

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND CULTURAL
NETWORKS IN INDIAN CIVILISATION

Mahimā Dharma

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FANINDAM DEO



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY
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Shimla
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DR FANINDAM DEO

INTRODUCTION

Socio-religious Movements and Cultural Networks in Indian Civilisation: Mahimā Dharma

The present study is part of a larger team project on ‘Socio-Religious Movements and Cultural Networks in Indian Civilization’. The latter seeks to create humanistic literature dealing with cultural and spiritual history of Indian Civilization in the process trying to understand the present as much as the past.

It is true that the metaphysical and religious tradition of early Indian Civilization took its definite shape during the classical era. However, the masterpieces of that era are still with us and they are being interpreted and reinterpreted in the context of changing historical situation and in the light of a new frame of reference. Then, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the influence of the West brought about seminal changes in the social and religious beliefs of different communities in India. The project endeavors to map all these cultural and spiritual unfolding. Apart from their ideological aspect, the project also seeks to investigate the sociological questions. My study is an inquiry on Mahimā Dharma on the above light—why and how this came to be propounded and accepted; why and how and by whom was the *dharma* sustained? I have inquired about individuals or communities, who were drawn into this *dharma*. How were such individuals and communities placed in society? What was the character of the existing spiritual environment? What did entry into the *dharma* mean? In what manner did individuals and communities transformed after such entry? How did the acceptance of *dharma* change their understanding of sacred and the profane? In what way did this *dharma* have its impact on the social norms and value system of the time?

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The study has also focused on the reaction of the believers of traditional “Hinduism” against this new *dharma* placing it in the right place in the socio-political and religious atmosphere of Orissan society. All these issues have been analyzed in this monograph.

Mahimā Dharma began in Orissa in the nineteenth century. The study of this *dharma* becomes particularly important in view of its links with the socio-political unrest in Orissa through the nineteenth century. However the socio-cultural environment of nineteenth century Orissa and many of the social and cultural processes emerging therein such as tribal-non-tribal interaction, intra- and inter-tribal interaction, changing religious milieu, the emerging pattern of social stratification etc. are all integrated with a long term trend originating in pre-colonial times. Accordingly any comprehensive analysis of the historical process behind this *dharma* would require an understanding of developments in the pre-colonial periods.

In the first chapter I focus on the evolution of socio-political milieu of Orissa in the historical perspective. To state briefly, the political articulation of Orissa was marked by local, sub-regional and regional lateral integration at a lower level. This process extended over centuries, ending when the regional entity broke up. Between the fifth and the fourteenth centuries the impulses of political fragmentation and decentralization came from below. Aboriginal chiefs, chiefs of obscure origin and the outsider taking advantage of a weak central authority rose to power and formed separate kingdoms. Here we come across interesting conjunction of emerging rulers and immigrant Brāhmaṇs: the ambitious chiefs laying claim to political authority had the patron seeking Brāhmaṇs serving them in justifying their claims. In fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the disintegration of regional kingdoms resulted in decentralization and political fragmentation. The rulers of regional kingdoms had to adopt different strategies and incorporate different ideologies to bring small kingdoms under their hegemony while simultaneously legitimizing their claim to new and constantly changing political boundaries. The evolution of political power in Orissa was intertwined with regional deities who were a source

of legitimization for the new rulers' claim over their newly acquired territories. However, while seeking such legitimacy in brāhmaṇical terms, most of the local rulers who originated from one or the other aboriginal community, simultaneously sought to maintain their links with the aboriginal and integrate them into their kingdoms. To sustain their kingdom they needed the co-operation, if not loyalty, of the aboriginal who constituted the vast bulk of the population.

A special feature of the formation of kingdoms in this area was that instead of 'sustained displacement' (as argued by Burton Stein) the local formation was 'marked by the local acculturation of tribes', which were increasingly brought into the *brāhmaṇic* society and transformed mostly into peasant and other occupational castes. By the end of sixteenth century, we also see a range of intermediaries between the ruler and the peasant. The Mughals conquered Orissa and subsequently recognized these intermediaries as well as the local rulers as *garhjāt* rājās and zamindārs. Marahattās conquered Orissa in mid-eighteenth century and divided Orissa into two major political divisions: *Mughalbandi* and *Garhjāts*. *Garhjāt* rulers consolidated their position in their respective areas. We see competition amongst them as well as composition of myths of their origin and *rāja-purāṇas* to legitimize the *garhjāt* chiefs as *rājā-mahāpuru* amongst the tribals and ethnic groups.

By the end of the eighteenth century the *garhjāt* rājās demanded the nominal allegiance of the tribal chiefs but, beyond that, the vast majority of the tribals were left more or less undisturbed. However, this very recognition by the tribal chiefs led to an elevation of their status. This intensified the process of social stratification, which had already begun earlier. Newer levels of intermediaries appeared and the system became more complex. The *garhjāt* chiefs appropriated some territories for themselves (*bhōgrā*), their relatives (*khōrak pōṣak*), their gods and goddesses (*debottar*), for brāhmaṇs (*brāhmōṭṭar*) and for service holders (*jāgirs*). In the beginning of the nineteenth century British captured Orissa from the Marahattās. Out of political necessity they recognized the *garhjāt* chiefs as feudatories, rājās and zamindārs and kept coastal Orissa in their direct possession.

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The local rulers in their part realized that the colonial rulers were powerful enough to protect them. Thus the alliance between colonial rulers and local rājās was struck. In the emerging situation, a four-tier stratification followed. This upset the previous balance. Previously, these rulers had not dared to antagonize the masses, there was no sustained displacement of tribals, and the local rulers had never transgressed the limit of acceptability. A gradual transformation of the earlier provision of gifts into dues, the concept of zamindār and raiyat relationship, introduction of *thekedāri* system, monetization, spread of administrative machinery in the interiors took place. All these had their impact on the society, which obviously affected its social structure, economic and agrarian institutions and political system. Tribal society appeared to have begun losing its command over resources and environment, as the process of encroachment on land and forest mounted. In the nineteenth century, the alienation of land, breakdown of mutuality, restriction of forest rights, exploitation of cesses, forced labour affected the community as a whole. Prior to colonial rule, local deities guaranteed and represented 'vertical solidarity' which was the most important condition for legitimacy in the tribal society. Under British protection, this became unnecessary. On the contrary, a rigid caste society emerged around the garhājāt. The latter development encouraged and necessitated 'horizontal solidarity' amongst the *garhājāts*.

In the nineteenth century the Jagannāth cult came completely under the iron grip of the rājā-brāhmaṇ nexus. The *śavara-devatā* (Jagannāth) had been hijacked by the ruling classes from the tribals and was used as a tool to exercise their authority over the latter. Even some of the *ādivāsis* were not permitted to enter the very temple dedicated to their God. This went against the basic principle of the universality, the cult of Jagannāth represented. The Jagannāth cult in nineteenth century had come to be identified with those who wielded power and authority. However, it would be wrong to assume that under such emerging order and pressure all groups revolted *en masse* against exploitation. In some areas the tribals accepted a low position where as in others they aspired for higher position and

became a part of the Garhājāt estates. Yet other groups could not cope with the external pressure and withdrew to the inaccessible areas and at other times revolted against exploitation.

Religious ideas have long been the languages of protest, innovation and expression of individuality and separate identity. They provide vast scope for reinterpretation in order to legitimize the aspiration of various sections of the population and justify changes in the existing relationships.

Mahimā Dharma in many ways began as a movement of the lower strata of the society to cope with the emerging social order and counter the spread of orthodox Jagannāth cult by the rājā-brāhmaṇ combine. So in their claim to superiority vis-à-vis the Jagannāth cult, this movement claimed that Lord Jagannāth of Puri left his temple and became a disciple of Mahimā Swāmy, the founder of Mahimā Dharma. Mahimā Dharma is open to everybody, even the lower section of the *jāti* society.

Membership of Mahimā Dharma embodies an element of protest against the prevailing socio-political and religious order. The followers of this *dharma* are forbidden from accepting anything from rājā-nrāhmana and their associates. They are also forbidden from taking Jagannāth *prasād*. A group of Mahimā followers made an attempt in 1881 to burn the Jagannāth idol.

In the second chapter I have focused on the critical attitude adopted by the subscribers of this *dharma* towards the orthodox tradition. This attitude was derived from the tradition itself. For this I have reviewed the literature on Mahimā Dharma. Also I have focussed on life and teaching of Mahimā Swāmy and Bhīma Bhoi, their concept of *mahimā* and *sūnnya brahma*. The *mahimā* concept of *Kaḷi Yuga* and *avatār* and their criticism of the orthodox tradition have also been dealt with. We have also analyzed their speeches, teachings, poems and concept in proper perspective.

The third chapter deals with teachings of Biśwanāth Bābā and institutional developments of Mahimā Dharma. It discusses the division among the followers after the death of the founder, expansion of its base by Biśwanāth Bābā in the twentieth century. This chapter also examines how Biśwanāth Bābā preferred Sanskrit text of the Vedānta and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* instead of

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the Oriya translations of Pancasakhā and in the process how the spontaneous and anti-establishment orientation of the early phase gradually dissipated, though the central theme of egalitarian ideology is still a living faith.

Chapter four tries to draw together the major findings of our study.

CHAPTER I

Socio-Political and Cultural Milieu of Orissa from a Historical Perspective

Mahima Dharma began in Orissa during the 19th century. To place this *dharma* in proper perspective a comprehensive analysis of the *dharma* would require not only understanding of the socio-political unrest in Orissa through the 19th century but also an understanding of development of the pre-nineteenth century period. Therefore, in this chapter we discuss the socio-political and cultural milieu of Orissa with historical perspective. The study of this *dharma* becomes particularly important in view of its links with the socio-political changes in Orissa through the 19th century. During this period, having ousted the Mārahaṭṭās, the British were consolidating their hold. As a part of this process they gave recognition to the local rājās, mahārājās and petty chiefs of different estates as feudatory chiefs and zamindārs.

These rulers while claiming independent status were also trying to consolidate and legitimize their position. Towards this a substantial strategy was the propagation of the 'Hinduism', particularly of the Jagannāth cult. Besides building Jagannāth temples in their capitals, land grants were given to brāhmanas, non-tribal service holders for building temples. These practices of the local rulers continued unabated and got further accelerated by the 18th and 19th century. Predictably, the sufferers were the local tribal and lower section of *jāti* society who were either displaced or exploited. There were changes in the structure and organization of *jāti*.

