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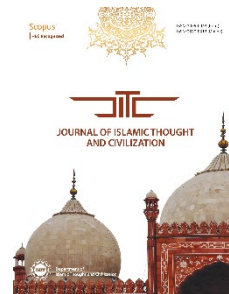
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Christian-Muslim Relations in the Second Half of 19th Century India in View of Syed Nāṣir-ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abūlmansūr Dehlvī (d. 1903)

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Abstract

The current study examined the nature of Christian-Muslim relationships in 19th-century India. It is argued that their relationships were largely shaped in the context of the polemical debates that were developed to defend the teachings and tenets of their respective religions. Syed Nāṣir-ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abūlmansūr Dehlvī (d. 1903) was a polemical Muslim writer who wrote approximately 25 books in the refutation of Christianity. He also defended the religion of Islam; however, his work remains in oblivion. The primary objective of the current research was to analyse Dehlvī's major works dedicated to refute Christianity and to assess their significance. This research holds importance under two key reasons. Firstly, it sheds light on the nature of Christian-Muslim relationships during the 19th century and secondly, it highlights the significance of Muslim writings about other religions, particularly Christianity, in the modern world. The research concluded that while the polemical technique, due to its confrontational aspect, may no longer be the primary method of religious studies. The texts, however, generated through this approach can still be significant resources for students and academics since they offer opportunities for critical thinking, historical investigation, and a better understanding of intricate relationships that exist between religious traditions. Therefore, polemical writings play a significant role in advancing the academic knowledge in the field of religious studies.

Keywords: Christian-Muslim relations, Christian-Muslim polemics, intricate relationships, religious polemics, Syed Nāṣir-ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abūlmansūr Dehlvī,

Introduction

Syed Nāṣir-ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abūlmansūr Dehlvī was born on 27th of Ramaḍān, 1237 AH (1822 CE).¹ His father's name was Syed Muḥammad Ali, who was a head clerk at Nagpur Residency. After getting basic education, he did a job for a short period at the house of Nawab Jahangir Muḥammad Khan (1816-44), the Nawab of Bhopal, who ruled from 1837-1844. After learning the English language, he spent his entire life reading and writing. He wrote in defence of Islam, that is, to prove the truth of Islamic faith over the Christian religion. During the period of the War of Independence, Abūlmansūr relocated to Delhi with his family, and he continued to reside there until his demise in 1903, he lived there.² He had two sons, Mir Nasir Ali (d. 1933) and Nusrat Ali (d. 1932). He acquired Christian education from Reverend Scot, a well-known missionary, for six years, and he gave him a written certificate of getting the gospel's knowledge.³ In 1865, he debated with Rev. David in Allahabad and answered his objections towards Islam. To train Muslims in debates

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¹Imdad Sabri, *Firangiyoṅ kā jāl* (The Trap of the Englishmen) (Delhi: Farid Book Depot, 2008), 520.

²Akhtar Rahi, "Syed Nāṣir-ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abūlmansūr Dehlvī aur Maṣīḥī-Muslim Munāzratī Adab," (Syed Nāṣir-ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abūlmansūr Dehlvī and Christian-Muslim Polemical Literature) *Alam-e-Islam aur Isaiyyat* 2, no. 7 (1992): 09.

³Sabri, *Firangiyoṅ kā jāl*, 521.

with Christian missionaries, he founded two institutes, *Dār-ul-Imāmat* (the House of Leadership) and *Anjuman-e-Islāmiyah* Delhi (the Islamic Society of Delhi).⁴

The Christian-Muslim relations in 19th-century India were largely formulated in the context of polemical literature. After the Freedom War of 1857, even more polemical literature was produced on both sides. Some of the missionaries, like Karl Gottlieb Pfander (1803–65)—the author of *Mizān-ul-Ḥaq*⁵ (The Balance of Truth), originally wrote in German. However, later in the author's life, this book was translated into Persian, English, Urdu, Turkish, Arabic, and Marathī language and was also considered the most authentic critique of Islam among the missionary circles. The author was of the view that the War of Independence was an infliction by God upon the British Government because they were afraid of patronizing Christianity in their government.⁶ The prominent indigenous Christians who actively wrote to criticize Islamic teachings and faith were Abdullah Atham (d. 1896), Safdar Ali (1830-99), Pādri (Reverend) Imam-ul-Din Lahiz (1830-1900), Pādri Rajab Ali, the author of *Ā'ina-i-Islām* (The Mirror of Islam), and Pādri G. L. Thakur Das (1852–1910), and last but not the least, Master Ram Chandar (d. 1880).⁷ These people received their education from the missionary institutes, left their ancestral faith, and accepted Christianity. Though, some of them like Abdullah Atham and Safdar Ali adopted government jobs, their religious activities were not less than those of religious leaders. They wrote numerous books in defence of Christian faith and to criticise the teachings of Islam.⁸ That is why, Abūlmanṣūr wrote mostly in response to the above-mentioned figures and attained prominence with the title of *Imām-e-fan-e-Munāẓarā Ahl-e-Kitāb* (The Leader of the Art of Polemics with the People of the Book). Since, these chronicles were written in response to missionary writings against Islam, the writers showed little politeness to each other. Moreover, without any hesitation, they did not feel bad by calling each other astray, the liar, the sinner, and the dogs. They always ended their writings with an invitation to guide their opponents to the right path that was already declared to them, without the possibility that their opponents may also be on the right path.⁹

