

Restoration and Preservation of unsung Mahima Dharma and the mystic poet Bhima Bhoi

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Abstract:

The mystic saint-poet from Odisha known as Bhima Bhoi needs to be explored by the academicians worldwide to get recognition in the present literary context and its glory. According to mythology, he was born in western Odisha, to the Khond tribe, probably between 1845 and 1855. He was indoctrinated into the Mahima religion of Mahima Gosain at a very young age and actively propagated its ideology in modern-day Odisha. He had a big role in making Mahima Dharma famous. He advocated egalitarianism and condemned the Brahmin priesthood, caste system, and idol worship. He felt that only a severe catastrophe or the end of the world could cause a major transformation in societal structure. Through the use of his poetry, which is a mirror of his philosophical idea of sunya or nothingness, he foretold the end of the world. According to the doctrine he espoused, God is Alekha, or ineffable, without form or qualities, merciful, and perceivable only via mystic intuition. His poetry captures the conflict of a mind that felt the pleasure of a real saint and despair over the injustice and suffering of humanity in equal measure. He wrote a variety of devotional and philosophical writings, including Ashtakavihari Gita, Chautisa Granthamala Bhajanamala, Brahmanirupana Gita, Stutichintamani, and Nirveda Sadhana. The tradition that Bhima Bhoi left behind after his death in 1895 is still being upheld by many of his devotees today, but it still requires academic attention to highlight the social and philosophical significance of this saint-point and give him his rightful place in the pantheon of Indian social reformers.

Keywords: Mysticism, Alekha, Tradition, Mahima Dharma, Poem.

Aim of the Study:

To overview and present an analytical report of the people belonging to the religious Alekha community, that has been following Mahima Dharma for the past two centuries and constitutional provisions to safeguard and restore their glory and unveil the mysticism in poems of Bhima Bhoi.

Statement of the Problem:

This paper attempts to explain mysticism as it is portrayed in Bhima Bhoi's poems. The research paper will review and analyse Bhoi's poetry in order to identify the underlying ideas. A cavalcade of poems on socio-religious topics was composed by the tribal Odia poet Bhima Bhoi in the nineteenth century. In addition to addressing societal issues, the majority of his poems, extols the grandeur and splendour of creation and the ultimate creator, defining him as a mystic through and through. Most intriguingly, despite not believing in Hinduism or idolatry, he bases his philosophy on Hinduism. The paper and study aims to highlight this saint-point's social and philosophical contributions in order to

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give him his due respect in the pantheon of Indian social reformers, which will be an important contribution in the Indian modern political thinker and thoughts.

Overview of Literature:

Introduction

India, the largest nation by population, is home to many different religious sects. With an estimated 172.2 million Muslims, 27.8 million Christians, 20.8 million Sikhs, 4.5 million Jains, etc., Hindus make up over 80% of India's total population.

Mahima Dharma, also referred to as Mahima Panth, is mainly followed in Odisha and neighbouring states, aligns with the Hindu sect. The religious movement was founded on the worship of the attributeless deity Alekha and the condemnation of all religious practises that were typically imposed by the wealthy and upper-class society.

Background

Mukunda Das, also known as Mahima Swami, established the faith known as Mahima Dharma. He was a Brahmin family member from the former province of Baudh. He was initially in command of the BaudhBalasingha Monastery. He established Mahima Dharma after achieving siddhi at Kapilas Hill in 1862 AD. From there, he travelled to Balasingha where he introduced Jagannath Das of Balasingha and gave him the name Govinda Das.

Bhima Bhoi was the poet prophet of this religion, and his samadhi in Khaliapali hamlet, about 12 kilometres to the west of Sonepur town, has come to be revered by his adherents. Mahimaism fought the growth of Christianity and Vaishnavism because it was created in an environment of oppression and mistrust.

All global religions are embodied in the Mahima Dharma. In the setting of the Indian Renaissance and the global social and political shifts of the 19th century, Orissa was undoubtedly an open territory for the Mahima Dharma to flourish. In the latter part of the 19th century, Odisha was the birthplace of Mahima Dharma. It was born from the two major faiths, Buddhism and Hinduism.

The monks' final act of defiance against the established Hindu religious hierarchy was the Mahima Dharma. The faith known as "Mahima Dharma" was established and taught by the renowned Prabuddha Guru Mahima Gosain. "Satya Sanatan Mahima Dharma" is another name for Mahima Dharma. Being an offshoot of the Sanatan Hindu Religion, it is Satya and Sanatan.

