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Abdullah Al Masud*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2729-964X>

Mohammad Zakaria**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1982-5398>

Md. Abdullah Al Mahmud**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9991-0204>

Munshi Meherullah's Theological Discourse and Its Contemporary Implications

Munshi Meherullah'ın Teolojik Söylemi ve Günümüze Yönelik Yansımaları

Abstract

Munshi Meherullah (hereafter Meherullah) was among the earliest Bengali Muslim scholars to engage systematically with Christian missionary activities in nineteenth-century Bengal. He played a prominent role in Muslim–Christian theological debates at a time when relatively few traditional ‘ulama’ publicly responded to missionary discourse. Despite the historical significance of his contributions, Meherullah’s theological writings have received limited scholarly attention within South Asian Islamic intellectual history. Using qualitative content analysis, this study examines his principal writings on Islam and Christianity to explore his theological arguments, comparative method, and responses to Christian missionary claims. The analysis demonstrates that his discussions focused on the status of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, Biblical portrayals of prophets, and related theological issues. Through comparative engagement with the Qur’an and the Bible, Meherullah critically evaluated missionary interpretations and articulated Islamic theological responses within the religious and intellectual context of nineteenth-century Bengal. Despite lacking formal higher education, he developed a sophisticated comparative theological approach that enabled him to contribute effectively to contemporary religious debates and the intellectual life of the Bengali Muslim community. His theological discourse provides an important source for understanding Muslim responses to Christian missionary engagement in colonial Bengal and offers valuable perspectives on interreligious dialogue, comparative theology, and the interaction of religion, colonialism, and intellectual exchange in South Asia.

Keywords: Munshi Meherullah, Comparative Theology, Christian Missionary Activity, Nineteenth-Century Bengal, Muslim–Christian Relations

* Assistant Professor, Department of General Education, Northern University, Bangladesh, masudnrcdu@yahoo.com

** Doctoral Fellow, International Islamic University, Malaysia (IIUM), gažilawdu36@gmail.com

** Associate Professor, Department of World Religions and Culture, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, mahmudnrcdu@du.ac.bd

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Öz

Munshi Meherullah (bundan sonra Meherullah), on dokuzuncu yüzyıl Bengal'inde Hristiyan misyoner faaliyetleriyle sistematik biçimde ilgilenen ilk Bengalli Müslüman âlimlerden biridir. Geleneksel ulemanın misyoner söylemlerine kamuoyu önünde sınırlı ölçüde karşılık verdiği bir dönemde, Müslüman-Hristiyan teolojik tartışmalarında önemli bir rol üstlenmiştir. Tarihsel önemine rağmen Meherullah'ın teolojik eserleri, Güney Asya İslam düşünce tarihi literatüründe yeterince incelenmemiştir. Bu çalışma, nitel içerik analizi yöntemiyle Meherullah'ın İslam ve Hristiyanlığa ilişkin temel eserlerini inceleyerek onun teolojik argümanlarını, karşılaştırmalı yöntemini ve Hristiyan misyoner iddialarına yönelik cevaplarını analiz etmektedir. Bulgular, tartışmalarının ağırlıklı olarak Hz. İsa'nın konumu, Teslis doktrini, kutsal kitaplardaki peygamber tasvirleri ve bunlarla ilişkili teolojik meseleler üzerinde yoğunlaştığını göstermektedir. Meherullah, Kur'an ve İncil'i karşılaştırmalı biçimde ele alarak misyoner yorumlarını eleştirel bir yaklaşımla değerlendirmiş ve on dokuzuncu yüzyıl Bengal'inin dinî ve entelektüel bağlamında İslamî teolojik cevaplar geliştirmiştir. Resmî yükseköğrenim almamış olmasına rağmen geliştirdiği karşılaştırmalı teolojik yaklaşım, onun dönemin dinî tartışmalarına ve Bengalli Müslüman toplumunun entelektüel hayatına etkili biçimde katkıda bulunmasını sağlamıştır. Sonuç olarak Meherullah'ın teolojik söylemi, sömürge dönemi Bengal'inde Müslümanların Hristiyan misyoner faaliyetlerine verdikleri tepkileri anlamak açısından önemli bir kaynak niteliği taşımakta; ayrıca dinler arası diyalog, karşılaştırmalı teoloji ile din, sömürgecilik ve entelektüel etkileşim arasındaki ilişkilere yönelik güncel araştırmalara tarihsel bir perspektif sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Munshi Meherullah, Karşılaştırmalı Teoloji, Hristiyan Misyoner Faaliyetleri, On Dokuzuncu Yüzyıl Bengal'i, Müslüman-Hristiyan İlişkileri

Introduction

After the Battle of Plassey in 1757, political authority over both Bengal and the greater Indian subcontinent shifted from Muslim rule to the British colonial administration. The British East India Company introduced significant changes to the political, legal, economic, and cultural structures of the region (see Travers, 2007; Gleig, 1841). Cornwallis replaced the Mughal legal system with English law (Malik, 2016), while Charles Grant's proposals, presented to the British Parliament in 1792, advocated integrating Christian missionary activity with education as part of a broader programme of colonial reform. These ideas later contributed to the wider dissemination of English language and cultural norms throughout the region (Woodrow, 1862). By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, much of the subcontinent had adapted to the emerging colonial order. To consolidate imperial authority, British administrators established local administrative institutions and an educational system designed to advance colonial objectives. This transformation disproportionately affected Muslim communities that resisted aspects of colonial rule, increasing their exposure to both internal social pressures and external religious influences. Within this context, Christian missionaries actively promoted Christian teachings while presenting critical interpretations of Islam in their efforts to attract converts (Majumdar, 1960).

Missionary activities expanded across the region and significantly influenced the religious landscape of many Muslim communities. It was during this period of profound social and religious transformation that Meherullah was born into a Bengali Muslim family. From an early age, he witnessed the growing influence of missionary activity within his community. As he matured, he developed a

reputation as a skilled debater, engaging Christian missionaries in public discussions and seeking to strengthen the intellectual confidence of Bengali Muslims through his writings.

This article first provides a concise overview of Meherullah's life before examining his role in Muslim–Christian debates in colonial Bengal. It then analyses his principal polemical writings and evaluates their theological arguments. The final section considers the contemporary relevance of Meherullah's intellectual legacy by discussing the study's principal findings and recommendations before concluding with a synthesis of the main arguments.

Research methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on content analysis and comparative textual interpretation. It examines Munshi Meherullah's theological writings, particularly those concerning Christianity, to identify his principal arguments, methods of refutation, comparative use of scriptural sources, and the contemporary significance of his theological discourse. The study relies primarily on library-based research and draws upon both primary and secondary sources. Meherullah's own writings, especially *Radde Kshristan O Daliul Islam*, constitute the principal primary source. Secondary materials include scholarly books, journal articles, doctoral dissertations, encyclopaedias, and historical studies that situate his thought within the broader intellectual, religious, and socio-political context of nineteenth-century Bengal.