However, his work remained in oblivion in the 20th century among students of religion and theology. The Western intelligentsia made numerous efforts to unearth the Christian-Muslim relations in the religious context of 19th-century India. Avril Ann Powell explored the contentious Christian-Muslim relationships before the pre-mutiny war in her famous book entitled “Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India.”¹⁰ Since, the scope of this book is limited to the pre-mutiny period (1857), the readers who are interested in exploring the situation after the War of Independence (1857), would find nothing important in the book. For instance, Abūlmanṣūr, who was considered as a great polemicist of his time and was also known as *Imām-e-fan-e-Munāẓarā Ahl-e-Kitāb*, has not been mentioned once in this book. He learned Christian teachings from a Christian missionary.

In 1992, Akhtar Rahi published the details of the work along with the biography of Abūlmanṣūr, however; the details did not exceed the explanation of the titles of the books and were limited to

⁴Ibid., 521-25.

⁵Karl Gottlieb Pfander, *Mizān-ul-Ḥaq* (The Balance of Truth) (London: Temple Bar, 3rd edition, 1832, 1862).

⁶Padari Barkatullah, *Salib kay 'Alambardar* (The Cross Bearers) (Lahore: Punjab Religious Book Society, 2nd Edition, 1857), 24-25.

⁷Farman Ali and Humaira Ahmad, “Contextualizing Christian theology in South Asia: An analytical study from 1542-1947” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 9, no. 2 (2019): 291.

⁸Rahi, “Syed Nāṣir-ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abūlmanṣūr Dehlvi aur Masīḥī-Muslim Munāẓrafi Adab,” 10.

⁹Dehlvi, *'Aqūbat-ul-Ḍāllīn* (The Punishment for those who Astray) (Dehli: Nusrat-ul-Matabi, 1324 Hijri/1906), 1.

¹⁰Avril Ann Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (Routledge, 2015).

defining the context of the work.¹¹ The following analysis is not just a description of his work, however, it also explores how Abūlmanṣūr understood other religions, especially Christianity and Judaism, in his time. Moreover, it also describes that how he responded to his contemporary missionaries and what significance these books hold in the 20th century. As far as the methodology of the study is concerned, each following entry consists of two parts. In the first part, the contents of the book have been explored to examine how significantly the author dealt with the subject. In the second part, the significance of the work has been highlighted for modern readers and in religious studies as well.

2. Abūlmanṣūr Dehlvī's Works on Christian-Muslim Relations

Abūlmanṣūr devoted himself to writing on Islam and also encouraged his contemporaries to indulge in the study of Christianity. He reprimanded such Muslims and also the views that discourage or prevent them from studying other scriptures. In his book entitled *Navīd-i-Jāved* (the eternal good news), the author describes seventeen different reasons as to why Muslims should engage themselves in the study of polemics and the revealed scriptures, especially the Torah, the Psalms, and the Gospels. He also disapproved of such misconceptions and traditions that prohibit common Muslims from reading the Torah and other revealed texts.¹²

Abūlmanṣūr mostly wrote in defence of Islam and to answer the allegations raised by Protestant missionaries about Islam. A brief description of his books related to Christianity has been presented as following:

1. *I'zāz-ul-Qur'ān fī rad A'la I'jāz-ul-Qur'ān lī Rām Chandra* (The Dignity of the Qur'ān in the Refutation of the Miraculous Nature of the Qur'ān by Ram Chandra). Ram Chandra (d. 1880) in his book *I'jāz-ul-Qur'ān* rejected the Muslim belief that Qur'ān is the word of God and reiterated an earlier objection of Christian theologians that Muḥammad (*SAW*) wrote it with the help of Jewish and Christian learned men. Therefore, Abūlmanṣūr's *I'zāz-ul-Qur'ān* (The Miracle of Qur'ān) was a response to prove Qur'ān's miraculous nature and to answer the objections raised by a Hindu convert to Christianity, Ram Chandra.
2. Another book penned by him entitled *Alistīṣāl fī Rad ala-al-Masīḥ al-Dajjāl lī Rām Chandra*, was also written in the refutation of Ram Chandra in which the author called Muḥammad (*SAW*) as a false (we seek refuge in Allah) Masīḥ.
3. *'Aqūbat-ul-Dāllīn fī rad 'Alā Hidayat-ul-Muslimīn lī Imad-ul-Dīn* (The Punishment for those who Astray in the Refutation of Direction to Muslims by Imad-ul-Din).
4. *Raqīmat-ul-Warīd fī rad 'Alā Niyāz Nāmāh li Ṣafdar 'Ali* (Incoming Numbers in the Refutation of *Niyāz Nāmāh*) was written in response to Safdar Ali's *Niyāz Nāmāh* (A Respectful Letter). Among the Christian circles, *Niyāz Nāmāh* is considered as the second most authentic critique of Islam following Pfander's *Mīzān-ul-Haq*.¹³ It was originally written as a trilogy of letters explaining why he left Islam and chose the Christian faith and later published in one volume entitled *Niyāz Nāmāh*.¹⁴

