were guaranteed protection against external and internal invasions. This made them carefree and they did not have to fear the Marathas and the Pindaris. *Article III* said that the rulers of Rajputana would always act in subordinate co-operation with the British Government. This clearly meant that the rulers henceforth were to obey the orders of the East India Company, and work with them as they were desired. They had lost their independence and had become subordinate and obedient chiefs. *Article V* said the disputes were to be submitted to the arbitration and award of the British Government. Thus the states became parties and the East India Company became the Judge. *Article VIII* related to the armies. It was definitely laid down that the rulers would render military help to the East India Company when demanded. By this article state forces were meant to help the East India Company. *Article IX* said The Political Agents, posted in the States had an effective say in the internal affairs. The rulers had to abide by their decisions because they were the immediate representatives of the British Government on the spot³

(II) Importance of Treaties

The treaties of 1818, were supposed to be beneficial to both the parties, but in reality they were more in the interest of the East India Company. The British Government wanted a direct route to link up their various possessions, so that it could facilitate the movement of the troops and other articles. An alliance with the states of Rajputana could connect Bengal and Bombay Presidencies⁴ The Rajput princes were asked to furnish troops according to their means at the requisition of the Government. In addition to the tribute the three states viz Mewar(Udaipur), Marwar(Jodhpur), and Kota contributed 41 lakh in support of Local Corps.

This increased the military resources of the British without incurring and additional expenditure of maintaining them.

The treaties made it expedient for the British Government to make provisions for the military protection and political control of the allied Rajput State.⁵ According to administrative arrangements, the States of Bharatpur, Alwar and Dholpur remained under the political charge of the Delhi Residency. Later on, the Rajput States of Bikaner and Jaisalmer were also annexed to the political charge of this Residency in view of administrative convenience.⁶ Further, the superintendence of British relations with the States of Dungarpur, Banswara and Partapgarh, was entrusted to the Resident in Malwa.⁷ Likewise, the States of Udaipur, Jodhpur, Kota, Bundi, Karauli, Kishangrah, Jaipur⁸ and Tonk⁹ were assigned to the charge of Major General Sir David Ochterlony designated as the "Resident in Rajputana and Commissioner" from April 1, 1818.¹⁰ On Daulat Rao Sindhia ceding Ajmer to the British according to the treaty of 1818, F. Wilder, the Assistant to the Resident at Delhi was appointed as the Superintendent at Ajmer.¹¹

But by these Administrative Arrangements the paramount position of the British Government thus ceased to be effective in Rajputana. However, it made the British Government become vigilant and its officers critical of the existing system of its exercising control over the States of Rajputana. Colebrook suggested that the "high controlling officer" for these states be at Ajmer rather than at Delhi. To ascertain the lapses of British superintendence over Rajputana States in particular, Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General wanted to remove the seat of the Supreme Government to the Upper Provinces so that he might get an opportunity of direct communication with the political officers and the princes in that quarter. When he was forbidden by the court of directors to do so, he undertook a tour of Rajputana and other places in North India, to get to know the princes and people of those parts at close quarters.¹²

(III) Bentick's Visit and Establishment of Rajputana Agency

Bentick reached Ajmer on January 18, 1832.¹³ Bentick's visit to Ajmer convinced him of the uniform complaint of the rulers that the frontier depredations, and the marauding raids

had been so frequently carried on by one neighbouring state against another in Rajputana that, almost all its states suffered on their account.¹⁴ The treaties provided that a state would not commit aggression on any one, and that in the event of any dispute arising between the states, it would be submitted to the arbitration and award of the British Government. To exercise effective control over the interstate relation of the States of Rajputana had been, therefore, the solemn responsibility and obligation of the British Government.¹⁵ However, it became evident to the Governor General that the British authorities in Rajputana had failed to fulfil the obligations of their Government to the Rajputana States.¹⁶ Bentick thus, saw that veracity of the complaints of the rulers. He attributed the laxity of British Control over the State of Rajputana to their distance from the seat of the Resident at Delhi.¹⁷ The Resident was the "Supreme Controlling Authority" for most of these States and on account of his varied and multifarious duties and assignments, he found it difficult to devote the necessary attention and time for proper superintendence and care of them.¹⁸ Besides, the British jurisdiction over the States of Rajputana was shared by the Superintendent and Political Agent, Ajmer.¹⁹