Content analysis is employed to identify recurring themes, doctrinal arguments, rhetorical strategies, and patterns of scriptural interpretation in Meherullah's writings. Particular attention is given to his treatment of the Bible, the Qur'an, prophetic narratives, the doctrine of the Trinity, the status of Jesus, the crucifixion, salvation, and his responses to Christian missionary arguments. This analytical approach facilitates a systematic examination of both the structure and the underlying objectives of his theological discourse. The comparative dimension of the study involves identifying relevant textual passages, examining them alongside scriptural and historical materials, and interpreting them within the wider context of colonial rule and Christian missionary activity in Bengal.

To enhance analytical rigour, Meherullah's writings are examined alongside later biographical and historical scholarship. This comparative reading enables the identification of recurring themes, strengthens the consistency of interpretation, and reduces the risk of extracting arguments from their historical and textual contexts. As the study focuses on a historical religious figure and is based exclusively on documentary sources, it does not incorporate fieldwork, interviews, surveys, or experimental methods.

Meherullah's life and encounter with Christianity

Early life and education

Meherullah was born into a Bengali Muslim family in December 1861 in the village of Ghope, located in the Baro Bazar Union of Kaligonj Thana in the district of Jashore, present-day Bangladesh. His father, Munshi Waresuddin, was a devout Muslim who resided in the nearby village of Chatiantola, approximately five to six miles from Jashore (Islami Biswakosh, 1996). He was of Pathan origin (Banu, 2018), although little is known about his broader family lineage. Available historical accounts indicate that Meherullah spent his early childhood in conditions of considerable economic hardship. Following the death of his father at the age of six, he, together with his mother and three sisters, moved to the home of his maternal uncle. From an early age, Meherullah demonstrated an exceptional enthusiasm for learning, a quality that later contributed to his emergence as an influential Muslim intellectual and social reformer. With financial assistance from his maternal uncle, he enrolled in a nearby *madrasah*, where he distinguished himself through diligence and academic ability. Reflecting on his childhood, Meherullah acknowledged the decisive influence of his mother on his intellectual and moral development (Talib, 1983, p. 20):

"Whenever my future seemed about to dissolve, it was at that moment that one person guided me to build it, and that person was my mother. Whatever I have learned in my life is largely due to her inspiration and efforts" (Talib, 1983, p. 20).

Although Meherullah was raised in a family of limited financial means, his perseverance, intellectual curiosity, and commitment to learning enabled him to gain wide recognition as **Munshi** Meherullah, one of the leading Muslim intellectuals of nineteenth-century Bengal. The title *Munshi*, derived from Persian, historically referred to learned secretaries, scholars, and language instructors serving administrative and educational functions in Persianate and Indo-Muslim societies. During the British colonial period, the term was commonly applied to local teachers of Persian, Urdu, and other South Asian languages (*The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1983, p. 580). Recalling his educational background, Meherullah remarked (Talib, 1983, pp. 104–105):

"I do not speak pure Bengali, although I have written some books. I do not know how much the Bengali Muslim society has benefited from these, but I was still able to earn their attention through the grace of Allah. Despite being the son of a poor man, I never considered myself deficient in the pursuit of knowledge" (Talib, 1983, pp. 104–105).

Meherullah received his early education at home under the guidance of his mother's tutor (Khan, 2013). His primary education began with the traditional *Bismillah Khani* ceremony, a customary practice in the Indian subcontinent marking a child's introduction to Qur'anic recitation, which was generally performed when children were four or five years of age. According to contemporary accounts,

Meherullah participated in this ceremony when he was four years, four months, and four days old (Asad, 1999). At the age of five, his father enrolled him in a Hindu *pathshala* to learn Bengali, at a time when formal education received comparatively limited attention among many Muslim communities in Bengal (Banerjee, 2017). Following his father's death at the age of six, he was raised in his maternal uncle's household and continued his education at a traditional *madrasah*. At the age of fourteen, he left home to pursue advanced studies in Arabic, Bengali, Persian, and the traditional Islamic sciences under Mauluvi Mashabuddin, a respected religious scholar of Koyal Khali in the Jashore district who was widely consulted on matters of Islamic teaching, jurisprudence, and *fatwas*. During his studies under Mashabuddin, Meherullah memorised three well-known works by Shaykh Sa' dī—*Pandnama*, *Karimah*, and *Gulistan o Bustan*. He remained under his instruction for approximately three years before continuing his studies for another three years with Munshi Muhammad Ismail, from whom he received advanced instruction in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. Munshi Muhammad Ismail also taught him selected portions of Sa' dī's *Gulistan* (*The Rose Garden*) and *Bustan* (*The Orchard*) (Banerjee, 2017). During this period, in addition to his advanced language studies, Meherullah memorised the Qur'an, Hadith, *Karimah*, *Gulistan*, *Bustan*, and Fariduddin Attar's *Pandnama*, thereby establishing a strong foundation in both Islamic scholarship and classical Persian literature (Ali Ansari, 1983). Nevertheless, persistent financial hardship prevented him from pursuing further formal education and compelled him to seek full-time employment (Khan, 2013).

Owing to his linguistic ability and interpersonal skills, Meherullah was appointed as a clerk to a local district board under the British colonial administration. Contemporary accounts indicate that when the Chairman of the Jashore District Board, the local magistrate, and other officials questioned his qualifications because of his youth and limited experience, Meherullah defended his appointment by asking whether they themselves had possessed prior experience before assuming their own positions. His response reportedly persuaded the officials, who subsequently accepted his suitability for the post (Khan, 2013). Despite this appointment, his independent character and critical outlook made him increasingly uncomfortable serving within the colonial administration. Consequently, he resigned from the position, moved to Jashore town, and adopted tailoring as his principal occupation.

Meherullah was not only a religious preacher but also a social reformer who sought to improve the socio-economic and educational conditions of Muslim society. He is widely credited with popularising the tradition of *waz mahfil* in Bengal, using these public religious gatherings to disseminate Islamic teachings and promote religious education (Khan, 2013). He also established educational and social institutions intended to encourage literacy, learning, and social awareness. Meherullah devoted

considerable effort to expanding educational opportunities among Bengali Muslims at a time when educational participation remained limited within sections of the community (Islam, 2014). He believed that educational advancement was essential for the intellectual and social development of Muslims. With the support of local benefactors, he established numerous mosques, *madrasahs*, and *maktabs* to broaden access to education. At the same time, he praised Indian 'ulama' who encouraged learning through local languages while criticising those religious scholars in Bengal who discouraged the study of Bengali and English. He stated:

"Studying in one's mother tongue is so hated that they are embarrassed to utter it. I tremble at the realization of its destructive consequences. From which country are they taking their wind, water, food, fruit, fish, meat, butter and nourishing themselves, but showing disgrace towards their language? I am terrified as they are initiating in a detrimental way" (Helal, 1992, p. 192).

Because he devoted much of his life to preaching and educational activities, Meherullah paid comparatively little attention to his health. He died at the age of forty-six (Dewan, 2000), leaving behind his elderly mother, two wives, three sons, and two daughters (Helal, 2008).