The Mahimā Dharma movement was a movement of the *chasā* (peasant), *kandha* (ādivāsi) people of central and western Orissa. In the emerging social order the orthodox caste system sponsored by the rājā-brāhmaṇ nexus ostracized the aforesaid lower sections of *jāti* society as well as the bird-eaters. Eventually,

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in order to cope with the emerging order they joined Mahima Dharma movement. Interestingly enough, in their counter claim they rejected the rājā-brāhmaṇ hegemony. In order to champion the cause of the movement they further claimed that Lord Jagannath of Puri left his temple and accepted the tutelage of Mahimā Swāmy, the founder of Mahimā Dharma. Mahimā Dharma was open to everybody, even to the lower sections of the *jati* society.

However, the socio-cultural environment of the 19th century Orissa and many of the social and cultural processes emerging therein such as changing religious milieu, the patterns of social stratification etc., were all integrated with long-term trends originating in pre-colonial times. Accordingly any comprehensive analysis of the historical processes behind this movement would require not only the understanding of the socio-political unrest in Orissa during the 19th century, but also an understanding of developments of the pre-nineteenth century period. So in the following sections we will trace the socio-political and cultural milieu of Orissa from a historical perspective.

I

With the disintegration of the Gupta empire, there arose numerous kingships at the local, sub-regional and regional levels throughout northern and central India.¹ In Orissa this period witnessed the emergence of a rural convergence of political power, led by autochthonous chiefs and, in some cases, by chiefs of obscure origin.² Local chiefs formed small kingdoms in the riverine basins and became champions of 'Hindusim'.³ To 'gain spiritual authority and eventually to strengthen their claim to be rulers, the local rulers welcomed brāhmanas to their courts. On their part the brāhmaṇs cooked myths and genealogies purporting to legitimize the authority of the new chieftains.⁴

However, while seeking such legitimacy, most among such chieftains, who originated from one or the other local aboriginal group, sought simultaneously to maintain their links with the autochthons in order to integrate them into their kingdoms.

To sustain their rule they needed co-operation if not loyalty of the aboriginal, who constituted the bulk of the population. Rulers could not displace the pastoral hunting society in Orissa, unlike what happened in south India.⁵ A special feature of the formation of kingdoms in this area was that instead of 'sustained displacement' (as argued by Burton Stein) the local formation was 'marked by the local acculturation of tribes', which were increasingly brought into the brāhmaṇic society and were transformed mostly into peasants and other occupational castes.⁶

In many ways the history of such areas is conspicuous in terms of its synthesis of aboriginal and brāhmaṇic elements which culminated in the Jagannāth culture of Orissa till the 14th century. As a part of establishing their hegemony, the local rulers also assimilated aboriginal deities into their belief system. The aboriginal stone objects could thus be easily identified with the Shiva *linga*. A good example of this process is available in the Lingarājā temple at Bhubaneswar where even today both bādus (aboriginals) as well as brāhmaṇs are priests.⁷

Further, royal patronage of aboriginal deities served to consolidate the legitimization of the political power over the newly acquired territories. In this process, Vaiṣṇavism got patronized and, thus, illustrated by Lord Jagannāth of Puri, an aboriginal deity Hinduised as an *avatār* or incarnation of Viṣṇu.

The emergence of small kingdoms and a gradual integration of these small kingdoms into sub-regional and regional kingdoms marked the political development of Orissa in the post-Gupta period. For instance, in the upper Mahānadi Valley (present western Orissa and eastern Madhya Pradesh) a chief of obscure origin could establish a small kingdom called Śarabhapurīa kingdom around 6th century A.D.⁸

The upper Mahānadi provided him with the fertile land to establish a kingdom. There was an attempt to improve the irrigation facilities also.⁹ Subsequently brāhmaṇs were invited and were purportedly settled in the interiors. It was perhaps to initiate a process of acculturation and thereby create an occasion to settle the hunting, gathering and shifting cultivation

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communities as settled agriculturists.¹⁰ Fortuitously after the decline of the Gupta empire, the brāhmaṇs of North India were in search of patrons,¹¹ and the newly emerging chiefs wanted the service of these brāhmaṇs to legitimize their claims.¹²

While the chiefs needed access to the more elaborate brāhmaṇical symbolic culture, seeking superior dealings with the supernatural in order to promote themselves socially; the brāhmaṇs also needed patrons. Together, they provided the setting and the vigor for the acculturation of the local autochthonous groups. In this juncture, Vaiṣṇavism as a religion provided a flexible ideology of early incorporation of aboriginals into the Hindu fold.¹³ This process is exemplified in the promotion of the autochthonous chief Śarabha and his Śaravapurīa polity to the status of a rājā claiming *ārya* heritage.¹⁴

When the Śaravapurīas established their kingdom, Udayāna, another chief of an obscure origin, possibly a *śabara*, gradually came into prominence in the Mekala area. His successor claimed 'Pāṇḍuvaṅśi lineage' and linked their genealogy to the lunar clan. They established matrimonial alliances with Śaravapurīas. In the beginning they were the *śamanta* and later the *mahāsāmanta* of the Śaravapurīas, most probably also the chief minister (*Sarvādhikāradhṛita*). They gradually became so powerful that they could capture the Śaravapurīa kingdom and annexed its territory around 8th century A.D.¹⁵

Thus, from a small kingdom emerged a sub-regional and later a regional kingdom in Western Orissa. The Mahanadi and its tributaries namely Śeonāth, Jonk, Tel, Sunder, Udanti and Ong provided fertile valleys and plains. This area became a homogeneous region (Dakṣiṇna Kośala or present western Orissa) and was ruled by succession of Śaravapurīas, Pāṇḍuvaṅśi who later called themselves Sômavaṅśis. The Sômavaṅśis finally extended beyond this region when they conquered coastal Orissa. Their claims to be Pāṇḍuvaṅśis and their descent from moon led to bolder claims of mythical origin than what the Śaravapurīas had attempted. The Śaravapurīas had never claimed divine origin; their symbol of legitimization consisted of patronizing brāhmaṇs and temples. That the Pāṇḍuvaṅśis's claim to divine origin by way of lunar decent was audacious.

They used the title of *Pratāpasakala-Kôśalādhīpati*.¹⁶ They claimed themselves to be *parama Vaiṣṇava*. Apart from Vaiṣṇavism, they patronized Śaivism and even granted villages for supporting a community of venerable monks of a monastery.¹⁷

During the reign of Mahāśivagupta of Sômaṁśī dynasty, patronage shifted strongly towards Śaivism.¹⁸ While his predecessors had claimed to be *parama Bhāgavatas* and *parama Vaiṣṇava*, he struck the emblem of a bull on his coins.¹⁹ During his rule tāntric-Śaivism flourished.²⁰ Gradually around mid-tenth century the descendents of this dynasty started claiming themselves to be Somavaṁśīs. But by this time they also claimed to be Trikalingādhīpati and most of their charters were issued from Suvarṇapur in western Orissa.

When the local dynasties were establishing these kingdoms in western Orissa, a number of small kingdoms began to flourish in coastal and central Orissa. In the lower Mahanadi valley another aboriginal dynasty, Śailodbhavas, established their kingdom extending from Mahendragiri in the south to the lower Mahānadi valley known as Kōṅgada Maṇḍala in the north.²¹ Around mid-eighth century another dynasty called Bhauma-Karas established their kingdom Tôśāli in central Orissa.²² They were able to extend their kingdom up to Kongada in the South and Dandabhukti (Midnapore) in the north. The small rulers like Śulkis of Kōṅgada, Bhañjas of Khinjali maṇḍala also accepted them as sovereign.²³

The Bhauma-Karas of central Orissa and the Somavaṁśīs of western Orissa entered into matrimonial alliances.²⁴ Later the Somavaṁśīs merged their own Kingdom in western Orissa with central Orissa in the 10th century A.D. This gave birth to the first regional Kingdom in Orissa under the Somavasis. After becoming master of three riverine nuclear areas (Dakṣhiṇa Kośala, Khinjali Maṇḍala and Kōṅgada Maṇḍala) they shifted their capital from Suvarṇapura in western Orissa to Yayātinagara on the coast. However such regional expansion does not mean that consolidation was complete. In the 11th century a junior branch of the Somavaṁśī dynasty declared its independence in western Orissa and for some time western Orissa was even captured by the Kālāchurīes of Ratanpur, Chhatisgarh.²⁵

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In the 12th century, the Eastern Gangas, a dynasty from South Orissa, captured central and Northern Orissa. Uniting it with their homeland Kalinga, they shifted their capital to eastern Orissa.²⁶ The last and final territorial integration of Orissa took place in the 13th century when western Orissa was annexed by the Gaṅga ruler Anaṅgabhīma Deva by defeating the Kālāchurī King of Ratanpur.²⁷ He also extended his Kingdom up to Midnapore in West Bengal on the North-East and up to the river Godavari on the South. The Kingdom continued after the Gangas under the Sūryavaṅśī Gajapatis.

In 1540 A.D. the Sūryavaṅśīs were over-thrown by the Bhois, a family of lesser origin, probably Śūdra.²⁸ However, by the middle of sixteenth century the last Hindu ruler in eastern Orissa, Mukunda Deva was defeated by the Sultan of Bengal, Sulaiman Karrani in 1568 A.D.²⁹ The advent of the Sultan helped the rulers of smaller Kingdoms. They declared their independence from the regional dominance of the rulers of eastern Orissa.³⁰

From the above discussion we may conclude that the political articulation of Orissa was marked by local, sub-regional and regional, lateral integration at a lower level. This process extended over centuries, ending when the regional entity broke up, particularly with the advent of the Sultan of Bengal. Earlier the disintegration of the Gupta Empire had helped the indigenous chiefs of the locality to extend their political authority in their respective areas. Over a period of time this resulted in the emergence of powerful Kingdoms led by Amarāyakula of Śaravapur, Pāṇḍuvaiśis of Mekala, Śailodbhavas of Kōṅgada Maṇḍala, Bhaumakaras of Tośali, Somavaṅśis of Kośala and Gaṅgavaṅśis of Kaliṅga.

Between the 5th and the 14th century the impulses of political fragmentation and decentralization were caused from below and not from above. Aboriginal chiefs and chiefs of obscure origin and the outsider, taking advantage of a weak central authority, rose to power and formed their own small kingdoms. Here we come across an interesting conjunction of emerging ruler and immigrant brāhmaṇs: the ambitious chiefs laying claim to political authority had the patron searching brāhmaṇs serving them in justifying their claims.

In the 15th and 16th centuries Orissa, a process can be observed similar to what has been observed elsewhere in north India.³¹ The disintegration of Gaṅgā and Somavaṁśī Kingdom resulted in decentralization and political fragmentation. This resulted partly from partition in the ruling family resulting in the division of the kingdoms and partly from the widespread practices of granting big and small territories to vassals who entrenched themselves territorially and ended up becoming independent potentates.

