

Religious History Of Islampur Subdivision In Uttar Dinajpur District : A Case Study

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Abstract: Every nation living on Earth has a religious history, which is an essential part of their culture heritage. The religious histories of different nations define their eternal values and principles. India is the home of the Sanatani Hindu religion. So the Sanatani Hindu religion has a profound influence on Indian culture. The present work attempts a detailed study of Religious History in the Uttar Dinajpur District with special reference to the Islampur Subdivision. The influence of the Sanatani Hindu religion is evident in the culture of Islampur subdivision, as the original inhabitants were closely associated with this faith. Numerous idols of Hindu deities have been discovered in the soil of Islampur Subdivision. There are many silent witnesses to the worship of nature here, which is an inseparable part of the local culture. The local influence of various mythological and Epic events are reflected in people's thought and beliefs. The spread of Islam in this area began during the attacks of Muslim rulers. With the change of times, the influence of Islam has increased in this Subdivision.

Key Words: Islampur, Purnea, Sanatani, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

The current Islampur Subdivision holds a glorious place in the history of the undivided Purnea district of Bihar. The history of Islampur Subdivision began a new chapter from the first of November, 1956 AD. On the first of November, 1956 AD, Islampur Subdivision of Purnea district was merged with West Bengal. Since the Medieval period, the present Islampur Subdivision was included in Tajpur Sarkar and Surjapur Pargana. The culture here is very diverse. Until the Muslim rule, the area was under the influence of orthodox Hinduism, and many deities were worshipped here. Since this area was included in the Surjapur Pargana, the original people here were also known as Surjapuri and their language as Surjapuri. History says that many Hindus in this region converted to Islam and embraced the new faith. There were several reasons behind this Hindu community's conversion to Islam, possibly due to change in religious beliefs and the desire to fight against social discrimination. Although the people here embraced Islam, they couldn't completely erase the sign of hindutva. Those who converted from Hinduism to Islam are known as Nasya Sheikh Muslim. They were following the religious of Islam as well as many gods and practice of Hinduism. Subsequently, the arrival of the English resulted in the spread of Christianity in this district, which had a significant impact on the local culture.

2. HISTORY OF THE HINDUISM IN ISLAMPUR SUBDIVISION:

Islampur subdivision was closely associated with the rise of the sanatani Hinduism religion, played a significant role in the social and cultural life of the region. This subdivision was involved in many events of Hinduism, many evidence of which has exploded in the social life of these people. On the west side of this Subdivision was the mythological Kingdom of Anga and on the east side was the kingdom of Pundra. "The district are believed to have been Angas to the west and Pundras to the East."¹ This area was under the rule of King Janaka during the period of the Ramayana, which initiated the cultural heritage of ancient Mithila. During King Janak's rule, this Mithila Kingdom was a source of Knowledge and wisdom. "The boundary of Mithila comprises the modern districts of Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Champaran and parts of the districts of Monghyr, Bhagalpur and Purnea."² During the Mahabharata era, this region was ruled by King Virat, The Pandavas took shelter in this region during their exile. "Local tradition still speaks of the struggles and conquests of the Kiratas, and a Kirata (Kiranti) women from the Morang or Tarai is said to have been the wife of Raja Virat, who, according to legend, gave shelter to Yudhishtira and his four Pandav brothers

during their 12 years exile. The site of his fort is still pointed out at Thakurganj in the north of the district."³ The Karandighi police station of this Subdivision was included in Anga during the Mahabharata era. This place is known as 'Karandighi' after King Karna. The pond in the Karandighi police station is known as 'Karandighi', which is familiar to the local. King Karna started performing Jal tarpan (water offerings) at this pond in memory of his ancestors. The reason for the pond's naming is that it has become 'Karandighi' according to his name. Later, the name Karandighi came from this Karnadighi.

The worship of deities in the current Islampur Subdivision is a traditional practice that has been passed down through generations. Digging in Islampur is revealing ancient statues of deities, which are valuable specimens of religious and cultural heritage. A statue of Vishnu was discovered while installing a water pump in a place called Newtown in Islampur. During the construction of the Hospital in Islampur, a Manasa Statue (Deity of Snake) measuring one and a half feet in height was recovered. It is said that the statue were of two, Pala Era.⁴ The tradition of worshipping Shiva has been ongoing in this region for many years. In this Subdivision, there is an ancient essence of Goddess Shakti that depicts much history. Even today, the influence of Goddess Shakti is observed in various festivals and rituals, and enriching cultural heritage of this region. "In every village can be found a Khalistan."⁵ The worship of Goddess Bhagwati was an important tradition in this region. The worship of Goddess Bhagwati has been practiced in this region since ancient times. Both Hindus and Muslims worshipped Bhagwati, symbolising cultural identity among them. "Hindus and Muhammadans celebrate their characteristic festival together. At the time of marriage, Muhammadans perform some ceremony at the Bhagwathi Asthana and put vermilion on the bride's forehead."⁶ The most popular deity in this area was Maharaj, who holds special respect among the local people. This deity was called the village protector deity, and the villagers worshipped him. The temple of this deity was established at the entrance of every village, which can still be seen today. "The most popular deity among the lower grades, both Hindu and Musalman, is Devarta Maharaj and his door keeper Hadi. His abode and temple are very primitive."⁷ The people of this area believed in Ghosts and spirits, and it is an important part of their culture. Even today, there are many people here who believe in ghosts and spirits. "All the low class Hindus, and the degenerate Muhammadans believe implicitly in evil spirits."⁸ The people in this area have deeply believed in Ojha and tantriks since ancient times. When family members fall ill, they often seek help from a Ojha and Tantrik. The practice of applying water and oil is a cultural ritual followed by many families during times of illness. "When ill, even Muhammadans call in a Hindu Ojha, who recites some mantras over the sick man."⁹ Additionally, when a family member falls ill, they would offer fruits, vegetable, and animals to the deities. "They freely offer goats, fowls, pigeons and the first fruits of trees and crops to purely Hindus deities, and especially to the village godling, who generally lives in the most convenient tree "¹⁰

