

Social Movement and socialization: A Study of Mahimadharm of Odisha

Dr.Pareswar Sahoo
Asst.Prof. in History,
Shailabala Women's Autonomous College, Cuttack.

ABSTRACT

The concept of social movement and the process of socialization is an important area of discussion in the course of history in general and the social history in particular. In the pages of Indian history the social movement though was started under the leadership of Gautama Budhha and Mahavir in 6th century B.C, passing through Kabir, Nanaka, Sri Chaitanaya , the medieval Panchasakhas Atibadi Jagannatha Dasa, Bhata Balarama Dasa, Sisu Ananta Dasa, Jasobanta Dasa, Ayuchtananda Dasa reached at the climax in 19th century under the leadership of Rajaram Mohan Roy , Jyotibha Phule, Sabitri Phule, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagara , Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Ramakrushna Paramhansa, Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Virashalinga Puntulu, B.R.Ambedkara, and Santha Kabi Bhimabhoi of Odisha. Each and every social reformer has tried to bring social change through the crusade against rituals and practices, beliefs and faiths, religious dogmas, social injustice, economic inequality and politically ill treated. This condition was highly prevailed in Odisha in 19th century. In this critical juncture Mahima dharm under Mahima Goasain and his able disciple Santha Kabi Bhimabhoi took a new lease of life. In the world only one religion that is the Mahimadharm was reached at its pinnacle without any royal patronage. In 19th century this dharm was more vibrant in its rational approach cutting across all the rituals particularly the Brahminical pantheon, idol worship. This dharm is referred to Stuti Chintamani, the first ever Metaphysics in the world. In the society when the untouchables are ill treated without getting any privileges by the upper strata of the society, the Mahimadharm was a ray of hope for them. In the writings of Bhimabhoi it is categorically mentioned that in the society everyone is equal. There is only one god who is Sunya(void) .In history it is corresponded to Jainism and Buddhism .The concept of social movement and socialisation is referred to Stuti chitamani, Bhajanas and Jananas . In Odisha people had admired Mahimadharama as the Daharma of untouchables, today to whom we calls as Shudras. The preaching of Bhimabhoi was very simple and philosophical cutting across all the rigidity and sophistications. As result all the bhajanas of Bhimabho acclaimed among the sudras who were living in the hill tracts of Odisha. To see it W.W.Hunter has mentioned it as the mass Movement. And the untouchables for the first became socialize through the process of Social Movement. Bhimabhoi had brought up the disciples for the untouchables. The objective of my research paper is to critically evaluate the philosophy of Mahimadharm of Bhimabhoi. The second one is various aspects of Mahimadharm to socialize the people of 19th century Odisha. The third objective deals with how does mahhimadharm acts as a crusade against untouchability and social injustice as well as the existing practices.

Key words: untouchability, crusade, socialize, patronage, strata , privileges, acclaimed, sophestication

The British rule in India is an important event in the history of mankind. During the time of the British Raj the people of Odisha particularly the lower strata of the society, were imbided as a ray of hope of livelihood by the philosophy of Mahima Daharma and led a social movement in the society under the mahimapanthis headed by Bhima Bhoi, the firebrand of Mahimadharm and other mahima philosophers..

To see the growing popularity of the movement W.W.Hunter in his book Orissa Vol.I has mentioned the 19th century mahima movement was a mass movement. The scholars of subaltern ideologies like Prasant Pradhan ,Biswamayee Pati have mentioned this movement as the subaltern movement. They tried to make the poor Oriyas free from irrationality and falsehood of religious rituals of the contemporary Hindu life. Here with Ramachandra Guha, the author of subaltern theory while introducing his scientific study on contemporary approach to history observed: “Those who write contemporary history known that the reader is not a passive vessel to receive the text placed before him or her.... . The further back we go in time, the less of problem this is ... the closer one goes to the present the more judgmental one tends to become”¹. As Recard Evans has also put it, a student of History attempting to study events in more recent time frames must be... prepared to confront uncomfortable realities and inconvenient truths”².

The prime objectives of this paper are to study scientifically the condition of the people who belongs to the lowest strata from the socio-economic point of view, secondly the role of Bhima Bhoi and how he could able to bring social changes through social movement, thirdly to make a critical evaluation on the consequences of Mahimadharm.