¹¹Rahi, "Syed Nāṣir-ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abūlmanṣūr Dehlvī aur Masīḥī-Muslim Munāzrafi Adab," 7–14.

¹²Syed Nāṣir-ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abūlmanṣūr Dehlvī, *Navīd-e-Jāved* (Delhi: Noor Muḥammad Malik Kakhana Tijarat Kutub, 1929), 6-30.

¹³Dehlvī, *Mīzān-ul-Mīzān fī rad-e-ala Mīzān-ul-Haq li Pfander* (Delhi: Matbu'a Nusrat-ul-Matabi', 1882), 3.

¹⁴For detail see: *Ṣafdar 'Ali, Niyāz Nāmāh* (A Respectful Letter) (Alahabad: Mission Press, 1867).

5. *Lahn-i-Dā'udī fī rad 'Alā Naghma Tanbūrī lī Imad-ul-Dīn* (David's Lyricism in the Refutation of the Melody of a Lute by Imad-ul-Din). *Naghma Tanbūrī* was produced as a result of a written debate between Imād-ul-Din and Mujtahid Luckhnavi. In response to it, Abūlmanşūr and Mujtahid Luckhnavi wrote *Lahn-i-Dā'udī*.¹⁵
6. *Ifhām-ul-Khişām fī rad 'Alā Taftīsh-ul-Islām li Padre Rogers* (Understanding Schism in Response to the Inspection of Islam by Rogers). The title of the book shows that it was written in response to Rogers' book *Taftīsh-ul-Islām* (Investigation of Islam).
7. *Harz-i-Jān fī rad 'Alā Aşliyyat-i-Qur'ān lī Abdullāh Athim* (A Very Dear Thing in the Refutation of the Originality of Qur'ān by Abdullah Athim). Abdullah Athim was a Muslim convert and he earned fame because he debated with Mirza of Qadiyan (1835–1908), the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement. After the debate, Mirza falsely prophesied that Athim would die within fifteen months but when time passed and Athim survived, the missionaries criticized Mirza for his false prophecy.¹⁶
8. *Al-Tibyān fī al-Ajwabah al-As'ilah al-Nişārah* (An Exposition to the Answers to the Questions of Christians).
9. *Mişbāh al-Abrār fī rad 'Alā Miiftāh-ul-Asrār li Pfander* (The Lamp for the right-minded in the Refutation of the Key of Mysteries): Pfander wrote *Miiftāh-ul-Asrār* in Persian and first published it in 1839. Later, it was translated into Urdu. In this book, the author discusses the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the holy trinity, with special reference to the objections made by Muslims to these doctrines. Many responses were written against the refutations of Pfander's book and *Mişbāh al-Abrār* deals with these issues.
10. *Daulat-e-Faruqiyah*.¹⁷ This book sheds light upon the Muslim version of the history of Jerusalem.
11. *Navīd-e-Jāved* (The Eternal Good News).
12. *In 'ām-e-'Aam fī rad-e-Ala Aina-e-Islam li Rajab* (A General Reward in the Refutation of the Mirror of Islam by Rajab)
13. *Taşiḥ al-Tāwīl fī Rad-e-Alā tafsīr al-Mukāshfa* (Correction of the Interpretation in the Refutation of the Interpretation of the Book of Revelation)
14. *Mizān-ul-Mizān fī rad-e-ala Mizān-ul-Haq li Pfander* (Balance of the Balance in the Refutation of the Balance of Truth by Pfander)
15. *Namūna-e-Taḥrīf* (Alteration Pattern).¹⁸

The detailed analysis provided here focuses on books numbered 11 to 15. This scrutiny is necessary as the aforementioned books are not accessible in Pakistan to the best of the researcher's knowledge. Although these books are available on the archive.org website, their presence is marred

¹⁵Rahi, "Syed Nāşir-ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abūlmanşūr Dehlvi aur Masīḥī-Muslim Munāzrafi Adab," 10.

¹⁶For details see: *The Sunday at Home*, Vol. 42 (Great Britain: Religious Tract Society, 1895), 203.

¹⁷Dehlvi, *Daulat-e-Faruqiyah* (Delhi: Matba Nusrat-ul-Matabi, n.d).