An important aspect of political development of Orissa was the tendency of rulers of sub-regional kingdoms to shift their capital towards coastal Orissa. Besides other factors, the prime motive seems to have been a desire to control the fertile coastal plains and trade routes, and sustain a big regional kingdom which needed elaborate administration. The hinterlands of Orissa with its hills, forests, preponderant presence of hunter-gatherers and a few pockets of settled agriculture could sustain the demands of small kingdoms only. So when the small kingdoms expanded into regional kingdoms they shifted to the more fertile plains which could generate necessary surplus.

Accordingly we find that the geographical boundaries of these kingdoms were never fixed. The rulers of regional kingdoms also had to adopt different strategies and incorporate different ideologies to bring small kingdoms under their hegemony while simultaneously legitimizing their claims to new, constantly changing boundaries.

Though the local rulers could establish their hegemony over sub-regional kingdoms between 11th and 14th centuries, it was actually after the 12th century that the sub-regional kingdoms developed traditions reflecting distinctive pre-modern characteristics. We will come to this later.

II

While due to its topography marked by hills, forests and rivers and a predominant tribal (kandha, santal gond, śabar, parajā, muṇḍā) population, the development of kingdoms did not follow either the north Indian or South Indian models; in Orissa

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we find a gradual 'concentric integration' of small sub-regional kingdoms.³² In this model 'territorial integration' of small sub-regional kingdoms was supplemented by cultural integration which operated through religion.

Accordingly we will now analyze the cultural integration of Orissa. The evolution of political power in Orissa was entwined with the regional deities, which became a source of legitimization for the new rulers' claims over the new territories. The local deities became the link between the rulers and the tribals. The patronage of pre-brāhmaṇic deities and their elevation to the position of '*iṣṭa devī* and *rāṣṭra devatā*' helped the rulers spread the notion that the local deity had blessed the ruler and/or the ruler could please the deity. This way they used the tribal's emotional and religious attachment to the deities to draw support for themselves, as also the fear of the deity, whose wrath might result from absence of worship. However while seeking legitimacy, in brāhmaṇical terms most of the rulers who originated from one or the other tribal community, simultaneously sought to maintain their links with the tribes and integrate them into their kingdoms. To sustain their kingdom they needed co-operation of the tribal who constituted the vast bulk of the population. Perhaps because of the above reasons the Śaravapurīas and the early Pāṇḍuvaṅśīs, although hardcore Vaiṣṇavas, patronised Śaivas and the Śomavaṅśīs and the early Gaṅgās, although strong-minded Śaivas, patronized Puruṣottam the local deity.

The Śomvaṅśīs, other than patronizing Śaivism and building big Śiva temple of Liṅgarāj at Bhubaneswar, revived the Puruṣottam worship at Puri. According to the tradition, the Śomavaṅśī ruler Yajāti, after acquiring coastal Orissa searched for the deity of Puruṣottam, with the help of the priests and scholars, which he found under a *neem* tree near Sonepur in the village Gopāli in a mutilated form. Therefore new idol had to be prepared. The rituals for the preparation of a new idol could not be held in the absence of '*daitā*' (tribal) priests. These '*daitā*' priests were the descendant of the Śabara chief, Biswābasu, the first worshipper of Lord Puruṣottam. Yajāti could trace the descendant of Biswābasu in Biribadhā in Western Orissa. With

their help he prepared a new idol and renewed the Puruṣottam cult and built a Puruṣottam temple at Puri.

Here it would not be wrong to suggest that the Śomavaṅśī ruler was projecting himself and his dynasty as the protector and reviver of Lord Puruṣottam in a bid to legitimise Śomavaṅśī rule over coastal Orissa. Western Orissa was the homeland of the Śomavaṅśīs and Sonepur was their earlier capital. Through this he could also ritually integrate his homeland and the *ādivāsi* Śābaras. Perhaps it served his political aim to unite east Orissa with West Orissa. Kulke has observed it:

The enlargement and elevation of an already existing autochthonous cult . . . glorified the new ruler and legitimized his power in the domain of the deity. The victorious king, however, was free to select for his royal patronage one or several out of the existing autochthonous cults. Usually he gave his preference not only according to political opportunism but also to his own individual dynastic religious tradition. He thus tried to find a cult of his royal patronage which may correspond to both these religious and political intensions.³³

This policy of patronizing local deities continued during the Gaṅgas. The Gaṅgas too, well aware of the importance of Puruṣottama in Orissa, patronized this cult. Like the Śomavaṅśīs they also chose Puruṣottam, the local deity with autochthonous elements, which however reached the status of the most important cult of Orissa in the 11th century. Gaṅgavaṅśī ruler Chodagaṅga, 1077-1147 A.D., shifted his capital to eastern Orissa.³⁴ Though personally he was a Śaiva, he built the biggest temple of his empire for Lord Puruṣottam at Puri in 1135 A.D. Anaṅgabhīmdeva III (1121-1238 A.D.) of the same dynasty, extended his empire over central and western Orissa. In the first three decades of his rule i.e. upto 1230 A.D. he claimed to be a *raūta* (deputy) and *Putra* (son) of three deities Puruṣottam Viṣṇu of Puri, Śiva Liṅgarāj of Bhubaneswer and Dūrgā (Śakti) Birajā of Jajpur. In 1230 A.D. he built a new temple at his capital Cuttack and named the capital as *abhinaba* Baranasi. But after 1230 A.D. he refers to himself in his inscriptions as the deputy and son of Puruṣottam only. He granted lands to brāhmaṅs

and temples. He also visited the temple of Puruṣottam of Puri, granted lands to brāhmaṇs and temples there and declared Puruṣottam as the King of Orissan Empire. In 1238 A.D. he counted his own re'gnal years as *anika* years of Sri Puruṣottam. Anaṅgabhimdev used Puruṣottam ideology for his Kingdom.

Under Narasiṃha I (1238-1264 A.D.) the Gaṅgā dynasty reached its zenith of political power. He, for the first time took the imperial title of *Gajaṇḍī*³⁵ or the Lord of elephants. He built the famous Sun temple of Konark. Gradually under his rule the Puruṣottam of Puri gained an all India status and the epithet Jagannāth (Lord of the Universe) came into vogue. We, for the first time, come across epigraphical reference of the epithet Jagannāth for Puruṣottam of Puri during the rule of Bhānudeva II (1306-1338 A.D.).³⁶ *Puruṣottam-Mahātmya* of *Skanda Purāṇa*, composed around the same period frequently uses the epithet Jagannāth for Puruṣottam.

The Large scale land grants to brāhmaṇs and temples, the building of new big temples, use of the imperial titles, dedication of the kingdom to the Lord, renaming the capital as *abhinava Bārānasi* indicate that the rulers of Orissa in the changed Pan-Indian political scenario i.e. establishment of Sultanate rule in North India, were trying to establish 'horizontal' legitimization amongst the "Hindu" *rājās* for imperial heritage while seeking simultaneously 'vertical' legitimization within Orissa.³⁷

For the purpose of this study, the most significant aspects were the decline of strong pre-brāhmaṇic elements, the evolution of brāhmaṇic priestly power, and a gradual transformation of the local autochthonous deities to the position of *rāṣṭra-devtā*.

Up to the mid-12th century the pre-brāhmaṇic mode of worship was strong in Puruṣottam worship. It attracted the attention of Vaiṣṇav Saint Rāmānuja who visited Puri around mid-11th century. He was constrained to note both heterodox mode of worship of Lord Puruṣottam and the lives of the priests. He tried to introduce the rituals prescribed in *Pancharātra* School of Vaiṣṇavism. But he failed. This shows how strong was the hold of the non-brāhmaṇs in Puruṣottam worship around 12th century.³⁸ But by the mid-14th century Puri temple had received an All India brāhmaṇic recognition. Śaṅkarāchārya,

while commenting on Rigveda in 1370 A.D. accepted Jagannāth Puri as one of the important centres of brāhmaṇic rituals. The brāhmaṇic versions of the origins of Puruṣottam were created between 1312 A.D. and 1370 A.D.³⁹ The transformation of pre-brāhmaṇic deity into brāhmaṇic deity was not without tension and conflict. There was a constant tension to establish a hierarchy between the non-brāhmaṇic priests, Brāhmaṇa priests and the ruler. Saralā Das reflects this in the contemporary Oriya version of the *Mahābhārata*. In *Mūṣali Parva*⁴⁰ of the *Mahābhārata* he narrates that king Indradyumna in the hoary past tried to lift the *dāru* (holylog) from water with his people. But he could not as it was not merely a log but the half-burnt *Piṇḍa* of Lord Krishna. Then the Lord appeared in a dream and told Indradyumna that only śabara Jarā and brāhmaṇa Basu would be able to lift the *dāru*. Both of them were then invited. Jarā could lift the log easily whereas Basu could lift with much difficulty. Another section of the *Mūṣali Parva* mentions that one of the Orissa Kings, Gālamādhaba, a great devotee of Puruṣottam Jagannāth killed many śabarās and for this Lord Jagannāth had cursed the king that his *vamśa* (line) will become extinct after him. A śabara chief further defeated Gālamādhaba. Gālamādhaba then prayed to Lord Jagannāth for help. Lord Jagannāth intervened and asked the king to surrender before the śabara chief and struck a friendship between them. But he did not withdraw the curse by which the king's lineage would become extinct.

The above narratives indicate the tension and conflict between *rājā*, brāhmaṇ priests and non-brāhmaṇ priests to establish an acceptable hierarchy. The elevation of Puruṣottam as the *rāstradevī* was accompanied by large-scale donation of lands to brāhmaṇs in Puri and all over the empire. Yayāti, the Śomavamśi King, invited ten thousand brāhmaṇs from north India to perform a horse sacrifice.⁴¹ The Gaṅga Kings, Cōdagaṅga, Anaṅgabhimā, Narashiṃha established brāhmaṇ *sāsanās* near Puri and Cuttack. Gradually Puri grew into an important *tīrtha* (pilgrim centre) and attracted people from outside.