To resolve the existing anomaly of British Superintendence in Rajputana, Bentick was convinced of the desirability of placing all the States of Rajputana under a single political authority with headquarters amongst them.²⁰ As the new arrangement necessitated, the States of Tonk, Bharatpur, Alwar, Dholpur, Karauli, Kota, Bundi, Dungarpur and Sirohi were separated from the control of the Delhi Residency; Banswara and Pratapgarh from Malwa Agency and Jodhpur, Jaipur, Udaipur, Jaisalmer and Kishangarh were removed from the Charge of the Superintendent and Political Agent, Ajmer and all were placed together under an officer designated as the "Governor General's Agent for the States of Rajputana and Commissioner of Ajmer " with his headquarters at the central position of Ajmer in 1832.²¹ Lieutenant Colonel A. Lockett, the Superintendent and Political Agent Ajmer was the first "Agent to the Governor General in Rajputana."²² The agent was also entrusted with the duties of the Commissioner of Ajmer. The Superintendent of Merwara too, was placed under his control.²³

The Rajputana Agency instituted to vindicate the paramount authority of the British Government in Rajputana and this increased the importance of the British Province of Ajmer, the headquarters of the Rajputana Agency was a natural and convenient arrangement. In April 1856, the headquarter of the Rajputana Agency was transferred from Ajmer to Abu for more convenience because Abu was summer headquarter of the Rajputana Agency. In spite of this change of headquarter, Ajmer did not lose its importance as a British strong hold in the midst of Rajputana.²⁴

(IV) Eastablishment of Cantonments

Besides these Administrative Arrangements, British troops and Local Contingents were also established in Rajputana which situated at Nasirabad, Ajmer, Beawar, Deoli, Erinpura, Kherwara, Kotra etc. Details are as below.

(A) Nusseerabad (Nasirabad)

Nasirabad was the military cantonment of Ajmer. It was fifteen miles from Ajmer, with which it was connected by rail. The existence of Nasirabad as a military cantonment dates from the year 1818, when its formation was necessary to protect the recently ceded district of Ajmer; and it then became the headquarters of the reserve of the Rajputana Field Force under Sir David Ochterlony.²⁵ Till 1857, Nasirabad was garrisoned chiefly by Bengal Troops. It was connected by rail with Agra, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Neemuch. It was thus capable of easy reinforcement from several quarters, and from its central position, affords the best possible position for undertaking operations in Rajputana.²⁶

(B) Deolee (Deoli)

The Cantonment of Deoli was situated 56 miles south-east of Nasirabad, at the junction of British *Meywar (Mewar)*, *Jaypur (Jaipur)*, *Tonk*, and *Bundi* territories. The site was selected by Sir Henry Lawrence in 1855 as commanding the passes *Kherar*, a hilly tract formed of portions of *Meywar*, *Jaypur* and *Bundi* extending some 13 miles eastward from *Jehazpur* and

the home of the Purriar Branch of the Mina Tribe, whose depredations in the surrounding country were long notorious. It was to overawe this tribe, that *Deolee* was occupied in the first instance by the *Kotah (Kota) Contingent*, the origin of which may be briefly described as follows.²⁷

"By the fifth article of the Treaty of 1838, Kotah was bound to maintain a Contingent force, to be paid from its revenues; and by the sixth article of the same its liabilities on this account were restricted to three lakh of rupees per annum. Accordingly in 1840, the Kotah(Kota) Contingent was raised as a part of the general policy of calling upon those States with whom treaties in which there was a specific provision promising subordinate co-operation had been concluded to fulfil their part of the engagement.²⁸ The corps was at first located in the vicinity of Kotha itself, but after various changes of station was finally quartered at Deolee, with the object above stated "²⁹