Meherullah's Interaction with Christian Missionaries

Although Christianity had reached the Indian subcontinent centuries earlier, missionary activities expanded considerably during the late eighteenth century. The intellectual and institutional environment that emerged under British colonial rule, together with the influence of figures such as William Jones, strengthened missionary commitment to organised evangelisation and encouraged more systematic missionary initiatives. Consequently, from the closing decades of the eighteenth century onward, Christian missionaries became increasingly active within the religious and cultural life of local communities. By the middle of the nineteenth century, missionary activities had spread across much of the region. By the 1860s, when Meherullah was born, the Jashore region had become an important centre of missionary engagement, where public preaching, religious debates, and missionary publications frequently presented critical interpretations of Islam and Muslim beliefs. During his formative years, Meherullah witnessed these developments, including missionary critiques of Islam and representations of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which he regarded as inaccurate and misleading. Reflecting his own assessment of missionary discourse, Meherullah observed:

"Their appearances prove that Christianity is the only true religion, the Bible is the only revealed scripture, and Jesus is the Son of God who is the only protector of humanity. These baseless fancies are their resources" (Meherullah, 2007, p. 59).

Meherullah subsequently came into direct contact with Christian missionaries who preached among Muslim and Hindu communities in towns, villages, and local marketplaces, which frequently served as important venues for missionary engagement (Khan, 2013). In response to these encounters, he undertook a systematic study of Christianity in order to formulate informed theological responses to missionary arguments. Through sustained participation in scholarly study circles devoted to Urdu and Persian literature, he further developed his knowledge of Islamic theology, ethics, intellectual history, and religious thought. This sustained engagement with scholarship broadened his understanding of the socio-political and religious circumstances affecting Muslim communities and contributed significantly to the formation of his intellectual outlook (Khan, 2013). As part of his comparative study of religions, Meherullah examined a wide range of religious texts, including the *Vedas*, the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Bible, the *Zend-Avesta*, the *Tripitaka*, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and other works relating to Hindu religious traditions (Islam, 2014). His careful study of both the Qur'an and the Bible subsequently enabled him to participate actively in public religious discussions, dialogues, and debates with Christian missionaries (Khan, 2013).

His strong commitment to the Muslim community, together with his independently developed intellectual engagement, enabled him to examine missionary literature critically, respond systematically to missionary arguments, and address what he regarded as misconceptions about Islam. To safeguard Muslim communities from missionary influence, he adopted a range of educational and religious initiatives aimed at strengthening Islamic knowledge and religious awareness. Together with his disciples, Meherullah travelled extensively throughout villages in different parts of Bengal, delivering public lectures and religious instruction that sought to reinforce Islamic teachings among ordinary Muslims. Contemporary accounts indicate that these activities contributed significantly to limiting religious conversion in several local communities (Kabir, 2013).

Hai and Ahsan (2010) observed:

"Meherullah proved to be the Rammohan of the Muslims of Bengal. Rammohan saved the Hindus from being converted to Christianity in the early nineteenth century, and Meherullah saved the Muslims from being proselytised into Christianity in the late nineteenth century" (Hai & Ahsan, 2010, p. 99).

As his reputation grew, Meherullah received invitations from various parts of Bengal to lecture on different aspects of Islam. Throughout his life, he devoted himself to religious instruction, public preaching, and intellectual engagement with theological issues affecting Bengali Muslims. His activities contributed to broader religious, educational, and social developments within Muslim society in Bengal (Banerjee, 2017).

As part of his *da'wab* activities, Meherullah authored numerous works addressing Islam, Christianity, comparative religion, and contemporary social issues. His first publication, *Ksbristio Dharmer Asarata (Hollowness of Christianity)*, appeared in 1886 and was later revised and republished in two volumes in 1895 under the title *Radde Ksbristan O Daliul Islam (Refutation of Christianity and Evidence of Islam)*. In this work, he responded to Christian missionary criticisms of Islam by examining Biblical passages alongside Islamic sources and presenting arguments that he considered both scripturally and logically grounded.

Another important work, *Jawab al-Nasara (Replies to the Christians)*, contains thirty-four responses to questions posed by Christian missionaries to Muslim communities in the Noakhali region. The work was prepared at the request of the social reformer Mohammad Abdul Jabbar and first published in Noakhali in 1897 with the aim of addressing religious concerns raised within the local Muslim community.

His poetic work *Mehrul Islam (The Sun of Islam)*, published in 1895, consists of six chapters. It opens with praise of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), followed by a discussion of Islam as a comprehensive way of life. Subsequent chapters examine the significance of the Sunnah, the religious basis of the five daily prayers with reference to the Qur'an and Hadith, and social issues including parental responsibility and excessive materialism. The concluding chapter employs narrative and moral reflection to discuss fundamental Islamic beliefs, including *tanḥid*, revelation, and the Hereafter. Meherullah also translated *Pandnama*, originally written by the renowned Persian poet Fariduddin Attar, into Bengali, thereby making an important work of Persian ethical literature accessible to Bengali readers.

Among his other publications, *Hindu Dharma Robosso o Deblila (Mystery of Hindu Religion and Deity Amusement)* examined religious arguments concerning Hinduism through comparative theological analysis. In this work, Meherullah critically discussed literary and religious representations of Muslims found in certain contemporary Hindu writings while also examining religious beliefs and practices from his own theological perspective.

Another significant publication, *Bidhoba Gonjona o Bishad Bhandar (Widow's Scolding and Treasury of Sorrow)*, published in 1897, addressed the social conditions experienced by widows in contemporary Hindu society. Meherullah further argued that certain customs, which he regarded as products of local patriarchal traditions rather than Islamic teachings, had also influenced some Muslim communities. Although the publication generated opposition from sections of Hindu society, it continued to circulate during his lifetime.

Among Meherullah's writings, *Kshristio Dharmer Asarata (Hollowness of Christianity)* and *Radde Kshristan O Daliul Islam (Refutation of Christianity and Evidence of Islam)* constitute his principal comparative studies of Islam and Christianity. In these works, he examined central Christian doctrines through comparison with Islamic teachings and presented theological responses to missionary critiques from his own religious perspective. His broader objective was, in the words of Hussain, "*to inspire the frustrated and morally debilitated Muslim society*" (Hussain, 2012, p. 464). By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, Meherullah had become one of the leading Muslim intellectuals of colonial Bengal, and subsequent scholarship has recognised his contribution to the religious, educational, and intellectual development of Bengali Muslim society (Banerjee, 2017).

Meherullah's discourses on some Christian issues

Meherullah argued that Christians follow the teachings of Prophet Isa, known in Christianity as Jesus, whom he regarded as a prophet in the same line as the earlier prophets, while maintaining that Prophet Muhammad was the final messenger in that prophetic tradition (Khan, 2013). To respond to Christian missionary activities in colonial Bengal, he produced numerous books and pamphlets that examined missionary arguments, defended Islamic teachings, and presented comparative theological discussions of Christianity and Islam. His writings addressed Biblical narratives, Christian scriptures, and the status of the prophets, while giving particular attention to central Christian doctrines such as the divinity and sinlessness of Jesus, his teachings, the attributes of God, and the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Christian scriptures

Meherullah presented a critical examination of the Christian scriptures. While acknowledging that the Bible contains passages praising God, offering moral instruction, and, in his view, including statements compatible with Islamic teachings, he also argued that it contains narratives and descriptions that he regarded as historically, morally, or theologically problematic. To illustrate his argument, he compared passages describing God's mercy with others portraying divine punishment. For example, "*The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy*" (Psalm 145:8), whereas another passage states: "*Then He struck the men of Beth Shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord... He struck fifty thousand and seventy men*" (1 Samuel 6:19). On the basis of such passages, Meherullah argued that the Biblical portrayal of God contained internal inconsistencies. He further maintained that the Bible included numerous contradictions, identifying thirty-five examples in different passages (Al Masud, 2021).