The author has been supported by many source materials to develop this research article such as *Stuti Chintamani*, one of the best metaphysics of the world, Bhimabhoi’s *bhajanamalas, jananas, Study of the decline of a movement of resistance against dominance Mahima Dharma of past and present* edited by Prasanta Pradhan and Pareswar Sahoo, *Resisting dominance Social history of 20th century Mahima Dharma* and many more articles including field study.

The process of socio-religious transformation becomes more flexible under the *Mahima* philosophies in the hilly tracts of Odisha as far as regional history is concerned. It is because the mahimapanthis adopted the concept of sunyavada of Buddhism, became popular in the ideals of Panchasakhas of medieval period through the bhakti movement. In the process of socialization *Mahima Dharma* was highly acclaimed by the marginalized and the backward sections of the society who were concentrated at the hilly tract of Odisha. The *Mahima* institutions like *Mahima Ashrams or Tungies* also play an important role to bring changes in the social and religious life of the people of Odisha in 19th century. Regarding sunyabada or the concept of void Bhimabhoi in his *Brahma NirupanaGita* has mentioned:

Padapani Nahi Tanka Padapani Achhi

Brahamabheda Gyani Jane Anusari Achhi

Nakhakona Nahi Tanka Nakha Kona Patnti

x x x x

Anthunala Nahi Tanka Achhi anthunala

Pasaku gale Bolanti Durantare Chala

Before going to study the process of socialization, socio-religious transformation and social movement in 19th century Odisha is to understand the meaning of the term social movement. It means a type of group action. It is large, sometimes informal, groupings of individuals or organizations which focus on specific political or social issues. In other words, they carry out resist or undo a social change. Similarly we also understand the term *socialization*. According to the *Advance English lexicography*, *socialization* is the action of establishing on a socialist basis, the act of meeting for social purposes, and the adaptation of the behavior patterns of the surrounding cultures. The above mentioned meaning of socialization reveals the fact that it is a continuous process. Its history is as long as to the *Paleolithic* phase of human settlement. Gradually the people started to learn their languages, cultures, values, attitudes, norms, personalities, rights, justice, and behaviour to become a social being³. In this context 19th century bears a water mark in the history of *Mahima Dharma* in Odisha was originated against dominants and inequality as far as social stratification is concerned. In pre-colonial era the people were in a critical juncture particularly in the field of social, political and religious life. They were suffocated by the behavior and attitude and the restrictions of the people of upper strata. As a result, the *sudras* had lost their faith in the society. They could not compete with others due to lack of education, superstitions, social taboos and awareness. Sometimes their simplicity and ignorance led them to a great trouble. Therefore, they were in search of the windows to get socializing through socio-religious transformation. Called in different names viz. Kalinga, Odra, Tolasi, Kangoda, Kosala and Utkal at different points of time today's Odisha bears within it the territorial nucleus of all the ancient kingdoms particularly belonged to ancient, medieval and modern times beckoned people from far and within, the saints like Bhima Bhoi known as *Santhakabi* Bhima Bhoi of Gramadiha of Redhakhole in Sonepur district in the middle of 19th century Orissa. He was more famous for his metaphysics. Though *Mahima Dharma* originated by Mahima Gosain known as Dhulia Baba who resided in Puri town become more popular and took a definite shape under Bhima Bhoi. He was accepted as Dhulia Baba because his living in sand without clothes, according to *Mahima darshan* and the local tradition. After the period of the Panchasakhas of 15th and 16th century *Mahima Dharma*, the only religion had played an important role to accelerate the process of socialization in the socio-religious life of the people of Odisha. When Odisha in 19th century regarded as not much progress in her history, due to lack of education, medieval values were firmly settled with all its tenets and rigidity *Mahima Dharma* side by side continued its popularity among the lower sections of the society particularly untouchables and tribes like *Bhuyans*, *Kandhas*, *Santalas* and *Mundas* etc⁴. It is the fact that the people of these tribes were not ready to accept the social hierarchy. Besides, the effort made by upper strata's in the field of social as well as economic rights put them into a great trouble⁵. They had their own identity of mobilization and mode of worship, practice. As a result, both in coastal Orissa as well as in the hilly tracts the tribes prefer to come under a fold of *Bhakti* which is referred to *Stutichintamani*⁶ and the cult of *Bhakti* was extremely popular among the untouchables and downtrodden, who were socially, economically, educationally and politically