¹⁸Rahi, "Syed Nāşir-ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abūlmanşūr Dehlvi aur Masīḥī-Muslim Munāzrafi Adab," 10; Farman Ali and Humaira Ahmad, "A Study of the Inter-Religious Dialogue through Syed Ahmad's Reconciliatory Approaches in Tabīn-ul-Kalām," *Al-Milal Journal of Religion and Thought* 3 no. 1 (2021): 173-74.

by significant spelling errors and inconsistent application of transliteration rules. This creates challenges in locating the books on the webpage.

2.1. *Navīd-e-Jāved* (The Eternal Good News)

This book is a comprehensive response to the questions frequently raised about Islam and its teachings, from the period of its emergence to the author's time. Two versions of the book are accessible on archive.org. The initial edition, released in 1879 CE, encompasses 658 pages, while the posthumous edition, published in 1929, comprises 618 pages. The second edition of the book is more reader-friendly, featuring footnotes that highlight crucial terms and editions of the cited books. The author structured the book into two tablets, referred to as "*alwāh*." The term "*lawh*" is chosen because it mirrors the biblical concept of tablets of stone, as seen in Exodus 34:14–28, Exodus 20:1–17, and Deuteronomy 5:5–21, where the Ten Commandments revealed to Moses were inscribed on stone tablets. The first tablet comprises two ecclesias, while the second tablet consists of ten ecclesias. The sub-parts are called ecclesia, which means a congregation made from different nations. As in this book, different articles are gathered from different languages, so the author named each sub-part ecclesia.¹⁹

The initial chapter contains two ecclesias, while the second chapter encompasses ten ecclesias. In the opening section, the author underscores the Quran's role as a yardstick for evaluating the substance and messages of earlier scriptures such as the Torah, Psalms, and Gospel. The Quran extensively references these scriptures, emphasizing their importance. The author also criticizes the Jews, likening them to an ass burdened with books but unable to derive benefit from them.²⁰ Furthermore, the author emphasizes the importance for Muslims to familiarize themselves with other religions, providing seventeen reasons to support this viewpoint. One of these reasons is a narration from Abu Umama (d. 700 CE), stating that on the Day of Judgment, a group from this nation will appear in the likeness of monkeys and pigs, for they used to live among the villagers, but they do not urge them to righteousness.²¹

The second segment of the book is organized into ten chapters, each devoted to elucidating specific themes that have generated controversy within the Christian and Muslim communities alike. Chapters three and four undertake a concise examination of the concept of *tahrīf* (alteration). The author vigorously contends that the contemporary Bible deviates from its original revelation to Jewish prophets. In substantiating this assertion, the author systematically presents a range of evidential support, employing methodologies such as historical, form, literary, textual, and source criticism.²² It is worth noting that these evidential demonstrations of alteration are distinct from those expounded in Rahmatullah Kiranavi's *Izhār-ul-Ḥaq* and Syed Ahmad's *Tabīn-ul-Kalām*.²³

In chapter five, the author posits that Christians have diminished their standing in the kingdom of heaven by disregarding certain laws such as circumcision and sacrifice. The contention is put forth that faith alone does not secure eternal salvation; adherence to the law or sharī'ah is deemed obligatory for entry into the kingdom of heaven. Additionally, the author addresses the issue of polygamy, asserting that its presence is not restricted solely to Islam, as it is also evident in the Bible without imposition of limitations; Islam merely confines it to four marriages.

¹⁹ Dehlvi, *Navīd-e-Jāved*, 6-10.

²⁰ Dehlvi, *Navīd-e-Jāved*, 12.

²¹ Dehlvi, *Navīd-e-Jāved*, 13.

²² Dehlvi, *'Aqūbat-ul-Dalīn* (Delhi: Nusrat-ul-Matabi, 1324 Hijri/1906), 9.

²³ For further detail see: Farman Ali, and Humaira Ahmad. "A Study of the Inter-Religious Dialogue through Syed Ahmad's Reconciliatory Approaches in *Tabīn-ul-Kalām*." *Al-Milal Journal of Religion and Thought* 3 no. 1 (2021):168-189.

Chapter six delves into four categories of evidence refuting the divinity of Christ. Firstly, the author outright rejects theological, hermeneutical, and miraculous arguments presented by Christian theologians and philosophers to establish the divinity of Christ. Secondly, through the examination of biblical verses such as Timothy 2:5, Mark 32:13, Luke 52:2; 2:4, and Matthew 18:21, the author contends that Jesus was a human being akin to others and not a deity. Thirdly, historical evolution is explored, illustrating the emergence of various Christian sects like the Ebionites, Unitarians, and Arians. Over time, a faction emerged that regarded Jesus as a divine figure, and it is posited that this group edited the original gospel to align with their beliefs. Lastly, the author cites Jesus' utterance on the cross — "Oh God, oh God, why have you forsaken me?"—as a further challenge to the divine status attributed to Jesus. The chapter covers a spectrum of theological topics including circumcision, polygamy, sola fide, veneration of holy figures, the Trinity, Muhammad's (PBUH) critique of idols, the prophethood of Jesus, the crucifixion of Christ, atonement, the gospel of Barnabas, and the historical persecution of Christians to propagate Christianity.

