



The Battle Belongs to the Lord: Healthcare Amidst Conflict in Kashmir

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Let me start with my testimony. I was born into a staunch Hindu family. There was always a question in my mother's mind: "Why are there so many Gods? Who will take me to heaven?" Finally her quest ended in a mission hospital in Rajhmundry, Andhra Pradesh. After a meeting with Dr. Susheela, my mother underwent an appendectomy operation. I was 6 years old then. After seeing Dr. Susheela's life, my mother desired in her heart that her first born should become a missionary doctor (that's me). She didn't even pray, but still our good Lord fulfilled that desire. I accepted Him as my personal savior after Dr. Latha Paul (ODC) led me to salvation in 1978. God helped me to repent deeply for my fallen nature and wicked thoughts and to retribute stolen things.

Now regarding our , John Bishop Memorial Hospital is a 110 year-old maternity hospital situated in Anantnag, Jammu-Kashmir, India. During the militancy uprising in 1989, the hospital faced a severe setback, so much so that the hospital remained closed for almost seven years. After much prayer, the President of Laymen's Evangelical Fellowship, Mr. Joshua Daniel, sent Dr. Joseph Daniel, an orthopedic surgeon, from St. Stephen Hospital, Delhi. He stayed for 3 months, and later, he and I took over responsibilities in 1997. Before coming here, I worked as a senior gynecologist in a maternity hospital, Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh for 17 years.

I came to Kashmir the first time for a month in January 1996 to survey the hospital. During that time, the hospital staff (a few old Muslim staff) had

suffered much due to lack of salaries while the hospital was closed. Nevertheless, they tried to guard the campus and prevent the equipment from being taken away. I did 75 tubectomies and 3 caesareans and paid their salaries. One day as I was alone in the hospital, some militants from Hizbul Mujahideen suddenly entered our hospital and took away our Land Rover. Later on, they left it some 17 km away. But, as it was my first visit, I did not dare to inform the police. Years later, we found a bullet lodged in the top of that car.

There were many troubles in reviving the work. I returned the second time with the intent to remain permanently. Forty days after my arrival, 4 Ikwans (surrendered militants) attacked us and took away cash and valuables at gunpoint, threatening us not to inform the police. After this incident, the government gave us security, first Jammu Kashmir Police and later Central Reserve Police Force during the Iraq-US war. At present, we don't have them (except two Jammu Kashmir Police) as they have been sent elsewhere. Once, I was given porridge mixed with finely-crushed glass pieces to eat, but miraculously I was unharmed. Gradually, they started understanding us.

Our work started increasing, slowly but steadily. People began having a lot of trust in this hospital. God has given me good Christian staff with



a definite calling and sacrifice. Some of them even resigned their government jobs and joined us.

God helped us reopen the Nursing School, which had been closed for 15 years due to militancy. Now, it has 54 Muslim students (both Auxilliary Nurse Midwives and Graduate Nurse Midwives) all residing inside the campus. Recently, the District Commissioner visited our hospital and appreciated our work; he requested us to start a B.Sc. Nursing program.

Under the shelter of the hospital work, the Lord has been enabling us to freely share the gospel before our daily ward rounds. We witness very boldly, giving tracts (in Urdu) to the needy and praying for them. In fact, they request our prayers as they acknowledge Jesus as one of their prophets but strongly deny his sonship and deity. The foundation of Christian faith “that Christ died for our sins” is learned in reverse by every Muslim from their elementary stage. We rarely come across people who are deep thinkers. Even if some dare to think, the fear of society restricts them. This heartbreaking daily struggle against the powers of darkness continues. One should venture into such an arena with good discipline and training at home, a thorough aptitude for learning, and, most importantly, a 100 % assurance of His calling.

Conditions here are highly unpredictable. Any political upheaval that concerns the locals affects us badly. At times, the religious leaders warn people not to visit us and announce it in mosques. All our efforts to provide education, free medical help, and gathering children for Christmas last only a few weeks.

In 2008, during the Anantnag land transfer controversy, we faced constant intense situations for two months. On one occasion, we, the female staff, thought of leaving at midnight and even kept

our vehicles ready, but God guided us not to move an inch from the place, and He alone gave us the strength to stay back.

In the year 2010, we witnessed violent activities and continuous strikes for five months. Every week, the Hurriyat leaders structured a resistance calendar which was followed strictly. Even basic essentials were not available. Several private properties were damaged by rioters, and the 15th was declared a black day. The Lord stood with us, and no one approached our gate.

The Indian army called for curfews, but the rioters did not care. Once we were told to keep our gates open, so that rioters could hide inside our compound. The Lord protected us and gave us the courage to refuse. Prayer alone sustained us. Sometimes, with the escalation of violence, we even had to live without lights. The rain is always a big welcome as it keeps rioters indoors. Once when we prayed, God sent heavy rain and scattered the rioters.

On 13th September 2010, after the threat to burn the Korans in Florida, we saw the worst violence in the past 14 years. That day, several Christian schools and churches were burnt down. That same night, two violent crowds with diesel cans approached to burn our institution. All women and children gathered in my hall to pray, and brothers were guarding the compound. At about 10:30 pm, that mob had a disagreement within itself and scattered. After that came a second crowd that wanted to stone us, but the shopkeeper across the road yelled at them and warned them not to cast a single stone. The crowd dispersed with the voice of just one man. Except for a window, not a single soul was harmed that night. This has been just one of the many incidents where the Lord has kept us according to His grace.



We do have many well-wishers in this area. Kashmiri Muslims brought us essentials and food in our time of need. Some of our nursing students called us up and tearfully requested us to temporarily vacate and return to our native places. Thus, in the midst of all this, God is showing us that all are not the same.

Several vicious activities were aimed to stop our work because of our faith. Amidst all these, God is doing His work despite our little faith. In the past, some militants came to me and asked me to conduct abortions for their wives, but I refused and told them that it is a sin to kill an unborn fetus. They became furious and left, but later on, I came across a couple of them in the market place carrying their babes, and they even smiled and wished me well.

So often has it been that a huge bomb would explode just within minutes after our people or vehicles have left that particular spot. Work among these people is truly a work that “pricks you,

scratches you, nearly bleeds you to death, but the fruit is very sweet” (prickly pear – by Eric G Fisk).



For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6: 12 KJV).

The more we face troubles and violence, the more we grow in faith and prayer. Please pray for us that nothing should deter us from doing God’s will.

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