The Satya Mahima Dharma is based on the philosophy tenet that "the final reality is One and the only One. Through the centuries, the human intellect has worshipped the One as it has appeared in various forms. However, according to Bhima Bhoi, "to descend down to the stem abandoning the branches" is the real act of devotion. To turn away from the many and towards the One and Only, in other terms.

Advaitabada is the name given in Hindu thought to the idea that there is only one Deity and one Supreme Reality. Many famous Indian thinkers, including Shankaracharya (9th century) and Ramanuja, adhered to the Advaitabada school of thought (11th century).

In the Subarnapur district's Jatasinga neighbourhood, Bhima Bhoi was born. Jatasinga hamlet was formerly part of the Rairakhol ex-estate. On the edges of this hamlet, where the baby's mother abandoned him, there is a palm grove by a pond. His Guru Mahima Gosain later introduced him in his own home. The writings of Bhima Bhoi convey to us a substantial amount of information regarding the lessons of his Guru.

The works of Bhima Bhoi reflect the very core of Mahima Dharma. He had his guru's companionship and his vision, which was obviously a benefit. Therefore, the only authentic sources for Mahima Dharma are his works.

In Khaliapali, Bhima Bhoi did not lead a Sanyasi lifestyle. He decided to establish a religious school in the spirit of his own ideals. Sanyasini Annapurna, his spiritual partner, was initiating the female followers while they were both residing in the Khaliapali Ashram. There were four other consorts of Bhima Bhoi in addition to Annapurna.

Bhima Bhoi passed away in 1895 AD at the age of just under 45. After his passing, a Samadhi shrine was built at Khaliapali in honour of his revered remembrance.

Rationale of the Study:

The Indian government is committed to serve for the humanity and to strengthen the process in a very recently move, the Government of India has empowered its constitutional provisions to safeguard the interests of the religious sects and believes in India based on the cases that surfaced due to non-identification and vulnerability of extinction of religious sects.

Bhima Bhoi altered the Mahima cult's principles and elevated himself to the position of "Guru" for a brand-new Mahima faith. The fact that Bhima Bhoi, a member of the Kandha clan, founded a religion that forbade idolatry and the social system is an occurrence of great importance. He proclaimed that "Yoga" or concentration and "Bhoga," the pleasurable, are identical for the first time in the realm of religion. He kept both in the same position. Throughout his existence, he himself put it into practise. However, after turning 30 he turned into a "Gruhi Bhakta" or domestic follower.

Through the proposed study, the researchers want to investigate the socio-economic conditions of believers of Mahima dharma, constitutional and institutional safeguards, restoration of sect believers based on religious non-identification, and channelization of their lifestyle and livelihood in the mainstream without any discrimination and violation.

Conceptual Framework:

As the study of social relationships and systems, the most appropriate theories that can help the researchers to better understand and interact with the world around. That includes competing theories that are attempting to explain the same phenomena, as well as theories that cover an incredibly diverse range of different social systems and issues. The theories are the interactionist perspective, the conflict perspective, and the functionalist perspective. And each has its own distinct way of explaining various aspects of society and the human behaviour within it.

Research Questions:

- (1) What are the reasons for non-identification of religious sect Mahima Dharma and what provisions can be ensured in the country to safeguard their rights?
- (2) What are the major problems while preaching the Mahima Dharma and bring back glory to their religious and cultural tradition ?
- (3) What steps are taken by the Indian government to bring lifeline to the mainstream mystical Indian political thinker Bhima Bhoi ?
- (4) What are the contribution of mystical poems of Bhima Bhoi in the Indian literature and what steps are needed for its restoration in historical, cultural and religious traditions?
- (5) What schemes and policies will bring mainstreaming and enhanced livelihood for the followers of the sect and their future secured ?

Research Methodology:

- a) **Coverage:** The study includes the target audience that are the religious believers of Mahima tradition belonging to the religious minority in Odisha that are residing in different habitats of Odisha and nearby state.

In addition to the state of Odisha, this casteless puritanical religion has drew followers from the Schedule and Tribal castes from as far away as Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bengal, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh.