(C) Ajmer and Beawar

Ajmer was the headquarters of the *Mhairwara* Battalion which had been in existence since 1822.³⁰ When Britishers obtained possession of *Ajmer* District in 1818,³¹ the Mers or inhabitants of the hilly tract which extends for 100 miles in length and 15 miles in breadth between *Ajmer* proper, *Meywar* and *Marwar*, were notorious for their plundering habits. With a view to affording due protection to life and property in this tract, it was determined to raise a local corps from the classes whose depredations had necessitated its formation; and as the restoration of order could not fail to be of equal benefit to the two adjoining states, they were required to make contributions towards the expenses of the corps.³² The corps was cantoned near the old town of *Beawar*, about 30 miles south-west of *Ajmer*, but was subsequently moved to *Naya Nagar*, 4 miles south of *Beawar*. It was designated the *Mhairwara Local Battalion*.³³

(D) Khairwara and Kotra

The Cantonments of *Khariwara* and *Kotra* were situated respectively 40 miles south-west and south-east of *Udaipur* in the hilly tracts of *Meywar*, *Kherwara* was garrisoned by five companies of the Meywar Bheel Corps, which was raised in 1840, consequent on the inability of the *Udaipur* State to keep its turbulent *Bheel* population in subjection.

At *Kotra* which was established as a separate post in 1844 were quartered three companies of the corps under the 2nd-in-command.³⁴

(E) *Erinpura*

Erinpura, the head-quarters of the irregular force was situated on the main road from Ajmer to Ahmedabad and was originally occupied by the Jodhpur Legion.³⁵ The force was raised under the following circumstances. Under Article VIII of the Treaty with the British Government dated 6th January 1818,³⁶ the state of Jodhpur was required to furnish a contingent of 1500 horse for foreign service whenever called on by the British Government to do so. This force, however, was found to be inefficient, and being composed wholly of Rajputs, was useless to act against the people of the country. Government accordingly accepted an application made by Maharaja Man Singh in 1835 to be released from his obligation to furnish this levy, on condition of an annual payment of Rs.1,15,00 which was to be devoted to the maintenance of a body of horse and foot under European officers.³⁷ Accordingly in the following year the Jodhpur Legion, consisting of 4 guns, 216 cavalry, and 610 infantry principally Hindustanis, under British Officers was raised with a view to preventing depredations and outrage on the unsettled Marwar-Sirohi border, and to protect the trade passing along the trunk road from the western coast and Gujarat via Sirohi and Pali to Pubjab.³⁸ In this way the British Cantonment of Erinpura was established in 1837.³⁹

(V) Railway Establishments

The first railway line in Rajasthan was laid from Agra to Bharatpur in August 1873.⁴⁰ It came to Ajmer in August 1875. Ajmer was the divisional headquarters of the metre-gauge section of the Bombay-Baroda and Central Indian Railway. The Railway Workshop (Loco) also established in Ajmer in 1886-87.⁴¹ With the advent of the Railway came a considerable influx of Goans, Madrasis, and other Catholics to supply skilled and other labours for running the line and Railway workshop.⁴²

The coming of the railway made obsolete the old style of Episcopal visitation. It is very interesting that the coming of the railways and other public works which were entered upon at this time involved the coming to India of a new type of Englishman. The new works required skilled artisans as engine-drivers and craftsmen. The railway provided employment for Anglo-Indians and Indian Christians. Railway required a good knowledge of English and the mobility which depended on freedom from caste prejudices about food, drink qualities which Anglo-Indians and Indian Christians possessed in good measure. So there came into existence the railway colonies superimposed upon small, old fashioned market towns with which they had little in common.⁴³

Thus, by the treaties of 1818, Britishers established a systematic administration with cantonments at various centres, and with the coming up of establishments of Railway in Rajasthan, so many British officials came to Rajasthan. For Christian Missionaries, this pre-established British Administrative setup at Ajmer, Beawar, Nasirabad, Eirinapura, Kherwara, Abu, Madar, Parbatpura, Phulera, Bandhikui etc. proved a safe and convenient ground and proved very helpful in the expansion of Christianity in Rajasthan. These stations became primary centres of Christianity in Rajasthan. Missionaries first established their stations at these places and expand their work in Rajasthan which we will see in coming chapters.

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