The last two Gaṅga rulers tried to reverse the policy of their predecessors. Their inscriptions indicate their independent

sovereign status. They stopped claiming themselves to be deputy or son of Puruṣottam.⁴² They also tried to interfere in the administration of the Puri temple. Perhaps for this reason the priest supported Kapilendra, a minor ruler. Kapilendra a *nāyaka* or *nṛpa* overthrew Bhānuadeva IV, the last Gaṅga ruler of Orissa.⁴³ There are indications of strong opposition from other *sāmantas* or feudatory chiefs and the relatives of Gaṅgas to the capture of power by Kapilendra. Therefore he needed special legitimization. While earlier Kings were claiming to be the son and servants of lord Puruṣottam, Kapilendra claimed that he became the king of Orissa at the *ādeśa* or command of the Lord of Puri.⁴⁴ *Mādaḷāpāñji*⁴⁵, a temple chronicle records that the Lord of Puri appeared in the dream of the last Ganga ruler Bhanudeva IV and nominated Kapila Rauta (Kapilendra) as the successor of Orissan throne. Thus, we find an alliance, between the priests and Kapilendra. To mark this alliance, Kapilendra established villages for brāhmaṇas called *śāsana* villagers. He also exempted many taxes and declared that anybody who would oppose him would be considered a *drohi* (culprit) against Lord Jagannāth.

In 1464 A.D. he marched against the chiefs who had opposed him. This time, before his campaign, he obtained the *ādeśa* (order) of Lord Puruṣottam.⁴⁶ Thus he projected that his action against the rebel chiefs had divine sanction. He claimed himself to be a mere *sevak* (servant). The acceptance of the post of *sevak* according to G.N. Dash was the price paid by Kapilendra to the priest in return of their support at a crucial movement which gradually increased the power and prestige of the priests.⁴⁷ The power and prestige of the priest further increased when Puruṣottamdev, an illegitimate son of Kapilendra inherited the throne. He also depended upon the priests for his legitimization. He established fifteen brāhmaṇ *śāsana* villages near Cuttack and distributed land and money. There are also indications that the tradition of ritual sweeping, *Chhera Paharā*, of the Lord's chariot during the car festival began during his rule. For the first time temple rituals were codified. The authorship of this code, *Gopālārchanābidhi* is attributed to king Puruṣottam.⁴⁸ Brāhmaṇs might have played an important part in drafting

this code. Incidentally, the code greatly enhanced the position of brāhmaṇ priests in the hierarchy. There is indication of resentment amongst the non-tribal priests but most probably they could not openly revolt because Jagannāth had already received an all India brāhmaṇic recognition.

The brāhmaṇs who came from north India must have played an important role in the codification. We have mentioned earlier that prior to 10th century brāhmaṇas were settled at remote places of the kingdom for internal colonization but around 10th century and onwards large number of brāhmaṇs were settled near the capital of the kingdom. They served as ritual and administrative elite. They also served as a check on the new emerging chiefs. Another role assigned to them was to settle the hunting and gathering groups as cultivators. While performing their work they encountered anti brāhmaṇic nāthism and tāntrism.

In this background perhaps the heterodox movements, nāthism, sahaṇyā, tāntrism became more popular at the grass roots and interior pockets of Orissa. Of course in Orissa tāntrism was very old and widespread. The collection of large number of palm leaf manuscripts containing esoteric texts and *devī purāṇas* indicate that both tāntrism and worship of shakti were popular in rural Orissa. It has been observed that many of the itinerant *nātha sannyāsīs* visited Orissa and preached their cult among the rural folks.⁴⁹ These *sannyāsīs* were mainly from lower strata of *jāti* society and were very demanding among the rural folk. Even the tantric preachers were not always brāhmaṇs but were drawn from the telis, mālis, gauḍa, kandh (*jāti* & tribal) society. The followers are drawn from any caste, creed or sex. It was generally believed that these *śiḍha jogies* (medicant) had control over their bodily senses, super human power and also had control over spirits. They were demi-gods for the masses. They had an advantage over the brāhmaṇs because they were available to the rural folk without invitation and remuneration also. But their influences were not a movement. Tāntrism was perhaps limited to its esoteric practices. The rājā-brahmaṇs alliance in many places branded many of the practices such as use of forbidden foods, and drinks, use of free love as immoral.⁵⁰

In many places they were either associated with modification or their *sādhana pīṭhas* were destroyed. But they could not eliminate tāntrism. The vast forest, mountains became their seclude. This popular *tāntrism* and *nātha* tradition provided base for growth of *bhakti* movement and monotheism in Orissa in the latter period.

Puruṣottama's son Pratāprūdra realized the growing influence of the brāhmaṇ priests. He tried to interfere in the temple administration and curtail their influence. But there are indications of his failure.⁵¹ The brāhmaṇs counter attacked the legitimacy of Pratāprūdra with a new brāhmaṇic version of the Indradyumna legend. This new legend was composed around 16th century.⁵² According to this narration a second Indradyumna, after consecrating Lord Jagannāth, prayed to extinguish his *vaṁśa* after him so that nobody after him could claim any right over Jagannāth. The Lord granted his appeal. This part was not there in the earlier brāhmaṇic and non-brāhmaṇic versions. The motive of this inclusion is very clear. It was to disown the legitimacy of Pratāprūdra and thus deny him any right over Jagannāth.

Against this brāhmaṇic dominance there was widespread discontentment. The *bhakti* movement in Orissa began during this period Chaitanya visited Orissa. Most of the *bhakti* poets were non-brāhmaṇs. They translated all important Sanskrit works into Oriya language. They challenged the monopoly of brāhmaṇs. A group of five poets commonly known as *Pañchasakhā* (Jagannāth, Balarama, Yośobanta, Ananta and Achyuta) flourished between the 15th and 16th centuries. Only Jagannāth was a brāhmaṇ and the other four were sūdras. *Pañchasakhā* in their writings perceived the essence of Jagannāth Viṣṇu as *Śūnya*, *Anādi*, *Nirākāra* and corresponded with *Śūnyabrahma* or *Parambrahma*. Their individual differences apart, they broadly believed that idol worship, pilgrimage and external rites cannot give *mokṣa* or Salvation, but *nirguṇa bhakti* can. It is only through *nirguṇa bhakti* one can transcend *karma* and attain *Śūnya Bhrhma*. They conceived this human body as a replica of *brāhmaṇḍa* (Universe). Certain point of the body corresponds to certain *tīrtha* of the external world. This true *tīrtha* could be reached through meditation and Yoga. This

ātmabhakti or *brahmajñāna* needs neither the earthly *guru* nor the authority of Veda. The real is *Alekh Param-Brahama* and he resides in every human being. It needs realization to know this *swarūpa* (real form). In this way they negated the authority of Vedas and particularly that of the *brāhmaṇs* and the *jāti* system. The visit of Chaitanya to Puri further helped them. There are indications of Pratāprūdra's support to Chaitanya and the *Pañchasakhā* to counter the *brāhmaṇic* authority.

Such reconstruction and alteration of conventional tradition was a weapon of the *Pañchasakhā* in the 15th and 16th centuries to attack the monopoly of *brāhmaṇs*. All of them interpreted the tradition and the religious texts in their own ways. Specially, Achyutānanda, Ananta, Yaśobanta perceived their precepts as future popular religion. Interestingly, through these writings, known as *mālikas*, they predicted the end of *kaḷiyuga*, whereupon God Budha-Jagannāth, the ninth *avatār* of Viṣṇu would leave his temple of Puri and manifest himself in a new form Mahima.⁵³ They claimed that they saw all these in divinatory-apocalyptic visions. They also identified the tenth *avatār* Kalki with Adi-Jagannāth or Śuṇyabrahma. They further predicted that Gupta-Kalki with the help of goddesses would spread his Mahimā and kill those who would refuse to accept his precepts. Only true *bhaktas* or the followers of the new precepts would enjoy this world. The true *bhaktas* were nobody other than the incarnation of true *baktas* from the earlier *Yuga*. The *Pañchasakhā* claimed themselves to be the reincarnation *Pañch Pāṇḍavas* of *Tretā Yuga* and were working together for the new *avatār* in the *kaḷiyuga*. The new *avatārs* would stand higher than all his previous *avatār*. He would bring about final conquest on Vedas and at the same time it would bring about general abolition of *jāti* system and establish *Satyayuga*. According to one *Mālika*:

Puṇi Kaḷi Pāpabharā hoibaprabala
Ayonisambhutā hebe Budhāvatāra
Yogi beśa dharitḥibe Kapilāsasthāna
Binā āhārare nebe tahu kete dina
*Grāme grāme bulikari jāchuthibe jñana.*⁵⁴

[Again this *samsāra* will be overburdened with the *pāpa* of *kaliyuga*. *Śuṇyabrahma* will come to this world again as *ayonisasmbhutā* (not born out of mother's womb). He will spend some time at Kapilās as a *Sannyāsi* without food and practice *brahmajñāna*. Then he will roam through the villages preaching his *jñāna* (knowledge). This *avatāra* would not be *Kalki* but an *avadhuta* or wandering ascetic wearing *kaupīna* or loin cloth].

We will analyze in detail in the next section how the above concept was utilized by the followers of Mahima Dharma in the 19th century.

III

One of the reasons of the emergence of *bhakti* movement in Orissa may be related to the following. The *rājā-brāhmaṇ* alliances had a control over Orissa for six centuries in the name of Jagannāth, merely giving concession of caste rules inside the temple. For few days also outside the temple during *ratha yātras*. When the non-brāhmaṇs were allowed to perform all *seva pūjā* of Lord Jagannāth but with uncooked food. But overall the socio-cultural order of Orissa was based upon *varṇāśhram-dharma*. In and around *śaṣana* villages and capital towns of *garjāts* the caste order were strictly followed. The defeat of *rājā*, destruction of temples and images in the hands of Muslims and even insiders, was a great blow to the *rājā-brāhmaṇ* alliance and the worship of Jagannāth image. The failure of the *rājā-brāhmaṇ*s to protect their *rājya* and the failure of the Lord to protect his *sevaka* or even himself might have given a cruel blow to the practices, canons and set of ideas propounded by *rājā-brāhmaṇ* alliance. Perhaps all these developments played pivotal role and quickened the resurgence of the idea of Jagannāth as *avatāri* formless God, Nirguṇa, and the rise of heterodox sects. They challenged the orthodoxy, caste system and even image worship. But it was mere questioning only. One should not interpret this analysis that the image worship of Jagannāth vanished and the *rājā-brāhmaṇ*'s dominance wiped out. Rather *rājās* multiplied and *brāhmaṇ*'s presence in society as performer of life cycle rituals went on unabated and at the same time the role of *brāhmaṇ*s, the *rājās*, and the images were questioned, re-interpreted. Many

aspects were rejected also. Therefore Orissan society was not static, not unchanging.

In the 15th and 16th centuries Orissa, a process can be observed similar to what has been observed elsewhere in northern India. The disintegration of regional kingdoms resulted in decentralization and political fragmentation. This disintegration of regional Kingdoms resulted in decentralization partly from partition in the ruling family resulting in the division of the kingdom and partly from the widespread granting of big and small territories to vassals who entrenched themselves territorially and ended up being independent potentates.