Meherullah also examined how Biblical figures who are recognised as prophets in both the Qur'an and the Bible are portrayed in the two scriptures. He observed that although the Bible describes believers as being protected from sin in passages such as 1 John 5:18, several Biblical narratives depict

prophets engaging in actions that he considered incompatible with prophetic integrity. As an example, he compared the Qur'anic account of Prophet Lut, where Lut is presented as a righteous servant endowed with wisdom and judgment (Qur'an, Surah Al-Anbiya 21:74–75), with the Biblical narrative. While Genesis 19:18–19 portrays Lot favourably, Genesis 19:30–38 narrates an episode in which Lot has sexual relations with his daughters after becoming intoxicated. Meherullah regarded these differing portrayals as evidence of inconsistency between the two scriptural traditions.

Similarly, Meherullah compared the Biblical and Qur'anic portrayals of Prophets Nuh and Daud. He observed that the Qur'an presents both prophets as exemplary servants of God, whereas the Bible recounts episodes that, in his interpretation, attribute morally objectionable conduct to them. He referred, for example, to the account of Noah's intoxication (Genesis 9:21–23) and to the narrative describing David's relationship with Bathsheba and the death of Uriah (2 Samuel 11:2–17). Extending this analysis, Meherullah (2007) argued that similar portrayals appear in Biblical accounts of Ishaq, Ibrahim, Suleman, Isa, and several other prophets, whom he believed were depicted in ways inconsistent with the dignity traditionally accorded to prophets in Islamic theology.

Depiction of Prophets in Christianity

Islam and Christianity recognise several prophets in common, whom each tradition regards as divinely appointed to guide humanity toward God. In both religions, prophets are presented as God's messengers who encouraged faith in the Creator and promoted moral conduct and righteousness. Although both traditions accord these prophetic figures a distinguished status, Meherullah argued that the Biblical portrayal of several prophets differs substantially from their representation in the Qur'an. In particular, he maintained that certain Biblical narratives attribute moral failings to prophets whom Islam regards as exemplary models of integrity.

In this context, Meherullah (2007) compared the portrayals of Prophets Lut, Nuh, Daud, Ibrahim, Sulaiman, and 'Isa in Islam and Christianity. He began with Prophet Lut, who is described in the Qur'an as a righteous servant endowed with wisdom and knowledge (Qur'an 21:74–75) and is also presented positively in the Bible (2 Peter 2:7; Genesis 19:18–19). However, Meherullah noted that Genesis 19:30–37 recounts an episode in which Lot's daughters intoxicate their father and subsequently engage in sexual relations with him, resulting in the birth of two sons. Meherullah compared this narrative with similar motifs found in other religious traditions and argued that such accounts were incompatible with the dignity traditionally associated with divinely appointed prophets.

Meherullah (2007) subsequently examined the portrayal of Prophet Nuh. He observed that both the Qur'an and the Bible describe Noah as a righteous and faithful servant of God. The Bible

characterises Noah as righteous (Ezekiel 14:14), while the Qur'an portrays Nuh as one whom Allah delivered and honoured (Qur'an 21:76–77). Nevertheless, Meherullah highlighted Genesis 9:20–23, where Noah is described as becoming intoxicated and lying uncovered in his tent. In his interpretation, this narrative contrasted with the prophetic character attributed to Nuh in the Qur'an.

Meherullah also compared the Qur'anic and Biblical depictions of Prophet Daud. According to the Qur'an, Daud was among the prophets whom Allah guided and favoured (Qur'an 6:84). Likewise, the Bible describes David as righteous and obedient to God's commandments (Psalm 18:20; 1 Kings 14:8). At the same time, Meherullah pointed to 2 Samuel 11:2–5, which recounts David's relationship with Bathsheba and the subsequent events involving her husband Uriah. He argued that the coexistence of these contrasting portrayals created an inconsistency in the Biblical representation of prophetic character.

Turning to Prophet Ibrahim, Meherullah (2007) observed that both the Qur'an and the Bible present Abraham as a righteous servant and a close friend of God. Nevertheless, he drew attention to passages in Genesis in which Abraham instructs Sarah to identify herself as his sister (Genesis 12:13) and subsequently repeats this statement before Pharaoh (Genesis 12:18–19). He further noted that Genesis 26:9 contains a similar account concerning Isaac. In Meherullah's interpretation, these passages attributed deception to prophets whom both religious traditions otherwise honour as exemplary individuals.

Meherullah also discussed the portrayal of Prophet Sulaiman. Both the Qur'an and the Bible acknowledge Solomon as a king endowed with exceptional wisdom and divine favour. The Qur'an attributes to him authority over creation (Qur'an 27:16–17), while the Bible records that God appeared to him on two occasions (1 Kings 9:2–3; 11:9). Meherullah nevertheless argued that passages such as 1 Kings 11:3 and 1 Kings 11:8, which describe Solomon's numerous wives and concubines and his later association with the worship of other deities, were incompatible with the moral and spiritual status expected of a prophet. On this basis, Meherullah questioned how such descriptions could be reconciled with the Biblical portrayal of Solomon as a divinely favoured figure (Meherullah, 2007, pp. 158–159).

Finally, Meherullah examined the figure of Jesus ('Isa), who occupies a position of exceptional importance in both Islam and Christianity. He observed that the Qur'an refers to Jesus in numerous verses across several surahs, affirming his miraculous birth, prophethood, and performance of miracles while rejecting his divinity, the doctrine of the Trinity, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. According to Meherullah, although the Bible presents Jesus in highly exalted terms, it also contains narratives that, in his view, raise theological questions regarding his status. As examples, he referred to the

temptation of Jesus by Satan for forty days (Luke 4:2–8) and the account of the demons entering a herd of swine with Jesus' permission (Mark 5:2–15). Meherullah regarded these passages as raising theological questions concerning Christian understandings of Jesus' divinity.

Biblical Narratives: Jesus Christ

Meherullah (2007) also questioned several Biblical narratives concerning Jesus. He referred to passages describing the plucking of grain on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1–4; Mark 2:23–28; Luke 6:1–5) and Jesus' response to his mother at the wedding in Cana (John 2:3–4), arguing that these accounts should be examined alongside broader Biblical teachings that emphasise respect for one's parents and consideration for others. He further discussed what he regarded as contrasting portrayals of Jesus' relationship with his disciples. On the one hand, Jesus referred to Peter as "Satan" (Matthew 16:23) and described Judas Iscariot as "a devil" (John 6:70–71). On the other hand, he entrusted Peter with "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:18–19) and promised the disciples, including Judas, authority in the final judgement (Matthew 19:28). Meherullah interpreted these passages as reflecting internal tensions within the Biblical narrative concerning Jesus and his closest followers.