In the Dhenkanal area, Joranda serves as the Mahima Gadi, or holy centre, of the Mahima Cult. It is made up of four temples: Gadi Mandira, Dhuni Mandira, Sunya Mandira, and NitiUpasana Mandira, and it is spread out over 100 acres. The Magha Mela, also known as the Mahima Mela and the Joranda Mela, is the most notable of all the fairs and festivals associated with the Mahima religion. It lasts for seven days during the month of Magha (Jan.-Feb.).

- b) **Sampling Size:** The Sample size of the study are the followers of Mahima sect residing in the different parts of Odisha and the nearby states.
- c) **Data Collection:** The study used a mixed methodology which will include Secondary data as well as primary data. The secondary sources will be analysis of government data and documents that have been in the same domain. It is very difficult to obtain the primary data due to unavailability of the sample as the followers of the sect is not recognised in public domain.
- d) **Data Analysis:** The collected primary data will be analysed using the Analytical tool SPSS. However, since the secondary data is available hence the findings has been analysed through Content analysis methodology.

Secondary findings:

Mahima Gosain, also known as Mukanda Das, of Baudh spread the Mahima Dharma throughout the 19th century. He propagated a clean monotheistic religion that is identical to Vedanta or Upanishad philosophy through some of his followers.

The Mahima cult movement was not a lone movement. The Mahima cult is thought to have started with Chaitanya Das of Khadial. His "NirgunaMahatmya" and "Vishnu Garva Purana" both mention Brahma Purusa as the universe's creator and, like Mahima Dharma, reject idolatry, the caste system, and idol worship. Later, in his "Sudhasara Gita," Sadhu Chandramani Das of Baghapali, Sonepur, showed the absurdity of the Hindu caste system and idol worship. Bhima Bhoi was older than Chaitanya Das and Chandramani Das.

Mahima Dharma is an Orissan reformist movement that revives the Vedantic impetus inside the Sanatan Hindu fold. The Mahima cult represents a synthesis of several opposites, including Hinduism and Islam, Brahminism and anti-Brahminism, and eastern and western traditions. Despite these traditions, the fundamental Indian tradition has not entirely disappeared. It is a special synthesis because its originality does not lay in just grouping disparate philosophical and theological currents together; rather, it lies in bringing them up in perfect harmony and demonstrating the development of a new light that is in a class by itself.

Mahima dharma fulfilled all the requirements for a theistic religion by incorporating all the loftier ideals cherished by earlier thinkers, such as compassion, love, tranquilly, and detachment, and by creating a personal God in Mahima Gosain who is best achieved through a full heart rather than by meticulous study. (It was brought up in a piece by Dr. N. Padhi.)

The Proceeding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, January 1882, reveals that Mukunda Das is the one who founded Mahima Dharma. He first emerged in Puri in 1826 and remained there for a very long period as an Achari-Vaishnab. Because his body had been covered in ashes, he became known as Dhulia Babaji.

He travelled from Puri to Dhenkanal and chose to live near a Mahadev shrine in the Kapilas Hills. Mukunda Das was known as the PhalahariBabaji because he subsisted solely on fruits for the first twelve years of his life in Kapilas. The following twelve years were spent drinking milk and water, earning him the name Khira-Nirahari. He was known to be a devoted follower of the local god while residing in Kapilas. He took great care to improve the area by clearing the forest, planting gardens, caring for the Bhog, or sacred food, of the idol, and looking after the pilgrims that frequented the location on occasion. As a result, the late Maharaja of Dhenkanal's mother, who provided him with milk each day for nourishment, respected him.

He rapidly gained the esteem of the locals in the villages around, and it became widely believed that he was in close communication with the deity.

The Creator of the Universe is Alekh or Mahima, a spiritual being without form, and he alone can hold communion. Mukunda Das left Kapilas Hills after spending several years there and began to preach that the various Hindu idols worshipped there were nothing more than stone and wood, and that worshipping these were articles was useless and of no avail, and that the Creator of the Universe was these were articles. In order to conceal his nakedness, he abandoned his Kaupin and Kanthi and

put on a Kumbhipat. He then travelled to Daruthenga, where he constructed a tungi and started to spread the new ideology. Mukunda Das was deified and started to be referred to as the Mahima Gosain at this location.

Mahima Gosain passed away in the year 1876 AD. Mahima Gosain's passing came as a major shock to his devotees who saw him as Surya Brahma and the Creator of the Universe.

Even during the reign of Mahima Gosain, the Mahima cult's adherents were split into three groups. Kumbhipata, Kanapatia, and Ashrita were them.