Sixteenth century history of Orissa was marked by a growth of a brāhmaṇic dominance, discontent amongst the masses, disintegration of the regional empire, rise of *sāmanta rājās* and their bid for power and independent status, attack by the Sultan of Bengal and finally in the last decade capture by the Mughals.

We have observed that Jagannāth had been monopolized by the brāhmaṇs and the regional emperor. Jagannāth temples were confined to Cuttack and Puri up to the 16th century. But after the 16th century the rājās of Sambalpur, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj constructed Jagannāth temples in their respective capitals. According to Kulke, Jagannāth had grown into a symbol of Hindu Kingship and royal authority. He considers the construction of Jagannāth temples as symbolic declaration of independence.

By the end of 16th century, we also notice a range of intermediaries between the ruler and the peasant; the emergence of younger branches of the ruling family controlling separately the territories inherited by them throughout Orissa.

The practice of granting small territories to the younger branches of the ruling family, along with fiscal and administrative rights to them, and also fresh conquests by the younger branches for their own consolidation, resulted in political fragmentation. And their younger branches entrenched themselves territorially and ended up as independent rājās.

These rājās, emulating the elder branch, tried to augment their own resources and estate. First they needed an agricultural surplus for the maintenance of the state machinery. They accelerated the clearing of forests, inviting the non-tribal

peasants to settle in their respective estates. Digging of ponds and construction of embankments by the peasants followed.⁵⁵

In many places in the hinterland forest was cleared but the new settlers worshipped the local deities of the forest people. In many places the *jhānker*, tribal priests, were retained. The rulers patronized the local deities and elevated them to the position of their *Iṣṭa Devi* or tutelary deity i.e. Sambaleśwarī at Sambalpur, Pātaneśwarī at Pātnagarh, Raktāmbari at Khariar, Bhatārika at Baramba, Maninageśwarī at Ranpur, Mānikeśwarī at Bhawanipātna. Consequently, in Orissa, we find tribal priests performing *pūja* in temples. In the Devi and Śiva temples of Orissa besides the tribal priests, there are priests from the unusual *jātis* like mali, thanāpatis and paiks. so that villages inhabited by both tribal and non-tribals get their priests. Up to 16th century Jagannāth ideology was not used by the chiefs of hinterland of Orissa for their legitimization in their respective areas rather the *thakurani* or *devi* of the aboriginal were utilized.

The Sāmanta rājās, their relatives and service-holders might have encroached upon lands, which the aborigines had held *communally* during this phase of expansion. The lands and villages were granted, to such relatives of the rulers family as *paṭṭāyats* (the second son), *lālu* (the third son), *bāboo* (the sons of a concubines/mistress), *rāṇi*, the queen, as *khôrakpôṣak* (maintenance estate), brāhmaṇs as *brahmottar* and *śāṣana*, *Dalabeherā* and *nāyak* (military chiefs both tribal and non-tribals) were also given. Custom enjoined these people not to wield the plough. Therefore, these people, in turn, rented land to cultivators. This was the upper stratum of society. Next to them were the economically superior aboriginals who aspired to Kshyatriya status; the local rulers who gave them the higher positions in the kingdom recognized their superiority. This recognition by the ruler combined with their economic superiority secured them higher social status.

This left vast majority of the aboriginal community and low ranking service performing *jātis* at the bottom. There was a competition amongst the local rājās and a bid to consolidate their positions and at the lower level there was discontent. Taking advantage of the internal dissension Sultan of Bengal

attacked Orissa in 1568 A.D.⁵⁶ His deputy Kālāpāhaḍ destroyed images of Jagannāth temple of Puri and the Sun temple of Konark. Taking advantage of the internal dissension of the *sāmanta rājās*, and most probably being invited by some of them, the Sultan of Bengal, and the latter captured Orissa easily. Mughals captured Orissa from the Sultan in 1580s. Mansing was appointed as the governor and a new *bandobast* or settlement was introduced in Orissa in 1582.⁵⁷ In this settlement the fertile coastal region was taken under direct management, Puri was declared as a crown land and in the hinterland of Orissa they recognized the intermediaries who had appeared in the earlier period. Twenty-four local rulers were recognized as *garhjat* chiefs according to their zones of influence. The latter paid annual tribute to the former and were almost autonomous. The rājā of Khurdha was recognized as the Gajapati of Orissa but he was given Puri-Khurdha and thirty-one small zamindāries only.⁵⁸

The rājā of Khurdha Rāmachandradeva renewed the Jagannāth cult of Puri. He established five *śāṣana* villages on the Puri-Khurdha road.⁵⁹ Rāmachandradeva was honoured by the priests as second Indradyumna. New version of Indradyumna story⁶⁰ was composed and according to it, one Bisar Mohanty found the unburnt *brahma* of Jagannāth on the bank of Hoogly river which Kālāpāhaḍ had thrown into the river after burning the images. Mohanty had kept it at Kujang and Ramachandradeva recovered it from Mohanty and had kept it in his palace at Khurdha. Later it was shifted to Puri temple.

IV

During this phase the brāhmaṇa priests of Puri started compiling temple chronicle *Mādalapañji*⁶¹. In the changed circumstances the Gajapati of Puri lost political power, resource base and was confined to a limited area. There was bitter contest between local rājās, Sultan of Bengal, Mughol Governor of Orissa to have control over the temple city. Obviously the wealth and pilgrim tax of Puri temple were the main attractions. For nearly 150 years uncertainty continued. In between 1600 and 1750 A.D. Jagannāth temple was attacked not less than 12

times by Hindu Chiefs, Muslim Sultans and Mughol governors. Mārahaṭṭās captured Puri in 1751 and reduced the Gajapati of Orissa to mere feudatory estates. The Mughols recognized the intermediaries who had appeared in the earlier period. Some of them were called zamindārs. The small local rājā's territory was called *garjāt*, *killā* and the rājā *Garhjātrājā*. Though the above terms were used, actually none of them actually owned land in the sense of having private property rights.

Mughols divided the fertile coastal plain of Orissa into two, the best lands were kept under direct management, rest were given to the service holders for their maintenance but not with property rights.

During the politically shaky phase, the successive Gajapatis of Orissa also tried their level best to nourish themselves through ritual means. In the early phase resourceful gajapatis of Orissa had applied Jagannāth ideology against their *sāmanta* rājās and effectively controlled the Jagannāth Puri (Supra). Later the politically weak Khurdh Raja, in order to enlist support of the *garjāt* rājās, accommodated and apportioned his status with the latter in the Jagannāth temple of Puri. He issued *Chhāmu Chitāus* (royal letters) acknowledging certain prerogatives to the Garjāt rājās e.g., special honour for Garjāt rājās and their relatives during their visit to Puri. This strategy according to Kulke was to "at least retain their source of authority i.e. Jagannāth Puri to the dwindling political position".⁶²

The Mārahaṭṭās got coastal Orissa in 1751 and subsequently western Orissa in 1755. They continued the policy of the Mughols and retained the two major political divisions of Orissa: Mughalbandi and Garjāts. Twenty four Garjāt chiefs of the hilly and forest tracts in the interiors of Orissa were recognized. They paid fixed annual tribute. There was no definite rule to fix the tribute. They were almost autonomous. The Mughalbandi area was divided into four *Chaklās* or division and was under the direct management of the Mārahaṭṭās.⁶³ They further divided *chaklās* to *pargaṇā* and managed with thirty two *amils*. At the lowest level the *Mukadam* and *Tālukdārs* were there to collect revenue. The Mārahaṭṭās granted rent free lands to temples, brāhmaṇas and maṭhs.

Both Mughals and Mārahāṭṭas did not bring the garjāts under their direct administration. They were satisfied with collecting an annual tribute so long as these rājās' loyalty to the former was assured. They preferred to pressurize the chiefs rather than to deal with people at large. In other words, the Mughols and Mārahāṭṭas did not have any significant direct impact on the hinterland of Orissa. Therefore, their presence did not seriously influence on the social mileau in the hinterland. But in the coastal plains the reduction of the position of the regional emperor, the appointment of zamindārs, *jagirdārs* had its impact on entire Orissa. The zamidars, *Jagirdārs*, rulers of Garjāt had an edge over the cultivators but they were not given hereditary rights over land. During the Mughols and the Mārahāṭṭas the Garjāt rājās consolidated their position in a gradual and prolonged process. The rājās recognized the tribal chiefs as *gahatia*, *dalabeherā*, *muthahead* and *gartia* etc. The latter got areas over which they were exercising power on military tenure. For this they were obliged to supply military service upon demand. Some powerful tribal chiefs who would not submit to such tenure were won over by matrimonial alliance. The rājā also depended upon the tribals, who were in majority, for recruiting his pāiks (soldiers).

The recognition of *gahatia*, *muthāhead*, *gartia* helped to establish a range of intermediaries between the Garjāt rājā and the peasant. These rājās also invited non-tribals with their developed agricultural technology to generate more surplus. Possibly, these non-tribals were invited from outside not to introduce intensive agriculture on the lands of tribals but to clear forests for fresh cultivation or perhaps to settle in the land vacated as a result of shifting cultivation. These rulers seldom transgressed the limit of acceptability or rather they dared not do so. The availability of fallow land and forest might have helped them to expand without touching tribal villages.

During this phase the tribal chiefs faced various kinds of pressure from rājās, their relatives, brāhmaṇas, service holders, Mughols, and Mārahāṭṭas. Yet they werel dominant. The pressure was confined to tribal chiefs but there was no pressure on the general tribal population.

At this stage perhaps the Garjāt chiefs felt the need to authenticate their status and exercise of political authority over their territory. They had also to legitimize their superior position and the rapidly growing differentiation. There was also a need to account for the increasing power of the ruler. Therefore in support of their position, they sponsored the composition of myths of their origin and *rājā-purāṇas*.⁶⁴ With the end of regional empire of Orissa, there was a shortage of patrons in coastal Orissa. Perhaps during this period the Brāhmanaṣ of Utkal migrated to Garjāt estates in search of patrons, as had happened in northern India after the disintegration of the Gupta empire (Supra). These myths and *rājā-purāṇas* placed the rājās as superior beings, *rājā-mahāpuru* or persons sent by God to preserve the *rājya*. It was believed that his absence would lead to anarchy. This helped both horizontal and vertical legitimization of the Garjāt chiefs. These *rājā-purāṇas* were utilized at the Puri darbar when the Jagannāth temple was reopened in 18th century. It also legitimized the rājā as *rājā-mahāpuru* amongst the tribals and ethnic groups.