More broadly, Meherullah argued that although the Bible contains the histories of numerous prophets, it presents differing portrayals of their prophetic missions and moral character. In his view, religious scriptures are expected to honour divinely chosen prophets as exemplary moral guides. He therefore maintained that Biblical narratives describing actions which he considered inconsistent with prophetic integrity raised theological questions regarding their representation within the Biblical tradition.

Meherullah examined the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation by engaging with Biblical passages frequently cited by Christian theologians. He referred in particular to the opening verses of the Gospel of John: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"* (John 1:1, 14). He observed that Christian theology understands these verses as affirming that the divine Word assumed human nature through Jesus Christ, who was conceived in the womb of Mary (Al Masud, 2021).

In response, Meherullah questioned this interpretation from both theological and rational perspectives. He argued that if Jesus' designation as the Son of God or the Incarnation rests upon his being created through the divine Word, then the same reasoning could be applied more broadly to all creation, since the Bible itself declares: *"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth ... He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast"* (Psalm 33:6, 9). On this basis, Meherullah asked why the universe itself, which was likewise brought into existence through the divine Word, should not also be regarded as possessing divine status if the same principle were

consistently applied. He therefore concluded that the doctrine of the Incarnation, as he understood it, did not logically establish the divinity of Jesus. Accordingly, Meherullah (2007) regarded this line of theological reasoning as internally inconsistent.

Miraculous Birth of Jesus

Christianity emphasises the miraculous birth of Jesus, affirming that he was born to Mary without human fatherhood and regarding this event as evidence of his unique status as the incarnate Son of God. Islam likewise affirms the virgin birth of Jesus while rejecting the doctrines of divine incarnation and divine sonship. Examining this theological difference, Meherullah (2007, pp. 67–68) challenged the Christian interpretation of Jesus' miraculous birth through a series of arguments drawn from both the Bible and rational analysis.

First, Meherullah argued that if the miraculous birth of Jesus were considered sufficient proof of divine incarnation, then Adam would possess an even stronger claim because, unlike Jesus, he came into existence without either a father or a mother. He noted that both the Qur'an (Āl 'Imrān 3:59) and the Bible (Genesis 1:26–27) describe Adam's creation as a unique act of divine creation, thereby inviting comparison between the origins of Adam and Jesus.

Second, Meherullah referred to the Biblical figure of Melchizedek, King of Salem, who is described as having *"neither father nor mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God"* (Hebrews 7:1–3). He argued that if the absence of ordinary parentage were accepted as evidence of divinity, the description of Melchizedek would appear to provide an even stronger basis for such a claim than that of Jesus, who was born of Mary.

Third, Meherullah observed that angels are traditionally understood as beings without biological parents or genealogical descent. He therefore questioned why, if extraordinary origin alone establishes divinity, angels would not likewise be regarded as divine within the same theological framework.

Fourth, Meherullah drew an analogy from Hindu religious literature, noting that several deities and legendary figures are described as coming into existence through extraordinary or miraculous circumstances. As an illustration, he referred to the traditional account of Mandhata, who, according to Hindu mythology, was born after King Yuvanaswa accidentally consumed water intended to enable Queen Bhṛigu to conceive. Meherullah argued that if miraculous birth alone established divinity, such figures would likewise qualify for divine status according to the same line of reasoning.

Fifth, Meherullah pointed to naturally occurring forms of life, such as worms and insects that appear seasonally without visibly observable parental origin. He employed this example as a rhetorical

illustration to argue that extraordinary modes of existence, by themselves, do not constitute proof of divinity.

Finally, he referred to the statement of John the Baptist: *"For I say to you that God can raise children to Abraham from these stones"* (Matthew 3:9). Meherullah interpreted this verse as further illustrating the unlimited creative power of God and argued that divine creative ability should not, in itself, be regarded as evidence supporting the divinity of created beings.

On the basis of these examples, Meherullah concluded that the miraculous birth of Jesus does not, in itself, establish either his divinity or the doctrine of the Incarnation. In his view, if miraculous origin alone were accepted as sufficient proof of divine status, numerous other beings described in religious traditions as possessing extraordinary origins would likewise require recognition as divine. He therefore maintained that the miraculous birth of Jesus should instead be understood as one of the manifestations of God's creative power rather than as evidence of Jesus' divinity (Meherullah, 2007).

Jesus: A Messenger of God

One of the central theological questions in Christianity concerns the status of Jesus and whether he should be understood as the Son of God. Christian theology affirms Jesus' unique divine sonship and frequently cites Biblical passages in support of this doctrine. Among the passages commonly referenced is John 1:14: *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."* Meherullah examined this interpretation critically, arguing that if the expression *"the Word became flesh"* were understood as sufficient evidence of divine sonship, the same principle would raise broader theological questions concerning the nature of creation and the relationship between God and created beings.

Meherullah (2007) further argued that some Christian missionaries attempted to support the doctrine of Jesus' divine sonship by referring to the Qur'anic expressions *Ruh Allah* (Spirit of God) and *Kalimat Allah* (Word of God). According to his analysis, these expressions were interpreted in isolation from their broader Qur'anic context in order to support theological conclusions concerning Jesus' divine status. To illustrate this argument, Meherullah referred to a public debate held in the village of Teghria, in present-day Jashore district, during the seventh month of the Bengali calendar in 1297, in which he represented the Muslim community in a discussion with Priest Hossain Ali. During the debate, the priest cited Qur'an 3:45, where Jesus is described as being *"among those brought near"* to Allah, and argued that this verse established Jesus' unique superiority in both this world and the Hereafter. Meherullah rejected this interpretation, maintaining that the verse identifies Jesus as one among those brought near to God rather than as the sole individual occupying that position. He further

argued that this interpretation overlooked Qur'an 6:84–87, which also describes numerous prophets—including Ishaq, Yaqub, Nuh, Daud, Sulaiman, Ayyub, Yusuf, Musa, Harun, Zakariya, Yahya, Ilyas, Ismail, Alyasa, Yunus, Lut, and Isa—as recipients of divine guidance and favour. On this basis, Meherullah concluded that the Qur'an attributes divine favour to many prophets rather than exclusively to Jesus (Meherullah, 2007).

Meherullah (2007) also examined the status of Jesus through a comparative reading of the Qur'an and the Bible. He maintained that both scriptures identify Jesus as a messenger of God rather than as God Himself or the literal Son of God. In his discussion of the Biblical expression "*Son of God*," Meherullah argued that the phrase carries multiple meanings within the Biblical text and is employed in a variety of contexts. According to his interpretation, the designation frequently refers to individuals who enjoy God's favour, including prophets, righteous believers, and, in particular, the disciples of Jesus. He further observed that Jesus instructed his followers to regard God as their Father in prayer (Matthew 6:9) and that the Gospel of Matthew contains numerous passages in which believers are described collectively as children of God (e.g., Matthew 5:9, 45; 13:43; 18:14). Meherullah therefore concluded that the expression "*Son of God*" should not be understood as referring to biological sonship or as a title exclusively reserved for Jesus.