Chapter seven is dedicated to the Christian belief that there are three statuses—the prophet, the king, and the high priest—associated with the second person of the trinity, the son. However, the author argues that as there is no person in the Trinity except God, in the person of Jesus there is one status—the prophethood.²⁴

In Chapter Eight, the author critiques the Christian doctrinal tenets concerning the crucifixion of Christ and his subsequent resurrection on the third day. The author presents an innovative interpretation of the crucifixion event as portrayed in the canonical Gospels. An argument is advanced, based on the resurrection narratives, contending that only eleven companions of Jesus bore witness to the resurrection, with no mention of the twelfth. The Resurrection, as per the author's interpretation, was limited exclusively to Jesus's companions and was not a universally witnessed event among the common people. Notably, Paul, later incorporated among Jesus's companions in his epistle, asserted that five hundred individuals had witnessed Christ's resurrection. However, Luke, who derived his gospel from Paul, failed to mention more than eleven witnesses, suggesting a conspicuous addition to the resurrection event outlined by Paul. This discrepancy raises skepticism about the credibility of the resurrection events, consequently casting doubt on the veracity of the crucifixion. Moreover, the author contends that Christian priests did not confine their alterations solely to sacred texts; they extended their amendments to historical records in order to substantiate resurrection events. One instance cited is the alleged modification of the history of Flavius Josephus (37–100 CE) to corroborate resurrection events. This assertion adds another layer to the scrutiny of the reliability of historical documentation associated with the resurrection narratives in Christian theology.²⁵

In Chapter Nine, the author challenges the Christian assertion that there are no predictions in the Bible regarding the advent of Muhammad (PBUH). The author underscores that while earlier scholars have identified numerous verses foretelling the arrival of the final messenger, Muhammad (PBUH), from both the Old and New Testaments, four specific verses are deemed particularly significant. These verses include Isaiah 19:19–23, John 19:25, Deuteronomy 18:15–18, and John 14:16. The chapter critically examines these passages, providing an in-depth analysis of their prophetic significance and their alleged connection to the emergence of Muhammad (PBUH). In Chapter Ten, the author counters the Christian assertion that miracles were not bestowed upon Muhammad (PBUH) as they were upon earlier prophets. The author emphasizes that not only was the Prophet (PBUH) endowed with miracles, but he also prophesied about future events. The author asserts that historical records affirm the fulfillment of these prophecies as foretold by the Prophet. Within this context, the chapter explores three specific miracles and seven prophecies attributed to

²⁴ Dehlvi, *Navid-e-Javed*, 369.

²⁵ Dehlvi, *Navid-e-Javed*, 375.

Muhammad (PBUH), examining their historical context and purported fulfillment. The academic examination aims to scrutinize the evidence and arguments surrounding the miraculous and prophetic aspects of Muhammad's (PBUH) life and mission.²⁶

Chapter 11 responded to the objection that Islam was spread by sword or *jihād* (holy war) and stressed that *jihād* is carried out primarily to root out persecutions and injustices, whatever their forms. It cannot be waged in the way of Allah by disregarding ethical limits. Moral values have to be given priority over everything in all circumstances. Moreover, adopting a polemical tone, the author stresses that Christians used all forms of persecution to spread Christianity, like the people of Prussia in early 1500 CE, who were forced to adopt Christianity after a long massacre, while Islam had been tolerant of other religions.²⁷ In the last chapter, there is a comparative analysis of two sacred places on earth, the Tabernacle and Holy *Ka'aba*, and two nations, the Arabs and Jews. As far as the Tabernacle and Holy *Ka'aba* are concerned, the author noted that the Tabernacle has been destroyed several times by the enemies, and when Abraha (d. 570 CE), an Aksumite army general, attacked the *Ka'aba*, God Himself intervened and destroyed his army by flocks of birds.²⁸ Similarly, the Arabs throughout history remained in their original status; however, the Jews remained smaller in number.

