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EVANGELISM IN INDIA: CORRESPONDENCE OF THE BOARD OF FOREIGN MISSIONS, 1833-1910



Evangelism in India took the form primarily of village itineration where male and female missionaries ministered to the spiritual needs of the populace while simultaneously attending to their medical and educational needs. The collection documents the Board of Foreign Missions' tripartite ministry (Farukhabad, Punjab, and the West Indian missions) in India but also reflects the development of the modern Indian state in a broader sense. Reaction to foreigners generally and Protestant missionaries specifically, discontent with British rule and the development of the Independence movement, and racial and internecine religious warfare between Hindu and Muslim populations are well documented.

Date Range: 1833-1910

Content: 69,017 images

Source Library: Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA

Detailed Description:

The establishment in 1837 of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.'s (PCUSA) Board of Foreign Missions (BFM) signaled the beginning of a worldwide missionary operation destined to embrace approximately fifteen countries located on four different continents. Presbyterian interest in foreign missions however predated the creation of the BFM by almost three-quarters of a century.

The PCUSA's Board of Foreign Missions was organized to convey the gospel "to whatever parts of the heathen and anti-Christian world the Providence of God might enable the Society to extend its evangelical exertions." Throughout much of the nineteenth century, the BFM directed the church's foreign as well as some domestic missionary activities. Before 1870, foreign missions were established in Africa, Brazil, China, Colombia, India, Japan, and Thailand. Following the reunion of the Old/New School denominations in 1870, the BFM absorbed the ABCFM's mission work in Iran, Iraq, and Syria and expanded its own operation.

The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.'s foreign missionary enterprise in the nineteenth century was responsible for the establishment of indigenous churches, a variety of

educational facilities, hospitals, orphanages, seminaries, and other institutions that reflected the church's educational, medical and evangelical ministry.

The Mission in India

The beginnings of American Presbyterian mission work in India antedate the organization of the Board of Foreign Missions. In 1834, William Reed and J.C. Lowrie arrived in India under the auspices of the Western Foreign Missionary Society, the Board's predecessor, and established a station at Ludhiana. Two years later, stations were opened in Saharanpur, Sabathu and Allahabad. In 1840, the India Mission was subdivided into the Punjab Mission, which encompassed the original four stations, and the North India Mission, also known as the Farukhabad Mission.

The expansion of the North India Mission began and continued throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. Mainpuri was opened in 1843, followed by Fatehgarh in 1844, Jullundur in 1846 and Mussorie in 1847. Work at Dehra Dun and Fatehpur commenced in 1853, followed by Etawah a decade later. Hoshiarpur was occupied in 1867 and Etah in 1873, though the latter was not formally constituted as a station until 1900. Ferozepur was opened in 1882, followed by Cawnpore in 1901, Gwalior and Kasgani in 1911 and Shikohabad in 1924.

Work in the Punjab throughout the 19th century revolved around the stations at Ludhiana, Saharanpur, Sabathu and Allahabad. In 1908, Khanna was opened, followed by Rupar in 1910, Moga in 1911 and Kosur in 1913.

In 1870, the work of the American Board of Foreign Commissioners in western India was transferred to the Board of Foreign Missions. Thereafter, that field was known as the West India Mission. In addition to the inherited station at Kolhapur, succeeding stations were opened at Ratnagiri in 1873, in Sangli in 1884, in Miraj in 1892, in Vengurla in 1900, in Kodoli in 1893, in Islampur in 1906 and in Nipani in 1910.

The work of the Presbyterian Church in India reflected the Church's concern for the educational, medical and spiritual needs of the Indian people. Coordination of the three missions' activities in these areas were directed by the India Council after 1913, while considerable interdenominational cooperation existed as well. A variety of educational institutions which had developed in the 19th century continued to grow in the 20th. Some of these included the Christian Boy's Boarding School, later known as Ewing Christian High School, the Allahabad College and Agricultural Institute, Forman Christian College, the North India School of Medicine for Christian Women and the Isabella Thoburn College.

Medical work was carried out through a variety of hospitals, dispensaries, clinics, sanitariums and leper asylums. Institutions like the Wanless Chest Hospital in Miraj, the Philadelphia Hospital in Ambala and the Fatehgarh Memorial Hospital serve as monuments to the medical work done by the Presbyterian Church in India. Evangelism in India took the form primarily of village itineration where male and female missionaries ministered to the spiritual needs of the populace while simultaneously attending to their medical and educational needs.