In conclusion, Meherullah argued that the Biblical designation "*Son of God*" is applied to a range of individuals rather than exclusively to Jesus. He therefore maintained that the expression should be interpreted metaphorically as denoting a person specially chosen and favoured by God rather than implying literal divine sonship. Within this framework, Meherullah concluded that Jesus should be understood as a distinguished messenger and servant of God rather than as God's literal Son.

Is Jesus the Saviour?

One of the central doctrines of Christianity is that Jesus is the Saviour of humanity. According to Christian theology, Jesus' sacrificial death provides redemption from the original sin associated with Adam and Eve, and numerous Biblical passages are understood within Christian tradition as affirming his salvific role. By contrast, Islamic theology teaches that salvation ultimately belongs to Allah alone and that every individual is born free from inherited sin. Accordingly, one of the principal theological differences between Islam and Christianity concerns the concepts of original sin and salvation.

In his critique of the Christian doctrine of salvation, Meherullah (2007) examined several Biblical passages that, in his view, attribute salvation exclusively to God. Referring to verses such as "*And beside me there is no saviour*" (Isaiah 43:11), together with Isaiah 33:22 and Psalm 37:39, he argued that these passages identify God alone as the source of salvation. On this basis, Meherullah maintained that the Biblical text itself supports the view that ultimate salvation belongs solely to God (Meherullah, 2007,

pp. 89–90). He further referred to Matthew 7:21–23, in which Jesus declares that not everyone who addresses him as "Lord" will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, interpreting this passage as evidence that salvation depends primarily upon obedience to God rather than solely upon recognition of Jesus' status. Accordingly, Meherullah concluded that God alone is the ultimate Saviour, while Jesus should be understood as His messenger.

Meherullah (2007) further argued that the New Testament frequently distinguishes Jesus from God by presenting Jesus as acting in submission to the divine will. In his interpretation, this distinction indicates that Jesus occupies the role of a divinely appointed messenger rather than that of God Himself. He therefore maintained that interpretations identifying Jesus as the ultimate Saviour reflected a theological reading that differed from his understanding of both the Biblical and Qur'anic texts. Although Meherullah regarded Jesus as one of the prophets granted exceptional honour and closeness to God, he concluded that this status should not be interpreted as evidence of divinity or as establishing Jesus as the ultimate source of humanity's salvation.

Crucifixion of Jesus

Meherullah argued that although Islam and Christianity share a common Abrahamic heritage and agree on many theological principles, they differ fundamentally on the question of the crucifixion of Jesus. According to Christian doctrine, Jesus voluntarily accepted crucifixion, died on the cross for the redemption of humanity, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day. By contrast, Meherullah explained that Islamic tradition maintains that Jesus was neither killed nor crucified. Rather, he argued that another individual was made to resemble Jesus and was crucified in his place, while Jesus himself was raised by God, body and soul, and will return before the Day of Judgment (Meherullah, 2007). In support of this position, he referred to Qur'an 4:157–158, which states:

"...they [the Jews] said (in boast), 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah'—But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them... for of a surety they killed him not—Nay, Allah raised him unto Himself." (Qur'an 4:157–158).

On the basis of these verses, Meherullah argued that the Qur'an explicitly rejects the crucifixion of Jesus. He further maintained that the Biblical accounts of the crucifixion should not be regarded as conclusive historical evidence because, in his view, the Gospel narratives were not written during Jesus' lifetime and were not composed by direct eyewitnesses of the event. Supporting this interpretation, he cited Ibn Taymiyya (1984, p. 110), who wrote:

"Not a single one of the Christians was a witness with them (the Jews). Rather, the apostles distanced themselves from the spot out of fear, and not one of them witnessed the crucifixion" (Ibn Taymiyya, 1984, p. 110).

Meherullah further argued that throughout religious history many prophets were sent to guide humanity, yet none assumed responsibility for the sins of others. He contrasted this understanding with the Christian doctrine of atoning sacrifice, according to which Jesus gave his life for the salvation of humankind. To illustrate that voluntary self-sacrifice is not unique to Christianity, he referred to the historical practice of *sati* (*shatidaho protha*) in parts of the Indian subcontinent, in which some Hindu widows immolated themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres. Meherullah presented this comparison not as an equation between the two traditions but as part of his broader discussion of sacrificial concepts in religious history.

Meherullah also compared Islamic and Christian teachings concerning individual moral responsibility. He referred to the Qur'anic principle that *"No bearer of burdens bears another's burden"* (Qur'an 35:18). He further noted that the Bible likewise states that *"the soul who sins shall die"* (Ezekiel 18:20) and affirms that God repays individuals according to their own deeds (Ezekiel 11:21; 22:31; Psalm 62:12). He also referred to Deuteronomy 24:16, which states that parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor children for their parents. On the basis of these passages, Meherullah argued that both the Qur'an and the Bible emphasise individual moral accountability before God. From this perspective, he concluded that the doctrine of substitutionary atonement was not supported by his reading of either scripture.

Accordingly, Meherullah regarded the crucifixion narrative and the doctrine that Jesus sacrificed himself to redeem humanity from original sin as theological claims that he considered inconsistent with both Qur'anic teaching and his interpretation of relevant Biblical passages. He therefore maintained that the Christian understanding of salvation through the crucifixion did not accord with the scriptural evidence as he interpreted it and argued that these doctrines required critical re-examination through comparative textual analysis.

Doctrine of the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity occupies a central position in Christian theology and has been described as *"the heart of all Christian teachings"* (Coolman & Coulter, 2011, p. 23) and *"the central faith of the Bible and of the Church"* (Kärkkäinen, 2007, p. xiv). Christian theological tradition explains the Trinity as the unity of the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit within one divine essence. As Ellis (1860, p. 3) observes, *"God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are brought together"* within this doctrinal framework. Beginning from these widely recognised theological formulations, Meherullah examined the doctrine of the Trinity through a comparative analysis of Biblical texts and Islamic theology. In his discussion, he first outlined the principal Christian understanding of the doctrine

before evaluating it from both Biblical and logical perspectives according to his own theological framework.

The Trinity: Arguments from the Scriptures

In his discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, Meherullah observed that Christian theology understands the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as distinct persons who nevertheless share one divine essence. According to his summary of Christian belief, God the Father is recognised as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, God the Son as the one through whom humanity receives redemption, and the Holy Spirit as the divine presence who sanctifies and guides believers (Meherullah, 2007). Having outlined this theological framework, Meherullah proceeded to evaluate the doctrine through his own reading of the Biblical text.

Meherullah (2007) argued that he could not identify any explicit Biblical passage that, in his view, unequivocally formulates the doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, he maintained that several Biblical passages distinguish between God the Father and Jesus. As one example, he referred to Ephesians 1:17, where Paul distinguishes *"the God of our Lord Jesus Christ"* from Jesus himself. He also cited Jesus' prayer in John 12:27: *"Father, save me from this hour,"* arguing that the act of prayer indicates a distinction between the one praying and the one to whom the prayer is directed. Likewise, he referred to Jesus' prayer in Mark 14:36: *"Abba, Father! All things are possible for you; take this cup away from me."* According to Meherullah, these passages portray Jesus as depending upon God, whereas God is never presented as depending upon another. On this basis, he concluded that the Biblical text distinguishes between God and Jesus rather than identifying them as one and the same being.