India, one of the greatest democracies in the world, upholds the values of secularism and diversity, and the Indian constitution encourages the elimination of prejudice based on one's place of birth, race, caste, or religion. The aforementioned issues all lead to a lack of trust amongst the minorities, which is detrimental to the unity and integrity of the nation. Bhima Bhoi's works are incredibly mystical. Bhoi, an impoverished tribal poet from Odia who was also blind and illiterate, was on level with American transcendentalists in terms of his writing ability. The works of Bhoi show his transcendental poetic vision, much like those of Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, and other notable authors. Almost all of his writing attests to and confirms his profound mysticism. He might even be considered a contemporary rishi (sage).

Bhima Bhoi

In the Subarnapur district's Jatasinga neighbourhood, Bhima Bhoi was born. Jatasinga settlement was formerly part of the Rairakhol ex-estate. On the borders of this settlement, where the baby's mother abandoned him, there is a palm grove near a pond. His Guru Mahima Gosain afterwards initiated him in his own hut. The works of Bhima Bhoi convey to us a substantial amount of knowledge regarding the teachings of his Guru.

The works of Bhima Bhoi reflect the very core of Mahima Dharma. He had his guru's companionship and his darshan, which was obviously a benefit. Therefore, the only authentic sources for Mahima Dharma are his works.

The poet's poems are unparalleled because they are unique, genuine, and sincere. According to Bhima Bhoi's writings, Mahima Gosain personally blessed him and requested that the poet use his poetry to communicate the fundamental principles of Mahima Dharma.

In contrast to Biswanath baba's "Gyana Bhakti Marga," Bhima Bhoi's ideology is known as "Bhakti YuktaGyanaMarga".

According to Bhima Bhoi, the Mahima cult is essentially a humanist cult. It holds that dedication to Alekh will enable even the greatest sinner to find relief. He has therefore created a harmony between worldly life and spiritual life.

Bhima Bhoi altered the Mahima cult's principles and elevated himself to the position of "Guru" for a brand-new Mahima religion.

The fact that Bhima Bhoi, a member of the Kandha clan, founded a religion that forbade idolatry and the caste system is a phenomena of tremendous significance.

For the first time in the history of religion, he asserted that the two concepts of "Yoga" (meditation) and "Bhoga" (pleasure) are same. He kept both in the same position. Throughout his life, he himself put it into effect. After his Guru Mahima Gosain passed away in 1876 A.D., he changed his status to "Gruhi Bhakta" or householder disciple, although he was still fulfilling his obligation as a Mahima Sanyasi by preaching the Mahima religion and introducing thousands of disciples. He gained worldwide fame because to the insightful remarks from Bhima Bhoi that follow.

Bhima Bhoi was thought to have been born blind. However, it has now been shown that he was not blind.

He returned from Joranda to Khaliapali with a sad heart and attempted to restructure the Mahima Dharma after the passing of his Guru Mahima Gosain in 1876. In Khaliapali, Bhima Bhoi did not lead a Sanyasi lifestyle. He decided to establish a monastic institute in the spirit of his own ideals. Sanyasini Annapurna, his spiritual partner, was introducing the female devotees when they were both residing at the Khaliapali Ashram. There were four additional consorts of Bhima Bhoi in addition to Annapurna.

Bhima Bhoi passed away in 1895 AD at the age of little about 45. After his passing, a Samadhi shrine was built at Khaliapali in honour of his revered memory.

Dissemination Plan:

The report of the research paper in the form of a proposed project will be made available and channelized to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India via the mode of Institution and at our personal level so that the better policies could be framed and implemented for the restoration and preservation of Mahima Dharma and literature work of mystical poet Bhima Bhoi. A detailed report will help the governmental institutions to execute the policies for its socio-economic identification.

Findings and Suggestions:

- (1) The reasons for non-identification of religious sect Mahima Dharma can be attributed to the lack of awareness among the masses due to less propagation of religion among the common masses.

Another reason that can be attributed to the non-continuation of the eminent saints and religious gurus to promote the Mahima Dharma that could give it a wide reach among the masses. Less recognition to the principles of the sect and undue recognition to the religion led to a very fumble presentation amongst the masses.