3. HISTORY OF THE ISLAM IN ISLAMPUR SUBDIVISION:

Before the arrival of Muslim rulers in India, the people of these region were fully devoted to Hinduism. The invasion of Bakhtiyar Khilji created a disastrous situation among Hindu's in Bengal. During this time, many Hindus tried to save their lives by converting to Islam. The conversion of Hindus to Islam was influenced not just by the Muslim rulers but also by the oppressive behaviour of upper caste Hindus towards lower caste Hindus. Also, generosity shown by Muslim Sufis played a significant role in converting lower caste Hindus to Islam, amid the oppression they faced from upper caste Hindus.¹¹

Hindus who converted to Islam for the above reasons are known in Muslim society as 'Nasya Sheikh'. Even after converting to Islam, they have been unable to abandon their previous religion. For many centuries, they have been following Hindu customs and principles. People of both religions would worship Goddess Kali together in the village, which was a great example of social unity. During marriage, it was a common practice for Muslim women to apply vermilion on their forehead. "In every village can found a Kaliasthan, and Hindus and Muhammadans celebrate their characteristic festivals together. At the time of marriage, Muhammadans perform some ceremony at the Bhagwati Asthan and put vermilion on the bride's forehead."¹² They also worshipped Hindu deities alongside Allah. They built temples for Allah and Hindu deities side by side and offered prayers. "Attached to almost every house, even of Muhammadans, is a little shrine called Khudai Ghar or God's house, and prayers are offered there in which the name of Allah and Kali both figure "¹³ Over time, they began to fully embrace the Islamic faith. Nevertheless, they could not erase the sign of Hindutva forever. Numerous Mosques were established in this Subdivision from the Mughal period to the English period. The mosques have served as important places for religious activities and organising Islam. Also, many Dargah and Mazars have been established in this subdivision. such as - mazar of pir Ali Chishti in Bhujagaon village, pagla pir of Pagla village, Dargah of Usufganj, Jama Mosque of Dohabari, Hama mosque of Goalpokhar, Akhayanji mosque of Dhantola, Goagaon mosque, Jamira mosque of Chakulia, Bolancha mosque, Surjapur jama mosque, Sonakhoda mosque of Shishabari of Islampur, Jami mosque of Kaltahar etc.¹⁴

4. HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIANITY IN ISLAMPUR SUBDIVISION:

In 1770 AD, the British forces began a new chapter as they occupied this area and took the governance into their own hands. When the English arrived in India, they began efforts to convert poor Hindus and indigenous people to Christianity. However, very few people in this subdivision (very little) adopted Christianity. "Of the total number of Christians returned at a the census of 1901, 156 were Europeans and 149 were Eurasians , while only 134 were natives , from which it is evident that Christianity has made little progress among the native population."¹⁵ During the British era, a 'Mission' was established in Kishanganj to promote Christianity but it did not last long. "Reichardt and maisch were next appointed to Italy, but the death of major latter, founder of the mission, at Kishanganj in 1822 led to its abandonment."¹⁶ until 1908 AD, there was a mission next to the Purnea railway station, known as the Baptist mission. "The only mission now (1908) at work in the district (undivided Purnea) is the Baptist mission, which has a station Purnea town and contemplates opening another at Rani near Nepalganj."¹⁷ In the present Islampur Subdivision, Christian mission have been established in many places and the number of Christian religions has increased.

5. CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, it can be said that the religious history of Islampur Subdivision is diverse, shaped by various religious resources and cultures. The religious history of this region has profoundly influenced the social and cultural life of the Subdivision. The peaceful coexistence that existed between Hindus and Muslims are now being compromised in places. In this Subdivision, it cannot be denied that a largest part of the Muslim society that was emitted from The Hindu society. In this Subdivision, the cultural and behavioural similarities between Hindus and Muslims are clearly noticeable.

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