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शिम्पी पांडे और रौशन ठाकुर

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Religious Contestations in *Purvanchal/Purab* Christian Missionary Activities from Allahabad to Patna up to C. 1860

Dr. Farha Khan*

In the First decade of the nineteenth century vast tracts of the North Western India fell into the hands of the English East India Company. It was within this heartland of Hindustan, and particularly in the holy cities on the bank of the rivers Jumna, Gomti and Ganga, that the various Missionary Societies made their appearance. By this time the Catholic Capuchin order sphere of influence from the 'Gangetic core' cities of Allahabad, Benares and Patna was being occupied by the Protestant missionaries.¹

After the Charter Act of 1813 that allows all the missionary societies to freely work in the British territories of India, the primary consideration of any mission seems to have been to choose a place which because of its political, commercial, or religious importance might be a centre of diffusion of the Gospel. This consideration alone would explain the choice of Allahabad and Benares. The ancient cities of Prayag (ancient Allahabad) and Kashi (ancient Benares) are situated at the junction of Ganga and Jumna rivers. The twelve yearly fair (*khumbh mela*) and other sacrificial assemblage of the multitude of people from many near and remote part of the country to bathe in the Ganges at Allahabad and the daily religious ceremonies attended by a huge number of masses, at the *ghats* of Benares opened a wide door of opportunities to the missionaries to propagate their religious instruction. In addition to this it was in this region that one could find the big military and civil stations. Besides that, Allahabad was the seat of governance of the whole north-west provinces (henceforth N.W.P.), and eventually the European residents of these towns felt the need of a whole-time Bishop and not the occasional flying visits of the Bishop of Calcutta.² Same reasons stood behind the selection of the remote eastern district of Uttar Pradesh and the capital of Bihar, Patna. 'Phulwarisharif' the most celebrated Muslim religious centre of Bihar (situated near Patna) was visited not only by the Muslims but people of every religious sect³; thus paving the way for missionary purposes.

A large number of ecclesiastical units were created in the Upper Gangetic valley to take on the newly established Churches, missions and to outshine the proselytizing activities. Up till AD 1820, the region up to Patna was under the jurisdiction of the Bishop at Agra. Who were look after the affairs of the missionary societies at the newly emerging Christian communities of the entire Hindustan Mission. However, owing to the long distance between the two places, a separate Seat was established at Patna with a full fledged Bishop for the city in the year 1845. After two years, Benares along with Ghazipur and Chunar were placed under the authority of the Bishop of Patna; which later in the year 1866 became a diocese⁴ with its seat of governance at Allahabad.

The present paper focuses on the proselytizing activities of various Christian Mission in the eastern regions of the United Provinces which had some of the grand pilgrimage centers of the two major religious communities of India. The data available to us on the issue is largely derived from English Government records and Missionary writings. As on this issue indigenous voices are apparently silent. This account is an attempt to portray history of the Missions, their encounters, assimilation, and contestation, through the prism of missionaries.

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