As far as the significance of the book is concerned, it serves as a valuable repository of information concerning Christian-Muslim relations during the 19th century. The work contributes vital insights into the intricate religio-historical interconnections among Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Notably, it presents an Islamized perspective on Christian teachings and mounts a robust defense of Islam and its doctrines. The author posits a viewpoint asserting the corruption of Christianity occurred subsequent to the Apostles. While the author declares the book's objective is to address questions about Islam from its inception to the author's contemporary period, it becomes evident that the focus is primarily on polemical themes related to Christian theology. Philosophical questions arising from the influence of Greek ideas are conspicuously absent from the book. An important aspect of the author's stance, particularly in the context of *tahrīf* (alteration), is the affirmation of the traditional position on *tahrīf*. The author contends that the people of the book not only refrained from textual corruption but also altered the meanings of the text through misinterpretation of the verses. However, it is noteworthy that due to the polemical nature of the work, rooted in the 19th-century context, its relevance has diminished in contemporary academic circles in India and Pakistan. The modern academic landscape in these regions places less emphasis on polemics, favoring a more scholarly exploration of religions. Those still engaged in polemical debates tend to draw heavily from the works of contemporaries such as Rahmatullah Kiranvi (d. 1891), Sana'ullah Amrītsari (d. 1948), Ahmad Deedat (d. 1996), and Dr. Zakir Naik (b. 1965). However, it is important to note that during the 19th century, the author's work found acclaim within Muslim circles, earning him the title of "*Imām-e-Munāẓara Ahl-e-Kitāb*" (the leader of polemics with the people of the book).

2.2. *Taṣḥīḥ al-Tāwīl fī Rad-e-Alā tafsīr al-Mukāshfa*

(Correction of the Interpretation in the Refutation of the Interpretation of the Book of Revelation)

Christian-Muslim relations in the 19th century were largely shaped in the context of polemical writings and debates. Consequently, majority of the writings of Abūlmanṣūr focused on polemical themes that emerged in the writings of different foreign missionaries and indigenous Christians. He wrote a short tract entitled *Taṣḥīḥ al-Tāwīl* (correction of the interpretation) in response to the Rev. Imam al-Din Lahiz's *Tafsīr Mukāshfa* (interpretation of the Book of Revelation), published in 1870. It consists of 44 pages with no chapters, contents, or sub-headings except one. In this tract, the author presented a critical commentary on 136 pages of *Tafsīr Mukāshfa* and mostly focused on the

²⁶ Dehlvi, *Navīd-e-Jāved*, 449-50.

²⁷ Dehlvi, *Navīd-e-Jāved*, 552-53.

²⁸ Dehlvi, *Navīd-e-Jāved*, 588.

commentary of chapter 9 because here, the commentator criticized Islam and its Prophet, Muḥammad (*SAW*). The book has no chapter division, however, it can be divided into three parts. In the first part, the author unfolded the nature of the Book of Revelation and asserted that it is based upon John's dream and that a dream can be interpreted in any way. To prove his assertion, the author brought many textual passages from the Book of Revelation and the commentary and related them to prove the supremacy of Islam, its teachings, and its founder. For instance, in the interpretation of Rev. 3:3, the commentator states: "God says to the servant of the church of Sardis that repents and holds fast, if you will not repent I will come upon you with wrath like a thief and at that time you will be destroyed completely, the time for repent will end; for, it is my law that I destroy the mischiefs of a mischievous."²⁹

The author asserted that the commentator could not prove the annihilation of those Christian communities and only discussed the wreck of their mischiefs and it is a total lie because these communists were annihilated. In the same vein, the author denounces the commentator for saying that while interpreting Rev. 7:9, he completely ignored an evident prophecy about Islam and its Prophet. Abūlmanṣūr asserted that a great multitude of all nations, tribes, people, and tongues discussed in this verse are Muslims who believed in the Prophet Muḥammad (*SAW*) from all nations and countries, and they will alone be illegible to stand before God as only the Arab is famous for its palm branches.³⁰

In the second part, the author focused on the commentary of chapter nine because Lahiz used its symbolic language to denounce Islam, its teachings, its Prophet, the Arab Muslims, and the Roman Catholic Church. In the interpretation of Rev. 9:1, the commentator argues that the fallen star stood for Muḥammad (*SAW*) and the keys to the bottomless pit (hell) were given to him. The author presents two arguments to show the errancy of Lahiz's interpretation. Firstly, the direction of a fallen star to earth cannot be taken to delegate someone's position. Secondly, the Roman Catholic Church adhered to the idea that the fallen star indicated the character of Martin Luther and there is no reason to label it with the figure of the 7th century. Additionally, while interpreting Rev. 9:2, the translator interpreted the smoke as the Qur'ān or its teachings and the sun and sky that were darkened by the smoke as the Christian kingdom and its subjects. Contrary to it, Abūlmanṣūr responded that it is a forced interpretation because other interpreters can interpret smoke in the meanings of Christianity and its teachings or in Luther's translation of the Bible, which polluted Christianity.³¹ In his interpretation of Revelation 9:06, Lahiz blamed Muslims for persecuting Christians under their rule but there is no historical evidence of it. From these two responses, it is evident that Abūlmanṣūr somehow succeeded in his claim that there is no solid ground to fix the interpretation of the book of Revelation to certain times and personalities. It can be interpreted the other way round like Lahiz criticized Islamic teachings based on Revelation 9:1-3, and similarly, Abūlmanṣūr criticized protestant Christianity and its founder, based on the same text. In the last verse of chapter nine, Lahiz criticized the adherents and leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, saying that instead of fighting with the Turks, they started fighting with each other and these immoral people killed many religious souls. Abūlmanṣūr reprimanded Lahiz by saying that as protestant Christians inherited their religious traditions from the Catholic Church, he questioned the legitimacy of the transition of his religious texts and doctrines.³²

