

REFLECTIONS ON TIME SPENT IN PAKISTAN

Looking back, it seems to me that the period 1967 – 1980, the period when I served as a missionary of the Church of Scotland in Pakistan, was a period of transition in the Church in Pakistan and that this was reflected in my own experience there.

When I arrived in Pakistan the Islamic Republic of Pakistan was twenty years old, but the Sialkot Church Council was still a part of the United Church of North India and Pakistan. It was not until 1970 that further union took place and the Church of Pakistan came into being.

More important than the developments in the institutional church, however, were the developments in attitudes and relationships. At the time of my arrival there were still Pakistani Christians, particularly among the older generation, who had been very dependent on western missionaries, saw these missionaries as their 'mothers and fathers' and expected to be able to continue to be dependent on missionaries. These Christians tended to be resentful of any attempt to encourage them to take on responsibilities for themselves.

At the other end of the spectrum, largely but not exclusively among the younger generation, were those who wanted the Church in Pakistan to be totally Pakistani, a Pakistani institution led entirely by Pakistanis for Pakistanis, totally free of any foreign influence.

I found, however, that the majority welcomed me as a sister in Christ and were ready to put up with my many faults and to allow me to work in partnership with them.

I was sent to Pakistan in 1967 in response to a request which the then Overseas Council of the Church of Scotland had received from the United Church in Pakistan for a graduate teacher. I suppose that many in the Church in Scotland would not have regarded me as a 'real missionary' since I was not going to be directly involved in evangelism. I saw mission in Pakistan as being the responsibility of the Church in Pakistan. I was to be a living expression of the partnership between the Church of Scotland and the Church in Pakistan, a link between these partners, sharing in the life and work of the Church in Pakistan and having a part in equipping its members to be 'the people of God in Pakistan' and in serving the wider community through its educational work.

When I arrived in Pakistan the Missionaries' Committee was still in existence, although it had gone by the end of my time there. I was required to complete two years of language study and was, in fact, not given a vote on the Missionaries'

Committee until I had passed my language exams. This language study was supervised by fellow missionaries.

When I began work teaching English in the Mission Girls' High School in Gujrat, a missionary colleague had responsibility for the management of the school.

When she was relocated to Sialkot, I shared this responsibility with a Pakistani colleague. She was appointed headmistress and was responsible for the academic side: the teachers, the students, the timetabling, while I had responsibility for the administrative side: the buildings, the accounts, the scholarships, the form filling, the paperwork.

When the schools were nationalised in 1973, it became necessary to review my role in Pakistan and I was re-located to Sialkot.

For a time I acted as secretary to the Bishop of Sialkot (at that time a fellow missionary) and was also, for a time, secretary of the Sialkot Diocesan Council. I am not sure that that was of much benefit to the Church in Pakistan, but it proved to be excellent training for work which I did on my return to Scotland.

It was not long, however, before I became involved in another sphere of work. Bible Teachers, trained by the United Bible Training Centre in Gujranwala, were doing excellent work with women and children in the Church, but there was a growing awareness of a need to expand and develop this work and that to do this more staff would have to be recruited, but there was a shortage of candidates who were suitably qualified to undertake the training offered by UBTC. There were, however, a number of young women who, it was felt, although lacking the necessary academic qualifications for UBTC, if given suitable training, would be capable of working, under the supervision of trained Bible Teachers, with the women and children. One of the senior Bible Teachers and I were appointed to provide this training. Together we worked on a training programme which involved the young women spending part of their time with us in Sialkot studying the Old and New Testaments and learning teaching methods and group work methods and the rest of their time on placements with trained Bible Teachers. On completion of their training, these young women were given the title, 'Bible Girl' – a title which, in retrospect, makes me squirm, but was acceptable at the time.

I also became increasingly involved in Sialkot Diocese's Adult Literacy Programme and, on the death of its Director, was honoured to be invited to take over as Director of Adult Literacy, Sialkot Diocese. Although the main aim of this work was to increase the level of literacy of Church members and thus equip them better for their role in witnessing to Jesus Christ, the classes were also open to Muslims who were prepared to accept their Christian basis.

I will never forget the words of one of the Church leaders when I left Pakistan in December, 1980. 'We'll miss you, Janet' he said. I had crossed swords with this

man on many occasions, so I asked, "Don't you mean, 'Thank goodness she's leaving. We'll get peace now.'?" 'No,' he replied, 'I mean we'll miss you. Only brothers and sisters can say what we've said to each other.'

I returned to Sialkot in 2006 to spend Christmas and New Year with friends and former colleagues. It was wonderful to find that, in spite of many difficulties and problems, so many there remain faithful. A particular joy was a reunion which had been arranged for the 'Bible Girls' I had helped to train. It was a real pleasure to hear all about their families and to find them still actively involved in the life and work of the Church.

I was, however, saddened to find that Adult Literacy work no longer seemed to be a priority and that its workers did not seem to be being treated with the respect they deserved.

Again the words of one of the Church leaders gave me much food for thought. He said to me, 'We like when the old missionaries visit us. You endured the hardships and walked with us. You understood our problems and you worked with us to try to find solutions.'

The Church in Pakistan is a minority church. It faces many difficulties and problems and is often persecuted. Yet it strives to remain faithful. It is my prayer that the Church in Scotland will continue to 'walk with' its brothers and sisters in Pakistan.

Janet H. Brown.