

‘Converting the Heathen’:

Conversion Attempts and Responses to the American Presbyterian Mission in the Punjab,
1849-1900.

By

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The American Presbyterian Mission was the first Christian missionary enterprise to enter the erstwhile Kingdom of Lahore (Punjab) after its annexation by the British in March 1849. The Revd. Charles W. Forman and the Revd. John Newton made the two week long journey from Ludhiana on the border to Lahore in December 1849 and immediately set upon establishing an English medium school with the aid and blessings of the government. Even though through the rest of the nineteenth century their main endeavor therefore became education, they did not lose sight of their primary objective—conversion. Therefore the Mission used various means—teaching Bible in the classroom, preaching on the streets, and going into the villages, to convert the locals.

The aim of this paper is to trace the ways in which the American Presbyterian Mission attempted to convert the people of the Punjab, and the responses they elicited from the local population. Their success or failure and the reasons behind it will also be analyzed. Issues of race and caste relations as well as Indian Christian leadership development as seen by the missionaries, colonial officers and the Christian converts will also be analyzed. This paper will use the official reports of the Mission as well as the private papers of the missionaries, government reports and newspaper records to weave the intricate story of how the American Presbyterian Mission developed and even transformed in the Punjab through these years and what this meant for the missionary endeavor and the province and India at large.