To reinforce this argument, Meherullah presented additional Biblical passages in which Jesus describes himself as acting under divine authority. He argued that the relationship between the Creator and the created cannot, in his view, imply identical status or attributes. Referring to John 14:28, where Jesus declares, *"My Father is greater than I,"* Meherullah interpreted this statement as indicating a hierarchical distinction between God and Jesus. He also cited Mark 10:40 and Matthew 20:23, where Jesus states that assigning places in the Kingdom belongs to the Father's authority. Meherullah interpreted these passages as demonstrating different roles for God and Jesus, with ultimate authority belonging to God alone.

Meherullah further examined Biblical passages concerning divine glory. He referred to Isaiah 48:11 (see also Isaiah 42:8), in which God declares, *"I will not give my glory to another."* He compared this with Jesus' statement in John 14:28: *"If you loved me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I."* Meherullah argued that these passages portray Jesus as directing honour toward God rather than presenting himself as equal to Him. He also discussed Luke 8:21 (see also

Mark 3:35), where Jesus states, *"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."* Meherullah interpreted this passage by distinguishing between the expressions *"my mother and my brothers"* and *"the word of God,"* arguing that they reflect distinct relationships rather than supporting the doctrine of the Trinity as understood in Christian theology (Meherullah, 2007).

In Meherullah's interpretation, Christian theologians grounded the close relationship between God and Jesus in Paul's statement: *"the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God"* (1 Corinthians 11:3). Meherullah argued that this passage describes a series of relationships rather than establishing ontological identity. He observed that the verse simultaneously refers to the relationships between man and Christ, woman and man, and Christ and God. According to his analysis, if these relationships were interpreted as implying an inseparable identity, the same reasoning would necessarily extend to every relationship mentioned in the passage. Meherullah therefore maintained that the verse should instead be understood as expressing ordered relationships rather than essential unity.

Developing this argument further, Meherullah explained that the relationship between a woman and her husband, between human beings and Christ, and between Christ and God may all be characterised by love, obedience, and devotion without implying sameness of essence. In his interpretation, Christ's devotion to God resembles the faithful commitment expected of believers toward God rather than indicating ontological equality. Consequently, he argued that the relationship between Christ and God reflects distinction rather than identity. As Meherullah (2007, p. 128) states:

"Although love of a woman for a man and love of a man for God are real, they differ in their identity and appearance. So, Christ's love for God does not imply an inseparable identity, but rather that both are distinct entities. Thus, the father and the son are not the same person but separate individuals in their attributes" (Meherullah, 2007, p. 128).

Meherullah (2007) further argued that several Biblical passages distinguish God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as separate entities. Referring to Mark 3:28–29, he observed that the passage states: *"Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men ... but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness."* He interpreted this distinction as indicating different roles attributed to God and the Holy Spirit within the Biblical narrative. Likewise, he referred to Luke 12:10, where blasphemy against the Son of Man is distinguished from blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. According to Meherullah, these passages suggest differentiated functions and identities rather than complete ontological unity.

Meherullah (2007, p. 130) also referred to the account of Jesus' baptism recorded in Matthew 3:16 (see also Luke 3:21–22), where Jesus emerges from the water, the Holy Spirit descends in the

form of a dove, and the Father speaks from heaven. He argued that this narrative presents the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as acting simultaneously yet distinctly. In his interpretation, the passage therefore depicts three distinguishable actors rather than a single undifferentiated divine person.

Meherullah further maintained that the Bible consistently portrays Jesus as a messenger acting under divine authority rather than as God Himself. He referred to several passages in Isaiah in which God declares His exclusive sovereignty: "*I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God*" (Isaiah 44:6); "*I am the Lord, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by myself*" (Isaiah 44:24); and "*I am the Lord, and there is no other*" (Isaiah 45:18, 21, 24; see also Isaiah 46:9). Meherullah interpreted these declarations as affirming the exclusive lordship and creative authority of God. Within this interpretative framework, he concluded that Jesus should be understood as God's servant and messenger rather than as God Himself. He also referred to Qur'an 5:116, interpreting the passage as further supporting his view that Jesus rejected any claim to divinity (Meherullah, 2007).

Meherullah also compared the Christian doctrine of the Trinity with the Hindu concept of the Trimurti (Islam, 2001). According to his analysis, similarities between the two doctrines suggested that the Christian formulation of the Trinity emerged within a broader historical context in which triadic conceptions of the divine had already existed. He compared the Hindu understanding of Brahma as creator, Vishnu as preserver, and Shiva as destroyer with the Christian understanding of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as described in Christian theology. He further noted that both religious traditions contain narratives involving divine manifestation, referring to the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove (Luke 3:22) and the appearance of tongues of fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:3). He additionally cited the Biblical account of Jacob wrestling with God (Genesis 32:24–30) as part of his broader comparative discussion. On this basis, Meherullah argued that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity should be understood as a theological construct rather than a doctrine explicitly formulated in the earliest scriptural sources (Meherullah, 2007).

The Trinity: Rational Arguments

In addition to his scriptural analysis, Meherullah developed a series of rational arguments against the doctrine of the Trinity. He maintained that the doctrine was not explicitly articulated during the earliest centuries of Christianity and argued that its later theological formulation emerged through a gradual process of doctrinal development. Modern scholarship has likewise noted that Trinitarian theology evolved through complex historical and philosophical debates. For example, Santrac (2013, p. 1) highlights the influence of Greek philosophical thought on the development of Trinitarian doctrine, while Boyarin (2004) argues that certain elements of Trinitarian thought were shaped by "*pre-Christian Jewish accounts*" of multiple divine manifestations. Within this historical context, the Council

of Nicaea (325 CE) occupies a pivotal place in the formal articulation of Trinitarian doctrine. Interpreting this historical development from his own theological perspective, Meherullah regarded the doctrine of the Trinity as a later doctrinal formulation rather than an explicit teaching of the earliest Christian scriptures.

Ahmed (1992, p. 106) summarises one of Meherullah's principal lines of reasoning as follows:

"If God the Father and God the Son, Jesus, are the same entity, then, when Jesus was crucified on the cross and suffered untold pains for three days, did God also die and suffer the same pain? If that is so, who was in charge of the earth and the Heaven during that time?" (Ahmed, 1992, p. 106).

Meherullah further challenged arguments that associated the miraculous birth of Jesus with his divinity. Consistent with his earlier discussion of the virgin birth, he argued that an extraordinary mode of birth does not, by itself, establish divine status. Referring to Adam and Melchizedek, he maintained that if miraculous origin alone were accepted as proof of divinity, figures whose origins were described as even more extraordinary would require similar theological status. As Meherullah (2007, p. 68) writes:

"If the miraculous birth of Jesus refers to the incarnation of God, then Adam would be the principal incarnation, whose birth was more miraculous than that of Jesus, as Adam was born without parents, even without being conceived in a womb. Likewise, Melchizedek, having no parents, no source in his entire life, also deserved to be more God-like than Jesus because he did not have any source to be in existence" (Meherullah, 2007, p. 68).

