

Penetration of Medical Missionaries in Kashmir: Reaction, Response and Impact

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Abstract

Medicinal History has been increasingly attracting the attention of historians over the past few decades. It is through this academic exercise that the knowledge gained by our ancestors over centuries of experiences, interactions and inheritance is preserved and made easily accessible to a broader readership. Health being fundamental priority among the hierarchy of human priorities, and pre-requisite for smooth and prosperous life, its status impinges on every structure of the society. Health and medicinal culture of a society is reflective of its, interactions with the outside world, intellectual status, receptions to exogenous influences, continuities in change and differences in the society, as medicinal culture varies among different sections of society as per their variegated economic conditions and levels of exposure. It helps us in understanding the changes in demographic history-stable population in pre-modern period and population explosion after scientific and technological revolution. This paper, though mainly aims to offer a holistic overview of health status of Kashmir during nineteenth century, also deals with how English Medical Missionaries penetrated in the valley of Kashmir and radically changed the scenario of health and medicine.

Keywords: Kashmir, Health, Medicine, Missionaries, Dogra Rule

The valley of Kashmir is isolated from the outside world by a massive chain of mountain ranges. As a naturally corollary Kashmir remained by and large immune from outside influences and developed a character of its own. However, it was with the establishment of Dogra rule in Kashmir in mid nineteenth century that the isolated character of the valley was broken and was linked with rest of India through a network of roads and sub-roads. The Dogra rule spearheaded under watchful supervision of successive British Residents and orchestrated by good officers deputed by British Indian government transformed the overall scenario of Kashmir in general and health and medicine in particular. Successive British Residents introduced changes, new ideas and implemented new projects. This led to a gradual renovation of Kashmir and to some extent ameliorated the condition of downtrodden populace of Kashmir.

Education and medicine were the two important tools used by the Britishers to transform the society. The people of Kashmir were totally unaware about the use of modern medicine. The method of treatment adopted by the people of Kashmir was nothing but adding fuel to the fire. Whenever and wherever there was spread of any disease, it was usually ascribed to the will of god. Instead of taking any resource or medical aid, the people preferred use of traditional methods. The traditional methods were usually based on superstitious beliefs which debarred them from making use of modern medical facilities. However with the advent of modern medicine and education the people began to leave superstition. People came to know that diseases were caused by germs or infections and could be cured or treated by proper treatment. This transformation of mind and society was done by English medical men who came to Kashmir during the second half of nineteenth century. This period saw a significant growth of modern medical knowledge in Kashmir.

Drawing on the practical experience of missionaries in the field, missions began to focus on two 'tools'; education and medicine, and in the last decades of the 19th century these systems were

accepted as an integral part of the missionary enterprise.ⁱⁱBy the end of the nineteenth century, it was a firmly established principle that schools and hospitals made up, with preaching, and pioneering missions inevitably established schools and hospitals alongside their mission stations. While our focus here is on medicine, it is important to remember that the two ‘tools’ were closely related, because those who had received Western education at mission schools were at the forefront of the indigenous development of Western medicine. Local figures did slowly cement their alliance with imperial interests by contributing to missionary educational and medical endeavors. The arrival of Christian Missionaries in the state was described as silver lining in the sky by Asha Dhar.ⁱⁱⁱIt is clear the primary aim was evangelization of Kashmir. According to Dr. William Elmslie:

“Kashmir, from the earliest times, had been an outlying province of the Punjaub, and had been made over by us to the present reigning family not twenty years before; and Christian people desired to place within reach of the people in Kashmir the same blessings which they had endeavored to give to the Punjaub. It was during a journey on the mountain-road between Murree and Abbottabad, that the idea first occurred to Dr. Cleghorn, that Kashmir was one of those countries where the influence of medical skill would greatly avail to aid the introduction of Christ’s gospel.”^{iv}

Along with Col Martin, Robert Clark was the first who set foot in the valley in 1854 on a trip as an evangelist. He returned again in April 1864, this time with his wife Elizabeth. She was a devoted evangelist, a linguist and a nurse who had worked as a sister at Kings Hospital College London.^v Both were keen to live among the local population of Srinagar city. Despite advice to the contrary from the ruling establishment, including the reigning Maharaja Ranbir Singh and the Prince Amar Singh, they persevered with the idea and managed to rent a house in the heart of downtown Srinagar.^{vi}As they tried to enter the rented house there was a riot, and crowd mobbed them. The present Maharaja did not like their presence and the interaction between the Christian missionaries and Kashmiris. Despite the difficulties, the determined Clarks soldiered on, and the couple opened the first allopathic dispensary near Nawakadal, in Downtown Srinagar, where the present day Nawakadal Higher Secondary School for Girls is located.