backward. Each caste had its own spiritual teacher called Vaishnava or Santha who performs caste rituals. Through *Mahima Dharma* the lower castes actually destroyed the ritualistic supremacy of the higher castes and the indigenous priests. At present the same practice is continued in the village areas of Narasinghpur, a hilly tract. An example can be made here that the village called Bandhahuda where half of the untouchables of the total population are performed their own ceremonies like, *sradha*, *Diwali* and many more. On this occasion the head of community performs the ritualistic works. Because this *Dharma* was based on monotheism, one God head, who is formless, the one and only supreme God known as *Anakara*, *Alekha*, *Nirakara*, *Niranjana* and *Nirguna* mentioned in *Stuti Chintamani* in a poetic form.

Ruparekha nahihe Sunyadehi

*Achha Ude Hoi*⁷

The concept of one God head or monotheism also popularizes in *Bhagabata Geeta*, *Tripitakas*, *Jatakas*, *Bibel*, and *Koran*. Besides, it reflects in religious tenets of *Islam*, *Christianity*, *Jainism* and *Buddhism*. In 19th century the great apostles like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda were propagated monotheism. Their motto was to establish nationalism among the Indians.

In 19th century the people of lower castes become more attracted towards the tenets of *Mahima Dharma*. This was one of the stepping stone to the process of socialization in Orissa. In the historical process it is unabated that the concept of socialization was predominated under the royal patronage. In absence of royal dynasties, the upper stratas of the society dominated rest of the people, who had not a ray of hope how to lead a healthy life and be the part and parcel of the mainstream of the society.

The popularity of *Mahima Dharma* among the oppressed class was the proof that these people were ready to change the social orders in a process of socialization⁸. It is the fact that the process of socialization brought through language, culture and religious principles. In this regard *Mahima Dharma* simplified the religious world for poor people in a very poetic form. This *Dharma* ignited a scenes of spirits those who were merely neglected by the high class Hindu's. Mostly the Dalitas and tribals and other backward classes some extent the Vaishyas became its ardent followers who were being harassed and paralyzed by the upper classes of the society⁹. Perhaps, it was the first organized and successful subaltern movement in 19th century Odisha. The scholars like P.K. Pradhan has coined as the first organized mass movement from below which became successful in many respects without any support of educated elite¹⁰.

Another aspect of *Mahima Dharma* in the process of socialization is the challenge posed by the women against the male dominated society. A lady name Late Bela Sahoo was born in Siaria in the Narasinghpur Block in Cuttack district liberated her from many of the wrong notions developed by the society for women. In this critical time her notable contributions to the society made her champion to attract a large number of women who belong to lower caste by high degree of spiritual bent of thoughts. As a result, a band of women came under the fold of *Mahima Dharma* whom we call lady *Mahima Panthies*. She popularizes the *bhajan*s of Bhima Bhoi. The *bhajan*s of Bhima Bhoi reflect on humanism, socialism and spiritualism and the realities of life. Besides it highlights on the duties of human being for the sake of

the society. Some scholars have argued that the philosophy of Bhima Bhoi is a religious fusion of *Buddhism*, *Jainism* and the Panchasakha's writings. Therefore, in 19th century such a *dharma* like *Mahima Dharm* was so popular. The following *bhajan*s of Bhima Bhoi are popularized by Late Bela Sahoo as

*Sunya Mandire Vihara, Chalante Sunya Sabada, Katakhandi Bhanga Pata, Ruparekha Nahiney Sunya Dehi and many more bhajan*s of *Mahima Dharma*.¹¹