The ideology of *rājā-mahāpuru* was based upon the dictum of adherence and devotion. The authority of the rājā, acquired by virtue of adherence to a deity, was ideally devised as *rājā-mahāpuru* (an earthly representative of the deity). As the deity has his *sevaks* the rājā had subordinates of his own, linked to him through kinship, pledged political adherence, or both. The term *rājā-mahāpuru* means both the Lord of the *rājya* and the Lord as the Supreme Being.⁶⁵

So we see by the 18th century the rulers had absorbed some territories for themselves (*bhogra*), their relatives (*Khorak-poṣak*), their God and Goddesses (*debottar*), for brāhmanaṣ (*brahmottar*) and for service holders. The rājās demanded the nominal allegiance of the tribal chiefs but, beyond that, the vast majority of the tribals were left more or less undisturbed. However, the very recognition of these tribal chiefs led to their status elevation. This intensified the process of social stratification which had an earlier beginning. Various levels of intermediaries appeared and the system became more complex. The rājās recognized

these intermediaries by receiving even a nominal allegiance or tribute, in which, the hierarchical arrangement was acted out.

In Orissa, the pre-dominant facet of these phase had been marked out by the growing weakness of the central authority and regional empire. The emergence of local elite with sufficient control over land and growth of their economic, political and administrative function also led to the decentralization of authority. This period was also marked by the dislocation in the long distance trade and sea trade, alienation of land to the brāhmaṇas and the emerging elite in larger proportion than before. This phase was also conspicuous for the rise of Samantas. They were drawn from tribals, outsiders and even from *jāti* society. Thus, those sections having influence over their zone, control over land or had political authority at the local and sub-regional level were often successful in gradually rising with varna scale. Conversely, as it has been observed elsewhere, those who lost control over land or local authority often sank in the varna scale.⁶⁶

British occupied south Orissa in 1768, north and coastal Orissa in 1803 and western Orissa in 1818. The above areas were placed under Madras, Bengal and Central Provinces respectively.

V

British colonial rulers realized the special position of these Garjāt rulers in the relatively unproductive and inaccessible hill and forest regions of Orissa. These rulers were retained under the all India colonial policy of 'protection of ancient families and continuation of their dignity and representation'.⁶⁷ This policy was a political necessity, for the colonial administration which paid them rich dividends as during the paik revolt of Khurdha. In many tribal movements like 1817 in Ghumsar, 1830s in Sambalpur and during the revolt of 1857, most of these feudatory chiefs and zamindārs co-operated with the British and helped them in capturing some of the leaders of the movement.⁶⁸

This policy of colonial rulers had other far-reaching consequences also. In the 19th century the British wrested power from the Mārahāṭṭās in Orissa. In the changed circumstances the local rājās realized that the colonial rulers were powerful enough to protect them against both internal and external dangers. The British wanted alliance with local rājās for their own reasons. So the alliance was struck between colonial rulers and local rājās. The rājās agreed to pay a certain annual tribute, and the former agreed to help as and when required so long as these rājās' loyalty to British crown was assured. In the emerging situation, a four-tier stratification followed: (1) the elder branches of Raj families as feudatory chiefs (2) the younger branches and a few tribal chiefs as Rajas and Zamindars, (3) *umrāo, mājhi, gahatia, muthāhead as gāotia/thekedār* of the villages and (4) the general mass, both tribal and non-tribal as peasants and landless labourers. Secondly, the rājās and zamindārs enjoyed police and magisterial power under the protection of the regime.⁶⁹ This upset the previous balance. Previously, these rājās had not dared to antagonize the tribals, there was no sustained displacement of tribals and the rājās had never transgressed the limit of acceptability.

The rājās, no more dependent on the support of the tribal, invited skilled cultivators from outside, settled them in tribal villages and initiated regular revenue collection from each village. For the regular realization of revenue, villages were given on *thekā* or auction.

Now that the rājās felt more secured and protected, they took repressive measures in case of tribal resistance. Not merely the *zamidārs* but their officials also exploited them.

The gradual transformation of what had been gifts into dues by the Garjāt chiefs under British protection and finally the concept of zamindārs and raiyat relationship, alienated the tribal headman from his fellow tribesmen. In the 19th century the *thekedāri* system eroded the tribal agrarian relation further.

Under the new system the tribal headman were forced to collect more revenue from their territory to compete with the non-tribal *thekedārs* who entered these parts as horse-traders,

distillers and moneylenders. Moneytization spread with the introduction of the new system of taxation and commutation of feudal dues and services into cash.⁷⁰ The colonial ruler's bureaucratic capabilities had an unprecedented and long reach. The system's administrative fingers spread to the heart of many formerly unadministered areas. All this had its direct impact on the society affecting its social structure, economic and agrarian institutions and political system. Everybody felt that they were losing their grip over their resources and environment, as the encroachment of the land and forest mounted.⁷¹

Under pressure different groups responded in different ways at different times. Some of them accepted a low position in some places; as some others aspired for high rank and became part of the Garjāt estate. Yet other groups could not cope with the external pressures and withdrew to the inaccessible areas and at other times revolted against exploitation.⁷²

The people thus came to be divided into four groups (i) a vast majority of small and marginal farmers and landless labourers (ii) a few zamindārs/garjāt rājās (iii) a group of *gāotia/thekedār*, protected and unprotected and (iv) those who chose to withdraw themselves to interior.

In the 19th century there were movements against the system. In some places the tribal aristocracy actively participated with the non-tribal aristocracy seeking a better political dispensation for themselves. They were able to use their traditional ties to bring the dissatisfied tribals, peasants and other groups also to the movement.

At other times and places a particular tribal group in general under their own leadership, who were not necessarily chiefs, revolted. In some places tribal groups revolted against the emerging social system but the lowly placed *jātis* actively participated in it, and the *pāiks* gave tacit support.

The alienation of land, breakdown of mutuality, restriction of forest rights, extraction of cesses affected the community as a whole to rise against the *sarkār-rājā-thekadār* nexus. Prior to colonial rule, local deities guaranteed and represented "vertical solidarity", which was most important condition for legitimacy

in the tribal society. Under British protection, this became unnecessary. On the other, rigid caste society strengthened around the Garjāts. The latter development encouraged to and necessitated, “horizontal solidarity” amongst Garjāts. British capture of Orissa was a severe blow to the position of Gajapati Rājā of Orissa. Mukunda Deva II was defeated and Khurdha territory was confiscated. He was confined to Puri and was made the Superintendent of Jagannāth temple. This was the bottom of political power the Gajapati of Orissa could retain. It has rightly been called “King without a kingdom”.⁷³ The successive Gajapatis tried to compensate their loss of political power through monopoly over Puri Jagannāth temple. They withdrew all the privileges, enjoyed earlier by the Garhjāt rājās and on the other hand, to counter the monopoly of the Puri Gajapati and to enhance their status and independent position, Garhjāt rājās started constructing temples and palaces. Each Garjāt chief, zamindār and even in some cases the *gaotiās* started constructing temples and buildings. This political ideological conflict had great socio-economic impact on Garjāt. Up to the 17th century there were only 5 (five) Jagannāth temples in Orissa but by the 19th century hundreds of Jagannāth temples were built by Garjāt Rājās. For that they needed Brāhmaṇs. As the Brāhmaṇs of the Garjāts were looked down as *halua*, cultivator Brāhmaṇs, and *jhādua*, from the forest, the Utkali Brāhmaṇs were invited to western Orissa. For the Brāhmaṇs and temples the rulers granted land at the expense of tribals and peasant.⁷⁴ With the increase of family members of the rājās, new lands and villages were acquired. In some places the rājās put tax on everything which was ‘susceptible of taxation.’⁷⁵ The people had to carry additional burden of beth-begar or forced labour.

In the 19th century Jagannāth cult was under the iron grip of rājā-brāhmaṇa nexus. The *śabara-devta* (Jagannāth) had been hijacked by the ruling classes of Orissa from the ādivāsis and was used as tool of exercising authority over the latter. *Dinabandhu* or the friend of the downtrodden (another name of Jagannāth) had been brāhmaṇized as *Badathākur* or the great God beyond the reach of the downtrodden. The downtrodden in general were not even allowed to enter the very temple dedicated to their

God. This went against the basic principle of universality; the cult of Jagannāth represented. Jagannāth cult in 19th century had come to be identified with those who wielded power and authority. Coincidentally, in 1865-66 there was a great famine in Orissa in which lakhs of people died. A section started thinking that it was due to the *pāpa* or sin committed by the ruling classes.

However, it would be wrong to assume that under such pressure all groups revolted *en masse* against the exploiter. As a matter of fact, we find that the reaction of each group in Orissa arose out of its own historical context. The meaning people give to an entity or an event arising out of the range of meanings and options available to them at the time of their particular experience of that entity or event prevailed.

When the lower strata of the society was chafing under the emerging system, one of the tribal poets, Bhima Bhoi, came out with his work.⁷⁶ He preached that the final deliverer had already appeared in Orissa in the form of Mahimā Swāmy. God Jagannāth of Puri has left his temple and became a disciple of Mahimā Swāmy. He saw the system responsible for the miseries of the low caste people and ādivāsis. This attracted the tribal peasant and allied caste groups who felt themselves incompetent to counter their loss of land and social status by open revolt. It also attracted the tribals who were socially and culturally in the lower levels of *jāti* society, and the untouchables and downtrodden who saw a possibility to enhance self-image and social status. In all these cases membership of Mahimā Dharma embodies an element of protest against the prevailing socio-political-religious order. Bhima Bhoi predicted establishment of Mahimā empire where all exploiters would become servants and the exploited would become masters. This reflects a millenarian ideology in a colonial situation. Within eight years of its existence it could attract thirty thousand people in Orissa in its folds. So we will analyze in the next chapter the life and teaching of Mahimā Swāmy and Bhima Bhoi, situating Mahimā Dharma in its proper historical context.

It has been observed elsewhere that religious ideas have long been the language of protest, innovation and expression of individuality and separate identity. They provide vast scope for

interpretation in order to legitimize the aspirations of various sections of the populations and justify changes in the existing social relationship.