Doctor William Elmslie and Progress of Healthcare

No doubt modern medicine was brought to Kashmir by Mr and Mrs Clark, but the solid foundation was laid by a Scottish doctor William Jackson Elmslie. Dr, Elmslie arrived in the valley and reached to Srinagar on 4 May 1865. His life was hard and difficult, for he had no hospital, his operations being performed under the trees; also orders were issued that the people were not to visit the doctor and sepoy were stationed around to keep them away, as the sick persisted in coming for relief. Several patients suffered imprisonment for disobeying the order of the authorities.^{vii} He rented a house near Amirakadal Srinagar and the house became his residence as well as health clinic. He started his work to treat the patients and five days later on 9 May 1865, Dr Elmslie wrote in his diary:

“9th May: -Today is memorable in the history of the Kashmir Medical Mission, from the fact that I opened my dispensary this morning. I had given notice that I intended

receiving patient.....Here the patients were seen one by one. The number present today was ten.^{viii}

Despite the opposition of the authorities and repeated visits by the Maharajas men, the number of patients visiting him increased progressively.^{ix} A routine was established whereby patients and their attendants, and any passers-by, were assembled in the veranda and a preaching sermon was delivered by the catechist in Kashmiri with the doctor in attendance or by the doctor with the catechist acting as the interpreter, followed by consultation with the doctor. Gradually the number of patients visiting the AmiraKadal Mission Dispensary increased and that included women also. This dispensary slowly changed into a small hospital as Dr Elmslie started using his multi-specialty skills. He performed a number of interesting but extinct surgical procedures that included Chopart's Operation (amputation of foot for tuberculosis). He also performed resection of a wrist, about which he wrote:

"Assisted by the Rev. Mr. Yeates, performed resection of the wrist-joint. The patient was a young- woman. Her parents were present during the operation."^x

The response of the people was continuously increasing day by day and the popularity of the dispensary continued to grow and the doctor was satisfied with his medical work. He wrote on 8th of June 1865;

"The number of patients present this morning was sixty-three, seventeen of whom were women. As usual, the people were very attentive to the portion of Scripture which I read. With the aid of chloroform, removed another tumour in the forenoon. Have great reason for heartfelt thankfulness to God, inasmuch as hitherto nothing untoward has happened with respect to my medical work."^{xi}

Despite the restrictions and opposition from the authorities, people with the passage of time from long distance would come to seek medical advice. On August 11, 1866 he wrote to his mother;

"You will be happy to hear that, in a medical point of view, at least, my work in Kashmir is prospering. In spite of opposition on the part of the local authorities, the work continues to progress. A few days ago I had as many as one hundred and eighty-three patients, and at this moment..... The people listen most attentively to our expositions of the divine Word, and receive ourreligious books gladly. Two Hindoos profess to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, ... What honour can be compared to that of leading a soul to Jesus, the Fountain of Life?"^{xii}

He went on trips to various parts of the valley and collected people there for an outdoor sermon. These sermons were followed by medical diagnosis and consultations. He was also a specialist of lithotomy.^{xiii} Elmslie is the first doctor who did an operation of a Kashmiri patient to remove his bladder stone. He operated three patients, out of which two survived and one died, to which he describes:

"Today my poor lithotomy patient died from gradual sinking. I fear this may interfere with my medical success, but all things are in God's hands, and there I leave this."^{xiv}

With the passage of time, opposition from people as well as government was lessened in comparison to earlier years. Firstly in 1866, a building was erected for him by state government and was handed over to him where he operated his work. About this work Ernest Neve wrote, “*This was Elmslie’s first building which was grudgingly erected by the state. Another shed was promised, but it had not materialized. This, then, was the first Mission Hospital, and the only building in Kashmir deliberately constructed with a view to extending the benefit of Western medical skill and science to the people of Kashmir.*”^{xv}

Dr William Elmslie also known to locals as *Padre Doctor Sahab*^{xvi} among Kashmiri’s was the founder of modern medicine or Allopathic medicine in Kashmir. He along with other medical missionaries treated thousands of Kashmiris. He was an able surgeon, dedicated physician and an obsessive Christian Missionary. Throughout his stay in valley he faced stiff opposition from number of people like priests, Molvis and from the ruling Maharaja for his evangelical activities. However, he followed his doctrine of healing with evangelization of Kashmiri’s with tenacious persistence.

Persevered with his evangelic and medical work dedicatedly he did not give up his work despite pressure from the authorities and thus changed the healthcare scenario of the Kashmir. In spite of all the obstacles he continued his work in Kashmir for five years. With every passing day he became popular among the people of Kashmir for the service he rendered to the deprived and helpless Kashmiris. For his service he was offered with gifts by the patients.

Next to Dr William Elmslie was Dr Theodore Maxwell who visited Kashmir in 1874. This time the opposition to the missionaries was withdrawn, the Maharaja’s government became more favourable and gave land at the foothills of Solomon’s Temple in Srinagar for the construction of a hospital.^{xvii}

In 1877 it was Dr Edmund Downes who arrived on the scene and took over the administration of the hospital. He worked nearly for six years in the valley and during his tenure a terrace was cut across the north side of Rustum Garhi spur; and few huts were extended to the hospital, which can accommodate more 100 patients. Downes acquired great reputation in the valley because he possessed great surgical skills. In this hospital during the year of 1878, one thousand patients were treated.^{xviii} Downes started touring the valley to see the patients and carried with him a mobile dispensary.