The impact of the philosophy of *Mahima Dharma*, its concept of one God and the simplest form of worship made easy to the dalitas and tribals to come to the mainstream of the society as far as the process of socialization is concerned. As a result, the old Garjats of Orissa and including the hilly tracts and in coastal belt, *Mahima Dharma* became so popular. To accelerate the process of the socialization thousands of *Mahima Tungies* were established in the village areas to attract more Mahima Panthies as a result, a great process of socialization began in Orissa in 19th century cutting across all the class and caste rigidity¹². The *Mahima ashrams* in greater Bhubaneswar play a great role in promotion of social norms. To give a new shape to the social life and the social structure of the people of rural Bhubaneswar Mahima Gosain first established the ashrama at Patia which is one of the earliest Mahima ashram of greater Bhubaneswar¹³. At present in Bhubaneswar there are fourteen mahima ashrams, these are Satya mahimadharma *ashram*, at Bomikhal, Mahima *ashrama* at the village Baramunda, Mahima tungi at Daruthenga, at Andharua, Damana, Gautama Nagar, and at G.G.P. Colony etc. The reason behind of the scores of Mahima tungis or the ashrams is the babas or the bhaktas use to move one ashram to another in the morning staying at a particular place for a single night. That is why they establish the ashrams within a short distance of fifteen or ten kilometers radius. Having this objective the mahima ashrams are sprang up both in rural and urban areas particularly in the greater Bhubaneswar¹⁴. The relevance of the Mahima dharma is not only existed among the lower castes but also present in higher castes such as the Khandayatans, and the Vaishya community.¹⁵

Thus the role of *Mahima* philosophy, the mahima panthis and santha kabi Bhima Bhoi in Odisha could be traced from cumulative effects of Christianity, and predominant of medieval socio-religious institutions like Sree Jagannath tradition. The social movement in 19th century Odisha helps the Dalitas, the untouchables and backward class to come to the mainstream of the society through the process of socialization. As a result a great socio-religious transformation became possible due to the ardent impact of Mahima tenents as well as the mahima institutions called mahima tungies or the ashramas. Also people of Odisha in 19th century started to be rational before going to impose any kind of socio-religious restrictions. The socio-religious transformation was not only possible among the tribes and the Sudras but also a great change was occurred among the Vaishyas. The Narasinghpur region of Cuttack district in this regard bears a watermark. The mahima devotees like late Bela Sahoo, belongs to Vaishya community, is remembered among the people of her areas as a path breaker for her multifarious socio-religious activities.

References:

1. N.Hasnai, *Indian anthropology*, Delhi, 1996, p.263, R.C. Guha, *India after Gandhi: the History of the World's Largest Democracy*, Picadore, 2007, pp.xxv-xxvi; C. Dash, *Mahee Mandalara Geeta*, Bhubaneswar, 2004, pp.8-10.
2. P. Mukherjee, *History of Chaitanya Faith in Orissa*, Calcutta, 1979, p.76; R.J.Evans, Redising the Past: History of the Political Trastition ,*Jouranal of the Contemporary History* ,Vol.38,2008,pp45-48.
3. P. Sahoo, Orissan Vaishnavism : A study of W.W. Hunter, J. Beams, A Stirling, L.S.S.O' Malley, A.K. Mishra, A.K. Patnaik (ed.), *Intellectual Tradition of Orissa, Ancient to Modern Times*, Bhubaneswar, 2006, pp.132-139.
4. P.K. Pradhan & P.Sahoo(ed.) *Study of the decline of a movement of Resistance against Dominance mahima Dharma of Past And Present*, Bhubaneswar,2010,Bhima Bhoi, *Stutee Chintamani*, Utkal University, 1961, pp.47-49.
5. Bhima Bhoi, *Bhajanamala* ,2015.
6. P. Chatterjee, Castes and Subaltern Consciousness, R.N. Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Vol.IV*, New Delhi, O.V.P., 1989, pp.169-209.
7. Bhima Bhoi, *Adi Ananta Geeta*.
8. Biswanath Baba, *Alekha Parambrahma Darshanam*, Utkal University, 1968, p.9.
9. C.R. Dash, *Mahima Dharma of Orissa*, Biswa Bharati, 1952, p.97.
10. Biswanath Baba, *History of Satya Mahima Dharma*, Cuttack, 1965, p.12.
11. The *Utkal Deepika*, 12.03.1881.
12. M. N. Dash (ed.), *Sidelights on History and Culture of Orissa*, Cuttack, 1977, p.115.
13. B. Nepack, *Historical Aspects of Mahima Dharma*, Bhubaneswar, 2004, p.66.
14. P.K.Pradhan& P.Sahoo (ed.), *Study of the Decline of the Movement of Resistance against Dominance:Mahima Dharma of Past and Present*, Bhubaneswar,2010,pp311-315.
- 15 P.K.Pradhan (ed.), *Resisting Dominance Social History of the 20th Century Mahima Dharma*, Adaspur,