Notes and References

1. Singh, 1984, 317; Kulke, 1982, 245.
2. Kulke, 1978, 104-114; Sinha, 1962, 35-80.
3. Kulke, 1978, 106; Tiwari, 1985, 35.
4. Deo, 1990, 86
5. Stein, 1969, 179-185, talks about 'sustained displacement of tribal society in the 'nuclear areas' of South India. Contrasted with the South Indian process of 'Sustained displacement' of tribals, there are processes of integration and acculturation in Orissa; Kulke, 1978, 104-114.
6. Sahu, 1983, 133-144; 1984, 148-160.
7. Eschmann, 1978, 1997.
8. Sahu, 1971, 95; Sah, 1976, 125-129; Tiwari, 1985, 35 suggest the tribal origin of this dynasty. CII, III, 190ff; E.I. XI, 185ff.
9. CII, III, 199, lines 25-26.
10. IA, VII, 250 fn. 26; EI, IX, 284, fn.10. There was a division in Saravapur kingdom called Sabarabhogika. EI, XXXIV, 28FF. Perhaps rulers had special administrative division (*bhōga*,) where aboriginal lived. In one source a Brāhmana was given a village and allowed to enjoy the *bhōgas* & *bhagas* but was to contribute *dhānya* and *hiranya* to the ruler i.e. it is liable for dues. EI, XXXI, 263ff.
11. Nandi, 1979, 70-100.
12. Tiwari, 1985, 35.
13. Sahu, 1974, 23; *Bhagavta Purana*, II, 4-18 says that Kirāta, Pulinda and Yādava can be purified by the worship of Viṣṇu. Tiwari, op, cit, 131, opines that Saravapurīas patronized Pañcharatra school of Vaiṣṇavism to include tribals in the kingdom. This permitted the tribals to enter into the religious fold of Vaiṣṇavism.
14. The Saravapurīas did not link their genealogy to any great mythical origin. They trace their descent from Śarava i.e. eight-legged mythological animal stronger than Loin. EI, XI, 186 fn. 5; Tiwari, op. cit., 24-30.
15. EI, IV, 258; CII, II, 293-294.
16. IO, 24-30.
17. EI, XXIII, 319ff.
18. EI, XXVII, 319ff.

19. *Ibid.*
20. Nema, 1978, 135.
21. Panda, 1986, 8.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Panigrahi, 1961, 84-85.
24. Ganguli, 1975, 198; Das, 1985, 11-12., Ganguli and Panigrahi state that there was struggle for succession to the Bhaumakara throne, that the Sômaṅśi King Janmenjaya intervened in support of his daughter, that he killed his son-in-law's brother in battle and finally placed his daughter on the Bhaumakara throne. *IO*, I, 367, Rajaguru argues differently that some feudatory chiefs of Odra started disturbances in Bhaumakara country taking advantage of the weak administration of Lalitakara, husband of Tribhubana Mahadevi. Janmejaya, her father intervened on behalf of his daughter and suppressed the rebel thereafter this kingdom was merged with Kośāla.
25. Panigrahi, 1961, 120.
26. *EI*, XXIX, 121 ff; Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, 161-162.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, 239.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. Sharma, 1965, 159.
32. Kulke, 1982, 258.
33. Kulke, 1986,
34. For detail See Kulke, 1986, 146-150.
35. This title became famous in the later period and till today the ex-kings of Puri and Ganjam district of Orissa called themselves Gajapati. Recently Orissa Government has formed a new district called Gajapati district. Gajapati in medieval period indicate imperial title like the *asva-pati* (Lord of the horse) in North India *Narapati* (Lord of the men) in South India.
36. *EI*, V, 35, S11, VI, VI, 714.
37. Kulke, 1986, 136-137.
38. Dash, 1986, 15ff.
39. *Ibid.*, 163.
40. *Mūṣali Parva*, XII, 83-100.
41. Sahu, 1980, 175.
42. Dash, 1986, 164.
43. Kulke, 1986, 204ff; Dash, *op. cit.*, 210.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Mādaḷāpāñji*.

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46. Dash, *op. cit.*, 211.
47. *Ibid.*, 217.
48. *Ibid.*, 219-220.
49. Panda, 1991, 328.
50. Satish Chandra, 1990, 131.
51. Dash, *op. cit.*, 219-220.
53. Deo, 1990, 111; Eschmann, 391.
54. Achutananda, *Sunnya Samhita*.
55. Deo, 1990, 83-84.
56. Panigrahi, 1981, 28.
57. Sahu, 1980, *op. cit.*, 254.
58. Sahu, *ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*, 256.
60. Kulke, 1986, 328.
61. *Mādalapāñji*.
62. Kulke, 1986, 327.
63. Toynbee, 1960, 24.
64. Deo, 1990, 64.
65. The ideas is derived from Gold Daniel, 1987, 305-327.
66. Chandra Satish, *op. cit.*
67. Deo, 1990, 130.
68. *Foreign Department Proceedings* (Political), 13 september, 1833, no. 56-57; July 1881 letter no.1778/90 dt. 18.5.1880, and 1777/90 dt. 18.05.1881, National Archives of India, New Delhi.
69. *Foreign Department Proceeding* (Political), 6 February, 1884, no. 102-103, National Archives of India, New Delhi; Aitchesan, 1929, I and V.
70. Officially a new cicca was introduced in Orissa in 1819, cowrie was withdrawn.
71. Deo, *op. cit.*, 155.
72. *Ibid.*
73. Kulke, 1993, 109-110.
74. De, 1971, 55-60.
75. *Foreign Department Proceedings*, July 1882, no 396/429 letter no. 2027; 10.06.1852, National Archives of India, New Delhi.
76. *Bhoi, Nirbeda Sadhana*.

CHAPTER II

Situating Mahimā Dharma: Life and Teachings of Mahimā Swāmy and Bhīma Bhoi

On first March, 1881, around midday, sixteen men and women defying the tradition of Jagannāth temple of Puri and ignoring the warnings of doorkeepers pushed open the main gate. They broke the gate of *bhōga mandapa* and reached up to *jai-vijaya* gate, shouting ‘*Alekh*’, ‘*Alekh*’.¹ Their aim was to burn the images of Jagannāth trinity to ashes on the *baḍadāṇḍa* (the great street). Dasaram, the leader of this squad, had a divine vision of *Paramabrahma*. The latter revealed the former that the *brahma* had disappeared from the images of Jagannāth temple of Puri in the *Kali Yuga*.² But the people have been blindly worshipping *brahmaless* wooden images instead of following the *satya dharma*. Dasaram, being a follower of *satyadharmā*, considered it his ritual duty to physically remove the obstacle on the way of *satyadharmā* i.e. the *dāru pratima* or wooden images of Puri devoid of *brahma*. For this he got the sanction and support of his fellow villagers. From an obscure village of Chhatisgarh forty-four men, women and children covered nearly four hundred kilometers and reached the holiest of the holy places of Orissa and lodged themselves in *satyabādi Mukām*.³ It was on the fateful day, the first batch of thirteen men and three women from the above mentioned squad, led by Dasaram “trespassed” and entered the temple of the God of the universe to fulfill divine mission. Rest twenty-eight persons were perhaps waiting outside for their turn to come. But alas! The first batch could not proceed beyond *jai vijaya* gate.⁴ The physical and numerical strength of Puri *Pāṇḍas* or priests proved far superior to these sixteen ‘mad men and women’. In the tussle Dasaram, the leader of the divine mission lost his life on the spot and other fifteen

were arrested. The police picked up the remaining twenty-eight persons immediately from the satyabādi mukām. The Deputy Commissioner of Puri sentenced the first batch to two months of rigorous imprisonment “for rioting and trespassing into a place of worship”. Four out of the remaining twenty-eight had to face seven days imprisonment.⁵

The Jagannāth Temple of Puri draws lakhs of pilgrims every year from all over the world. Devotees flock to Puri to have a *darśan* (seeing) of Jagannāth, the Lord of the Universe. Every year during *Rath Yātra* (car Festival), Jagannāth as *Pañitapābana*, ‘Savior of the Downtrodden’, comes out of his *baḍadeuḷa*, ‘the great temple’, to the *baḍadāṇḍa*, ‘the great street’, to give a *darśan* to the downtrodden. Devotees long to touch the dust of the *baḍadāṇḍa*. The offering to Jagannāth is known as *mahāprasāda* and the specially cooked rice offered to the Lord of the universe is known as *kaibalya*. The 22 steps leading to the main temple are known as *bāisi pāhācha*. These steps are considered auspicious. To breathe one’s last here is considered as *jīvan-mukti* or freedom from the bondage of life and death. Hindus believe in the existence of *Swargadwāra*, or the gate of heaven in Puri. Puri is one of the four most important *tīrthas* (sacred sites) of the Hindus. Legends, myths and literature record that a *Śavara-devatā* was brāhmanized as Purusottam in the hoary past.⁶ Later, the ruling dynasties of Orissa, Somavamśis in tenth century and the Gaṅgās in the twelfth and thirteenth century, patronized Purusottam and elevated him to the position of *rāṣṭra-devatā* (God of the kingdom). This finally was elevated to the position of Jagannāth, the Lord of the Universe. The rulers of Orissa claimed to be the deputies and servants of Jagannāth.⁷ All important religious currents of Orissa were accommodated and harmonized in Jagannāth. The *Śabara-devatā*, Puruṣottama, Nīlamādhava, the Buddha, the Triratna, Buddha-Jagannāth, the ninth *avatāra* of Viṣṇu—all have been identified in Jagannāth. Jagannāth has evolved as an integral part of Oriya culture, as the heart of Oriya cultural unity.

We have noted earlier that a group of 44 men, women and children from an obscure village of western Orissa (Chhatisgarh in 19th century) covered nearly 400 kms. on foot and reached the

holiest of the holy places of Orissa, i.e., Puri.⁸ Their mission was neither to eat *kaibalya* nor to have a *darshan* of Jagannāth, nor to touch the dust of *baḍadāṇḍa*. They were not here to participate in *Rath Yatra* or even to pass through the gates of heaven. Their mission, to everybody's surprise, was to burn the images of the Jagannāth trinity (Jagannāth, Balaram and Subhadra) to ashes on the *baḍadāṇḍa*.⁹ They made their unsuccessful attempt on 1 March 1881.¹⁰ (supra)

Who were these people? Was this an attempt by *nangula nanguli, asabhya banua jati*' (naked men and women of an uncivilized tribe)? Was this an act of a group of mad men and women? Were they Muslims or Christians? Why had they made an attempt to burn the Lord of the Universe? Rumours started floating. Twelve days after the incident, *Utkal Dīpika*,¹¹ an Oriya weekly, reported, "if the rumors are true, then the Lord of the Universe is in great danger." The weekly promised to bring out the truth and detailed story later. On 26 March 1881, it reported that, on Tuesday, the first of March, around midday sixteen 'naked men and women', defying the tradition of Jagannāth temple of Puri and ignoring the warnings of the gatekeepers pushed open the main gate, broke the gate of *bhoga maṇḍapa* (feeding hall) and reached the *jai-vijaya* (victory) gate, shouting Alekh! Alekh!. Their aim was to burn the images of Jagannāth trinity to ashes on the *baḍadāṇḍa*. The attackers were described as *mlechhas* (uncouth), who neither bathe nor clean themselves after defecation. They belonged to a *baṇua* (wild) and *asabhya* (uncivilized) *jāti*, like Sānthāl, and were lured by a shrewd man who was misleading them, posing as their *guru*.¹² This episode, which seems like a reckless adventure, generated a lot of commotion in Orissa. The attempt on *Baḍathākura* (Great Lord) was considered as an attack on the heart of Oriya culture, a great danger to the Lord of the Universe. Immediately, the commissioners of Orissa and Chattishgarh, as well as the *tehsildārs* of Banki and Anugul, the manager of Dhenkanal estate and the magistrate of Puri, were asked to send their reports. *Utkal Dīpika* published an abridged versions of the report of the Commissioner of Chattisgarh on 19th November 1881.¹³ An abridged version of the report of the commissioner

of Orissa was published in the proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1882.¹⁴ According to these reports, the intruders 'were Hindu dissenters, followers of Alekh'. Alekh Dharma, or Mahimā Dharma, had been started by Alekh Swāmy (Mahimā Swāmy) in Banki and Dhenkanal estates of Orissa.