In the last part, the author brought more examples from *Tafsīr Mukāshfa* to show the errors the commentator has committed in this commentary. In Revelation 20:10, the author shows that the

²⁹Dehlvi, *Taṣḥīḥ al-Tāwīl fī Rad-e-Alā Tafsīr al-Mukāshfa* (Correction of the Interpretation in the Refutation of the Interpretation of the Book of Revelation) (Delhi: Nusratul Matabi', n.d), 6.

³⁰Dehlvi, *Taṣḥīḥ al-Tāwīl*, 11.

³¹Dehlvi, *Taṣḥīḥ al-Tāwīl*, 14.

³²Dehlvi, *Taṣḥīḥ al-Tāwīl*, 35.

commentator made a mistake in his interpretation that Satan would be released from the lake of fire; however, there is no hint in the text about Satan's liberation. In Revelation 16:13, the interpreter symbolizes the dragon, beast, and false prophet with Satan, the Pope, and Muḥammad, respectively. However, in other verses, he equates the symbolic character of the beast with Satan and breaks his principles of interpretation. In a nutshell, Lahiz left no opportunity to label the demonic characters of the books of Revelation to his religious foes and to delegate their status and teachings.

The significance of the book is evident from the aim of the book, as it was written in response to the objections raised against the Prophet Muḥammad (*SAW*) and His religion. However, the author extensively strengthens his argument by using Christian sources. The response is not just an answer to the objections; it also highlights the depth of Biblical knowledge of a Muslim scholar. However, it lacks the quality of his contemporary Syed Ahmad's (d. 1898) *Tabīm-ul-Kalām*, because the latter aims to reconcile the controversial themes of Christian-Muslim theologies.

2.3. *Namūna-e-Tahrīf* (Alteration Pattern)

His writing, *Namūna-e-Tahrīf* (The Alteration Pattern), sheds light on one of the oldest polemical themes of Christian-Muslim writings. The Qur'ān accuses Christians of alteration in their holy scriptures (2:79; 2:75; 5:13; 6:91; 3:78). Here, the author gives examples of three types of alterations, that is, addition, deletion, and alteration made in the Torah, Psalms, and Gospels. Moreover, each type of alteration proves his assertion. For instance, there is a mention of Moses's death and his grave. Therefore, it is an evident example of addition that someone else has inserted this additional detail in the original book.³³ In addition to internal examples of alteration, the theological positions of both Catholic and Protestant scholars were also used regarding the authorship of scriptures as a tool to prove that Bible was not written by the original authors but by human minds working behind them. To prove this assertion, he quotes both, Protestant and Catholic authors who do not regard Bible as a direct word of God and accept that numerous verses are not divinely inspired.

This treatise is an evident example of polemical work against Christian and Jewish scriptures and the Qur'ān held them responsible for their alteration. Here, the author upheld the traditional stance of *tahrīf* and emphasized that the people of the book have not corrupted the book textually but they have also changed the meanings of the text by misinterpreting the verses.

2.4. *Mizān-ul-Mizān fī rad-e-ala Mizān-ul-Ḥaq li Pfander*

(The Balance of the Balance in the Refutation of the Balance of Truth by Pfander)

This brief text was prepared in response to Pfander's *Mizān-ul-Ḥaq* (the balance of truth), one of the four best apologies written against Islamic doctrines and beliefs. The importance of *Mizān-ul-Ḥaq* may be seen in the fact that most works produced against Islam are either extracts or duplicates of its contents and arguments.³⁴ The missionaries describe its contents as an attack on Islam, to which Muslim academics cannot possibly respond. Abūlmanṣūr's *Mizān-ul-Mizān* is based on Muslim's response to Pfander's book. In his introduction, Pfander describes five signs of a true revelation and then concludes that the Qur'ān does not fulfil these signs and cannot be ascribed as divine revelation; it is the result of man-made efforts. By adopting an apologetic tune, Abūlmanṣūr applied his five conditions to Bible to prove him wrong that, upon their basis, he cannot prove Bible as a divinely inspired text. Consequently, Pfander must accept the inherent errors in the suggested signs because they cannot be verified even from the Christian theological books.³⁵ For instance, one of the signs of a true revelation is that it contains no real contradictions. However, Paul's stance upon the law in

³³Dehlvi, *Namūna-e-Tahrīf* (The Alteration Pattern) (Delhi: Nusrat-ul-Matabi, n.d.), 3.