Arrival of Neve Brothers

The healthcare scenario of Kashmir changed with a rapid speed with the two Neve brothers Arthur Neve and Ernest Neve in Srinagar, in 1882 and 1886 respectively. Arthur Neve wrote several accounts of his journeys in the Kashmir and Central Asian regions. For these contributions Arthur Neve was awarded with Beck Prize in 1911. In his book *Thirty Years in Kashmir* published in 1913, Arthur Neve provides us with an account of all his mountaineering expeditions and explorations in Kashmir.

Writing about the skill of Dr Arthur Neve, Dr Henry Holland (1875–1965) wrote in his autobiography:

“so great was the rush and so large the number of patients who flocked to us (in Shikarpur near Sukkar) that I sent an SOS to Dr Arthur Neve who was then on a tour in the Punjab. A distinguished surgeon, he came to the rescue and on a single day (5 December 1909) performed forty-seven eye operations; without his help the work could not have been undertaken.”^{xix}

The task of rebuilding and extending Kashmir Mission Hospital Drugjan, Srinagar, started in 1888 and lasted for eight years. It extended for almost a quarter of a mile along the hill. It had a big hall which could accommodate 200-300 people, a number of consultation rooms, a dispensary, a microbiology laboratory, X-ray room and two operating theaters. In 1896 the Hospital could accommodate 125 patients and by 1914 the bed capacity was increased to 150. Miss Nora Neve, who was the niece of Neve brothers, The Superintendent of Nursing, was responsible for the disciplined décor of the wards.

The number of patients treated in the Hospital was almost 37000. From 1889-1899, 30000 surgical operations were performed. During 1914-1924, 166,000 new outpatients were seen and 46,699 operations were performed. Irene Petrie, a medical missionary described a typical at the Hospital in 1896 as;

“From 150 miles away over the mountains patients have come to it, and it influences the whole valley. In so lofty and land malarial diseases are few; so are accidents, vehicles and machinery being scarce. Mauked by a bear, fallen from a fruit tree, are typical accidents. Poverty, dirt, hereditary disease and contagion fill the wards; eye cases, bone cases, kangri burns and the majority of cases are surgical. As many as 58 cases are have been performed in one day, the after mortality is less than five a thousand ...”^{xx}

The Hospital was visited by every Kashmiri, including Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Hindu Sadhus from all over India, men with sturdy ponies and long coats from Yarkand in Xinjiang China on their way to Mecca for the Hajj pilgrimage, Gurkha soldiers from Nepal, Buddhists from Ladakh, Gujjars from the mountains, and many more people from distant lands sought treatment at Kashmir Mission Hospital.

The two brothers worked together for 33 years and were later joined by their niece Nora, who also worked at Kashmir Mission Hospital. Initially she was unconnected with the Church Missionary Society, came to Kashmir as an auxiliary helper. After working for some time she went to London, trained as nurse and came back to Kashmir in 1898 as a missionary of Church Missionary Society and took responsibility as the Superintendent of Nursing at Kashmir Mission Hospital. Mrs Nora was a disciplinarian who rendered utmost nursing and care to her patients and ensured strict and disciplined cleanliness within the Hospital premises. Ernest Neve remarked about her as follows;

“I have already referred to the most important and valued work done by Miss Neve as Superintendent of Nursing. To this we owe much of the efficiency of the hospital.”

Conclusion

Dogra period marks a watershed development in the history of Kashmir as it witnessed remarkable changes in social, political, economic and cultural fields. However, to the misfortune of common masses, health care in Kashmir received little attention from the state and was based on traditional lines. It was only with the influx of Medical Missionaries in second half of nineteenth century, the need for separate and modern health care facilities was acknowledged. Though, ostensibly missionaries aimed to serve the suppressed masses who were caught in a vicious cycle of ignorance, backwardness, state oppression, poverty, basically aimed at evangelization of Kashmir through noble deeds like education and Medicine. No doubt, they miserably failed in conversion but they left an indelible mark in health and medicine sector and liberated the masses from the shackles of diseases and death to great extent. Therefore, it is not surprising that not only the state backed their initiatives, but people irrespective of caste, creed and gender, thronged their dispensaries, hospitals where they received free advice, check-up and medicine. Thus, medical missionaries did a splendid job by not only improving the condition of common masses but also by laying the foundation of modern medicine in Kashmir which has gone a long way in shaping the future course of health in Kashmir.

To cure the diseases people generally went to priests and *Pirs* (holy men). The *Pir* usually gave them a piece of paper with name of *Allah* written on it and the Brahman priest similarly inscribed name of *Shiva* on the paper. The patients were supposed to swallow down it with water. Moreover Kashmiris wore charms or amulets written with short verses from *Quran* on a piece of paper. The paper was folded and stitched in cloth piece or leather and then was attached to that part of body that was affected by disease. This belief debarred them from making use of modern facilities.

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