Meherullah also discussed missionary interpretations of the Qur'anic expression *Rūḥ al-Qudus* (Holy Spirit). According to his analysis, some Christian missionaries interpreted this expression as supporting the divinity of Jesus. Meherullah rejected this interpretation, arguing that being described as blessed or sanctified does not imply divinity. He pointed to other individuals who, according to scripture, were likewise blessed by God yet were never regarded as divine. He concluded that the Holy Spirit should instead be understood as the angel Gabriel (*Jibril* in Islamic tradition), rather than as a divine person. As Meherullah (2007, pp. 61–66) states:

"If Jesus, as a blessed person, becomes God, then many other blessed people should also become God. John (Ishayyah) and Zirmiah had been blessed before their birth, but they were not God. Then, why should Jesus be God who has been blessed at the age of 30? To sum up, the Holy Spirit is not God but rather a messenger known as Zibrail in the Quran and as Gabrail in the Injil" (Meherullah, 2007, pp. 61–66).

Meherullah also engaged with the Christian understanding that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit possess one divine essence while remaining distinct persons. Daniels (2009, p. 5) summarises this doctrine as follows: *"God is one God who has manifested Himself in three different ways for the salvation of mankind—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."* Meherullah acknowledged this theological formulation

but questioned whether sharing identical attributes necessarily establishes ontological identity. He argued that similarity in knowledge, will, power, or moral qualities does not, by itself, demonstrate that distinct beings are numerically one. In his view, entities may possess comparable characteristics while remaining distinct in their identities. On this basis, Meherullah concluded that the similarities identified within Trinitarian theology were insufficient to establish the ontological unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Meherullah, 2007).

Findings and recommendations

An informed engagement with the contemporary global order requires a comprehensive understanding of its intellectual foundations, the historical factors shaping religious interactions, and the mechanisms through which ideological and missionary discourses have developed. Meherullah's engagement with Christian missionary activities demonstrates an approach that combined theological argumentation, historical awareness, and comparative textual analysis. Based on the present study, the principal findings and recommendations are as follows.

Findings

Meherullah emerged during a period in which many Muslims in Bengal were experiencing profound educational, social, political, and cultural transformations under colonial rule. These conditions significantly influenced the religious and intellectual challenges confronting Muslim society and shaped the context in which his reformist activities developed. Meherullah actively pursued education through both traditional Islamic learning and independent study. This intellectual commitment enabled him to engage critically with Christian and Hindu religious literature while developing a broader understanding of the social, political, and cultural circumstances of nineteenth-century Bengal. His writings indicate that he regarded familiarity with other religious traditions as essential for responding to contemporary theological debates through informed scholarship.

The study further indicates that many traditional '*ulama*' of the period primarily concentrated on classical Islamic disciplines. According to Meherullah's assessment, this educational orientation limited broader engagement with emerging intellectual and missionary debates during the colonial period. He therefore advocated a wider educational outlook that combined religious scholarship with an awareness of contemporary social and intellectual developments.

Another significant finding concerns Meherullah's critique of the interpretative methods employed in his religious debates. He argued that some missionary interpretations relied on reading individual Qur'anic passages in isolation from their broader textual and theological context. In his view, such selective interpretation led to conclusions that did not adequately reflect the overall message of

the Qur'an. Meherullah therefore emphasised the importance of contextual and holistic interpretation in interreligious dialogue. From his perspective, partial or decontextualised readings could contribute to misunderstanding and reduce the quality of scholarly engagement between religious traditions.

Recommendations

Drawing upon Meherullah's theological approach and the findings of this study, several recommendations may be proposed for future research and scholarly engagement.

First, Meherullah's engagement with the religious and cultural realities of his time highlights the importance of examining the historical, intellectual, and social conditions that shape contemporary interreligious relations. Such an approach encourages researchers to analyse how religious identities, missionary activities, and public discourses concerning Islam and Muslims have evolved under changing political, cultural, and institutional circumstances. Given the continuing transformation of political systems since the emergence of the modern nation-state, further research should investigate how state institutions influence religious life, citizenship, and identity formation in different national contexts, including Bangladesh.

Second, the development of modern nation-states has generated new forms of citizenship, governance, and public identity. These developments have also influenced the relationship between religion and the public sphere through diverse legal, political, and educational institutions. Future studies may therefore examine how Islamic ethical traditions interact with secular political frameworks and how Muslim communities negotiate religious identity within contemporary nation-state settings. Comparative investigations of Islamic and secular conceptions of the self may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of these dynamics.

Third, further research should explore the concept of technologies of the self from interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing upon anthropology, religious studies, philosophy, and intellectual history. Such an approach may provide a deeper understanding of how religious and secular traditions construct individual identity, moral responsibility, and social belonging within different cultural settings. Comparative analyses of these intellectual traditions may also illuminate the diverse ways in which religious communities respond to changing social and political environments.

Finally, future scholarship would benefit from examining the interaction between secular modernity and Islamic intellectual traditions through balanced and historically grounded comparative research. Rather than approaching these traditions as inherently incompatible, greater attention should be devoted to the diverse intellectual, theological, and social responses that have emerged within different historical contexts. Such research may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of

contemporary religious pluralism, interreligious dialogue, and the evolving relationship between religion, society, and the modern state.

Conclusion

Meherullah's intellectual legacy illustrates how theological engagement can be closely connected with the social and historical realities in which it develops. His responses to the educational, religious, and social challenges of nineteenth-century Bengal demonstrate an approach that combined theological argumentation with careful attention to the broader conditions affecting Muslim society. By engaging critically with Christian missionary literature through comparative examination of primary religious sources, he sought to articulate Islamic theological positions while contributing to the intellectual confidence of sections of the Bengali Muslim community during a period of profound political and cultural transformation.

The present study indicates that Meherullah's writings extend beyond religious polemics and reflect a broader concern for education, intellectual inquiry, and social reform. His emphasis on the careful study of competing religious traditions illustrates the importance he attached to informed scholarship as a prerequisite for meaningful theological dialogue. In this respect, his work provides valuable historical insight into the development of Muslim intellectual responses to missionary activity and colonial modernity in nineteenth-century Bengal.

The findings also suggest that Meherullah's approach retains relevance for contemporary scholarship on religion and society. Current debates concerning religious identity, intercultural engagement, and theological dialogue continue to require historically informed and intellectually rigorous analyses. Meherullah's method of combining scriptural comparison with contextual interpretation offers a useful historical example for examining how religious traditions respond to changing social and political environments while maintaining their theological integrity.

Ultimately, Meherullah's contribution lies not only in the specific theological positions he advanced but also in the methodological approach he adopted. His reliance on comparative textual analysis, historical awareness, and critical engagement with competing religious claims represents an important chapter in the intellectual history of South Asian Islam. Consequently, his writings continue to provide a valuable source for understanding the intersections of religion, colonialism, intellectual exchange, and interreligious debate in nineteenth-century Bengal.

Author Contributions

Abdullah Al Masud, Mohammad Zakaria, and Md. Abdullah Al Mahmud contributed collaboratively to the conception of the study, methodological design, interpretation of the findings,

drafting of the manuscript, and subsequent revisions. All three authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to publication.

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