³⁴Dehlvi, *Mizān-ul-Mizān fī rad-e-ala Mizān-ul-Ḥaq li Pfander* (Balance of the Balance in the Refutation of the Balance of Truth by Pfander) (Delhi: Matbu'a Nusrat-ul-Matabi, 1882), 2.

³⁵Dehlvi, *Mizān-ul-Mizān*, 5.

Genesis 3:10–21 contradicts Jacob's stance upon the law, which reflects that the teachings of revealed books are contradicted by one another. Moreover, the responder argues that the concept of a triune God in Christianity is also contradicted by Pfander's second condition, which stresses divine revelation, and must per with conscience, but human intellect failed to comprehend the divinity of Christ.³⁶

As a whole, this book is a part of the Christian-Muslim controversies that gained momentum after the arrival of missionaries in British India. He wrote numerous books of this kind to present a correct understanding of Islam and to defend its teachings. Muslim *'ulāmā* (clerics) engaged in the study of the Bible and Christian theology directly to furnish their writings with appropriate arguments in order to find out the contradictions of the Bible and, thus to denounce the apostles and Christian theologians. Due to instant responses to Christian writings, Abūlmansūr was well-known in academic circles and became famous with the title of "the leader of the polemics" among the people of the book.

2.5. *In 'ām-e-'Aam fī rad-e-Alā Aina-e-Islām lī Rajab* (A General Reward in the Refutation of the Mirror of Islam by Rajab)

In 'ām-e-'Aam ((A General Reward) was written in response to *Aina-e-Islām* (The Mirror of Islam) which was authored by Rajab Ali, a Muslim convert, and Rev. Knowles. In response to Rahmatullah Kiranvi's criticism of Christianity, which claimed that the presence of different sects revealed the inadequacies of the Christian faith, Rajab and Knowles argued that if the presence of sects in a religion "proves it to be weak," Islam will be labelled as "weak and unreliable" because it, too, has one-hundred and fifty sects.³⁷ They questioned Islam's validity due to its sectarianism and emphasized that Islam has numerous sects which contradict each other; eight of them do not trust in God, fourteen do not believe in Muḥammad (*SAW*), and fifteen do not believe in the Qur'ān.³⁸ Consequently, they argued that Islam is a baseless and man-made religion.³⁹ In the introduction of *In 'ām-e-'Aam*, Abūlmansūr first stated the core tenants of the Christian faith, that is, belief in trinity and revealed scriptures and then, in a polemical tone, he listed eighty-eight Christian sects. He argued that eight of them do not believe in Logos (The Word), twenty-five do not believe in Christ's divinity, eight do not believe in the crucifixion, sixteen do not consider the Old and New Testaments to be revealed scriptures, and the remaining sixty-five contradict each other in their teachings.⁴⁰ In this way, Abūlmansūr rejected the claims of the authors of *Aina-e-Islām* that Christians have substantive agreements on the divine unity, the holy trinity, the atonement, and salvation through faith.⁴¹ In the end, the author acknowledged that throughout the tract, the tone has been polemical, and spiritual matters of religion received less consideration.

3. Conclusion

Abūlmansūr emerged as a prominent polemicist during the latter half of the 19th century, extensively contributing to the defense of Islam. Though the nature of the challenges Islam is facing these days has largely changed, the writings of Abūlmansūr are still important. These texts serve as valuable references for comprehending the Christian-Muslim theological conflicts that emerged in a colonial

³⁶Dehlvi, *Mīzān-ul-Mīzān*, 5.

³⁷Elwood Morris Wherry, *The Muslim Controversy: Being a Review of Christian Literature Written in the Urdu Language for the Propagation of the Christian Religion and the Refutation of Islam* (London: Christian Literature Society, 1905), 104.

³⁸Dehlvi, *In 'ām-e-'Aam fī rad-e-Ala Aina-e-Islām lī Rajab* (A General Reward in the Refutation of the Mirror of Islam by Rajab) (Delhi: Matba'-e-Faruqi, 1290 AH/1873 CE), 13.

³⁹Dehlvi, *In 'ām-e-'Aam*, 7.

⁴⁰Dehlvi, *In 'ām-e-'Aam*, 41-43.

⁴¹Wherry, *The Muslim Controversy*, 103.

context. Therefore, the polemical technique, due to its confrontational aspect, may no longer be the primary method of religious studies. The texts generated through this approach can still be significant resources for students and academics since they offer opportunities for critical thinking, historical investigation, and a better understanding of the intricate relationships that exist between religious traditions. Polemical writings can play an important role in advancing the academic knowledge in the field of religious studies. The writings produced in the second half of the 19th century are highly important to achieve this goal because the most well-known book *Izhār-ul-Haq* (The Revelation of Truth) is the product of this period and the works of Syeed Nāṣir-ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abulmanṣūr are the second to mention.

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