The flowing provisions can be ensured in the country to safeguard the rights of the glory of the less recognised religion. The government should try to give recognition to the followers of the religions and give them due place in the constitutional setup. There should be a release of series of revenue and postal stamps that would duly help in regulation and popularity of the sect. The National and the State Government can also rename domestic and international airports and railway stations in the name of religious leaders and the mystic poet to give them back fame and glory. The curriculum of the state boards can inculcate the chapters on the glory and religious literary texts so that right from the beginning children could learn about them.

- (2) The major problems while preaching the Mahima Dharma and bring back glory to their religious and cultural tradition are almost the same as discussed above along with the distraction among the masses to have an urge of knowing the rich and cultural traditions which are on the verge of extinction.

The followers of the religious sect are less aware of their rich traditions which had a very huge impact in the last two centuries. The vulnerability of losing it is associated with the lack of urge amongst the common masses to have a sense of enquiry of their historical and social aspects of the sect. It can be iterated that if the common masses and the state agencies will work hand in hand definitely the recognition to the glorious tradition and Mahima sect can be restored and preserved for the generations ahead.

- (3) He mystic poet Bhima Bhoi through his poems and literature works which is the only source of retrieving the Mahima religion needs to be given thorough preservation and preaching. The following illuminating lines of Bhima Bhoi have made him world famous.

" Boundless is the anguish
and misery of the living
who can see it and tolerate
Let my soul be condemned to Hell
But let the Universe be redeemed."

It was earlier maintained in beliefs that Bhima Bhoi was born blind. But now it has been proved that he was not blind.

nuhanti se guru nuhanti se sisyaNahinsaantasevaka
nuhanti brahmana nuhantichandalanuhanti se badaloka
nahintankajatinahintanka gotra nathaibachhabebhara
benijanaekaatma mana hoi karuchhantisansara. (Stutichintamani, 36)

He is neither the master nor the servant, the preceptor nor the pupil, the Brahmin nor the untouchable. He comes from no caste and no family. His sense of discernment is nonexistent. These two binary opposites have fused together and coexist as though they have one consciousness and one soul.)

In order to define the ultimate reality, Bhoi transitions from this collection of negations to a set of affirmations.

(4) Bhima Bhoi's ideology is known as "Bhakti YuktaGyanaMarga" as opposed to Biswanath baba's "Gyana Bhakti Marga."

According to Bhima Bhoi, the Mahima cult is essentially a humanist cult. It holds that dedication to Alekh will enable even the greatest sinner to find relief. He has therefore created a harmony between worldly life and spiritual life.

Bhima Bhoi altered the Mahima cult's principles and elevated himself to the position of "Guru" for a brand-new Mahima religion.

The fact that Bhima Bhoi, a member of the Kandha clan, founded a religion that forbade idolatry and the caste system is a phenomena of tremendous significance.

(5) One of the most recent religious sect which came into existence in the 18th century is Mahima Dharma. The governmental efforts along with the institutional support and its preaching amongst the common masses will definitely be a breakthrough to bring the glory of the religion easily accessible to the common masses. The chanting of the "Alakh Niranjana" which means 'One God for all' was even seen and practised by the saints and gained popularity even by the means and modes of television through early channelization's of religious movies and serials which propagated by the saints while broadcasting. However, with due course of modernisation and upgradation of the media and industry these chanting lost the relevance and popularity. It is a matter of utter surprise that such a recent sect just got very easily vanished and if not that, then unpopular in such a small period. The literature and the historical aspect having a claim on the social aspects of people needs to be regained, restored and preserved for the generations ahead as India has been religiously, socially and traditionally very conscious about its rich past to be passed on towards the future. On one hand we have to keep pace with the world on parameters of science, technology, research, education and modernization at the same time we have to be very cautious in preserving our rich history, customs and traditions intact for the masses. Thus any of the steps would be welcomed by the academicians, philosophers and historians in this fight to bring back the glory of the lost heritage.

Conclusion:

In the welcome speech by the incumbent President of India, the mention of mystic poet Bhima Bhoi and his contribution to the literature and religious work found its place. It gave a sense of pride amongst the followers and believers of the Mahima Sect and became a whistle blower and eye opener for the academicians to work and revive the glorious past which is scrambling in bits and waiting its undue recognition in its mother country. India has been a home to various religion, languages, sects, customs and traditions. In this struggle of the fight of recognition, there is the responsibility of the academicians and the historians to give their contribution and help the lost glory of the Mahima religion and the mysticism revealed in the poems of Bhima Bhoi to get its due recognition and take its due course in its journey ahead.

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