

KASHMIR

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A Government of India travel brochure states: "*Outshining them all is the Kashmir valley, mentioned by the Mughul king Jehangir as 'Paradise on earth'. Kashmir's capital, Srinagar, lies on the banks of the Jhelum, which is crossed by seven wooden bridges.*"

Kashmir is the loveliest land on earth. It is Switzerland on the grand scale. The four million or so Kashmiris are happy to share this beautiful country with tourists who come from all over the world. They welcome Hindus who come on pilgrimages to the remote cave at Amarnath.

Most Kashmiris are Muslims. One of the Muslim sects – the Ahmadiyyas – claim that Christ came to Kashmir and died near the capital (Srinagar) of natural causes when he was a hundred and twenty years old. Most Muslims believe that he never died, but went alive to heaven.

There are only a few hundred Christians in Kashmir to share the good tidings of His birth, death and resurrection. One convert to Christianity, a teacher in Srinagar, devotes part of his leisure time to giving Tibetan Gospels to traders passing through to Chinese-held Tibet. High up in a mountain valley a handful of Christians from other lands used to meet in a wooden church to worship. They were on holiday. They enjoyed the meadows of flowers, the mountain walks, the glaciers and the rushing streams. They worshipped the Christ "whose voice is as the sound of many waters". In the winter the valley had no worshippers of Christ. The little church was looked after by a Muslim caretaker. The inadequacy of the Christian witness in Kashmir must strike every Christian visitor – two hospitals, some educational work and a few congregations. "*The heavens declare the glory of God and the earth shows forth His handiwork*", but few remain to explain:

*How could the Eternal do a temporal act,
The Infinite become a finite fact?
Nothing can save us that is possible:
We who must die demand a miracle.¹*

Already within the boundaries of what is technically the State of Jammu and Kashmir there are (in the Ladakh area) hostile Chinese posts and a Chinese military road. Other lines of division go through the State where Indian and Pakistani troops have dug in. From January 1949 until August 1965 there was a cease-fire line. That line now extends over hundreds more miles of territory outside Kashmir, near the borders of India and West Pakistan.

¹ P.66 *For the Time Being*: a Christmas Oratorio by W H Auden, published by Faber and Faber Ltd., 1945

While we try to understand all the issues involved, we should perhaps often think in terms of human suffering. A Pakistani teacher has two brothers who were in Delhi at the partition of the sub-continent in 1947. She and her sisters, who were living in the area which became part of Pakistan, now have Pakistani nationality. Her brothers have Indian nationality. Her village in Pakistan is a few miles from the border, and today it is probably a wreck. Wherever men fire or cease-fire, there are refugees – half a million in Vietnam – an unknown number in Kashmir and on the borders of India and West Pakistan. There are the homeless, the widows and the orphans. Then there are the economic refugees – those who have not lost their homes but who have lost their livelihood because of the geographical position of their villages and towns.

Many BMMF partners have prayed for Kasur each month. The magazine *Time* (24th September 1965) reported that it was a deserted town whose hundred thousand inhabitants were scattered over the surrounding areas. The stench of death was in its silent streets where the police patrolled to prevent looting. Many have prayed for Sialkot which will now go down in history not only as the birthplace of the poet and philosopher Dr Mohammed Iqbal, who first dreamed of a Muslim holy land called Pakistan, but as the plain on which was fought a battle of tanks.

Facts emerge sometimes months or years later, but we know that the 15 year-old Anglican cathedral in Ambala is now a ruin through bombing; we know that some churches have appealed for blood donors and for collections to help refugees; we know that the United Christian Hospital in Lahore is ministering to casualties in Pakistan and that the Christian Hospital in Ludhiana is ministering to casualties in India.

The Kashmir problem is symbolic of all problems of human relationships. *The New Statesman* has recently reminded us that there are brothers on both sides of the Indo-Pakistan borders – some leaders in the armed forces and in government positions twenty years ago and less worked together as colleagues. These twin nations are brothers; but so were Cain and Abel. The ultimate as well as the immediate answer to all problems of relationships, whether of individuals or nations, lies in an event which occurred nearly two thousand years ago: Jesus Christ was born.

The evil news of war and rumours of war spread quickly through the world, but the glad tidings that in Christ there is newness of life has spread slowly. It is a mystery that Christ was born of Mary in Bethlehem. It is astounding that the Son of Man became a refugee in Egypt. It is thought-provoking that he was despised and rejected by his fellow-Jews. It is incredible that the Son of God died for sinners in Jerusalem and on the third day he rose again from the grave. We believe these facts, and we accept and worship Him. *“If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.”* This is good news of great joy for all people. It is more up-to-date than the next news broadcast. We must spread it quickly while there is opportunity.