II

The actual background of the founder of Mahimā Dharma (or Alekh Dharma), like that of most such founders, is surrounded by myths and legends. The followers of Mahimā Dharma believe that the founder was a pure incarnation of *Alekh* (indescribable) *Param* (transcendent) Brahma. They also believe that Mahimā Swāmy was *ayoni-sambhuta* (not born of a womb). He is believed to have appeared on this earth first in the Himalayas and later in Orissa, the holiest land in India. The *Tehsildār* of Banki reported in 1881 that Mahimā Swāmy's early name was Mukunda Das.¹⁵ He was an '*Achori Baiṣṇav*' and worshipped Hindu deities at Kapilash in Dhenkanal estate. There he was stoned and he gave up his *kaupina* (loincloth) and *kanṭhi* (beads) and wore *kumbhipāt* (bark of *kumphi* tree). He left Kapilash and came to Puri, stayed some time near Lokanath temple in a hut made of mud. Later he proceeded to Daruthenga in Khurdha estate, built a house there and roamed around nearby villages. Here his disciples deified him as Mahima Gosain.

The *Tehsildār* of Anugul reported that the founder was known as *Dhulia Gosain*, a name applied to a sect of Hindu ascetics who besmear their body with ashes.¹⁶ He was in Puri for a long time. He came to Kapilash and at first lived twelve years only on fruits and for the next twelve years on water and milk. He was thus also known to the people as *Phalāhāri Bābāji* (fruit-eating saint) and *Khīranīra-pāyee* (milk and water drinker). In the third stage he came in contact with the *rājā* of Dhenkanal and finally he started preaching Alekh Dhrama (religion of the Indescribable), or Mahimā Dharma (religion of the Great). He believed that there was only one master of the universe and that his master was invisible and without form. He first built his *tungi* (elevated platform; hut), at Dāruthenga in Dhenkanal, but later

shifted to Malbeharpur in Banki. He established an *anāhata-dhuni*, inextinguishable fire. This sacred pile of fire was the only altar for worshipping *mahimā*. The manager of Dhenkanal¹⁷ estate reported that Mahimā Swāmy was originally a *Vaiṣṇava* and later became a devout worshipper of Mahādeva of Kapilāsh in Dhenkanal. Mahimā Swāmy was credited with improving the place of worship by cutting the jungle and making a garden, looking after the *bhoga* (food) preparation of the idol and taking care of the pilgrims. The people of the surrounding villages respected him. The Dhenkanal rājā's mother supplied milk and food for him. He served the sick and on behalf of the sick and suffering, he visited the god to cure the sick persons. Later he abandoned Kapilāsh and started preaching the uselessness or meaninglessness of worshipping stones and wood. He initiated disciples and established *tungis* at Dāruthenga, Malbeharpur and in almost all Tributary Estates of Orissa.

Apart from these reported events, Bhīma Bhoi, as a poet of the nineteenth century, composed *bhajanās*, *janānas* and *chautisās* expounding the basic teaching of Mahimā Swāmy.¹⁸ He played a crucial role in getting the latter deified. In 1902, Karuṇākara Das and Machhindra Das, both Mahimā sannyāsīs, wrote the *Abadhuta Darśana*. In the same year, Rajendra Das published a book named *Satya Dharma*, the first published work on Mahimā Dharma.

Mahimā Swāmy left behind no written works. But Bhīma Bhoi, in his works, mentions that he had been commanded by Mahimā Swāmy to compose poems to propagate the tenets of Mahima Dharma.¹⁹ According to his earliest work *Nirveda Sādhana*, the first disciple of the Swāmy, Govinda Bābā, was none other than Lord Jagannāth of Puri, who by his good *karma* came to know of the advent of Mahimā Swāmy, took human form and became a disciple.²⁰

C.E. Buckland utilized the report of the Commissioner of Orissa in 1901 in his work *Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors*, later O'Malley utilised in his work *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers, Sambalpur* 1908.²¹

The Commissioner of Orissa calls the followers of this *dharma*, 'Hindu dissenters', 'followers of Alekh'. B.C. Mazumdar in his

work, *Sonepur in Sambalpur Tract*, 1911, generalized the teachings of this *dharma* with Digambara Jainism in a very simplistic way.²² N.N Vasu in his work highlighted the distinct connection between the teachings of Mahimā dharma with *ādivāsi* religions on the one hand, and the Oriya school of Pañchasakhā on the other.²³ On the ground of the use of certain Buddhist conception of *śūnyata*, he considered the Pañchasakhā as ‘crypto-Buddhists’, obviously, he characterized Mahimā dharma as neo-Buddhist. Chittaranjan Das’s work on Mahimā Dharma in 1950’s traces the development of Mahimā philosophy from Sixteenth Century to 19th Century. It surveys the historical traditions, legends and doctrines of Mahimā dharma.²⁴ *Mahimā dharma Itihās* was published in 1935 and the *Philosophy of Mahimā Dharma* by Biśwanāth Bābā was published in 1936.

In 1968, the Tribal Research Bureau published their study, *The Impact of Satya Mahimā Dharma on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Orissa*. This work deals with the social dimensions of this *dharma* but considers it as a mechanism to incorporate tribal societies in the Pan-Indian Society.²⁵ Bijayanand Kar in his work (1969) analyses the special attributes of this *dharma* placing somewhere between Vedantic philosophy of *advaita* in one hand and Buddhist and Jaina philosophy on the other.²⁶ In 1977, DAV college Koraput organized a Seminar on Mahimā dharma. These papers provide the link between *Mahimā* Philosophy and the *Pañchasakhā* philosophy, the principal teachings of Mahimā Dharma, the institutional growth, and also provide some informations on the present discourse between followers of Mahimā Dharma and the orthodox tradition.²⁸ The English translation of A. Eschmann work appeared in 1978.²⁹ This work has been most comprehensive, it surveys all the primary and secondary sources and supplements with participatory observations, She critically evaluated the traditions, doctrines, official history, their links with Orissan tradition, the institutional growth and the continuing dialogue between Mahimā Dharma and others. She considers the Dharama as ‘an autochthonous, Hindu reform movement’ that turned against Jagannāth worship in particular. Yet unlike neo-religious reform movements of Bengal there is little evidence

to show that this movement was influenced by the Philosophy of the west.³⁰ This movement derives its critical attitude towards Hindu tradition directly from the tradition itself. Her study was part of a larger project on the cult of Jagannāth and Regional Traditions of Orissa. Ishita Banerjee-Dubey,³¹ in her doctoral theses considers this *dharma*, as “a sectarian formation in Orissa emerging in mid-nineteenth century as a protest against the scheme of authority and hierarchy encoded within structure of dominant Hinduism”. Obviously, she concentrates particularly on the philosophical and religious tradition of Orissa though she makes passing references to the socio-political unrest of Orissa. We have delved into its details the socio-political-religious unrest of Orissa in the first chapter. Let us now focus on the life and teachings of Bhīma Bhoi.

III

Like that of Mahimā Swāmy, myth and legends also surround Bhīma Bhoi’s early life. A lot of controversy is there regarding his place of birth. Scholars assign from Paiksara, Bolangir district to Kankanapada, Jatasingha and Redhakhol in Sambalpur district and even Joranda in Denkanal district, as his place of birth.³² Also, Scholars have not yet arrived on the exact year of his birth that is between 1849 to 1869 and his place of birth. But there is no controversy regarding his year of death, i.e., he died in 1895 at Khaliapali, Bolangir. There are many legends regarding his birth but we need not go into the details. But one aspect that whether he was blind is interesting?

N.N. Vasu, in his work says Bhīma Bhoi was blind by birth.³³ Artaballav Mohanty in his introduction to *Stuti Chintāmani*, relying on medieval literature argues that he was undoubtedly blind by birth.³⁴ B.C Mazumdar, Binayak Mishra, speculate that he lost his eyesight later.³⁵ N.K. Sahu and M. Mansingh opine that he lost his eyesight due to small pox.³⁶ Chittaranjan Das³⁷ speculates that due to his radical stand on caste system the upper caste people of his village threw him in a well where he lost his eyesight. Amongst the followers of Mahima Dharma also this controversy persists; Biśwanāth Bābā believes that he

was blind by birth whereas Śrīyā Devi, the adopted daughter of Bhīma Bhoi strongly claims that he was not. Kuñja Bihari Bābā, a *balkala dhāri sannyāsi*, Latā Māthā, Joranda also believes in the latter. (Author interviewed Kuñja Bihāri Bābā in 1994 on Māgha Pūrnimā, at Joranda,). Interestingly *mālikās* of earlier period predicted the coming of Mahimā Swāmy and Bhīma Bhoi as incarnations in the *Kali Yuga*. Achutananda³⁸ (16th century) predicted, “Nitya Radhā would take male form in *Kali Yuga* as Bhīma Bhoi”. Sridhar Das³⁹ wrote “Radhā would take male incarnation at Redhākhhol in a Kandh family. He would be blind by birth”.

These compositions known as *mālikās* began in the 16th century and till now are very popular in Orissa. In this literature the writer uses apocalyptic vision to foresee the end of *Kalī Yuga* and therefore it is vulnerable to interpolations. So these compositions need close scrutiny and analysis. In our opinion, uncritical acceptance of these compositions had led to the controversy. Scholars like Bhagirathi Nepak and J.K. Meher have sought to analyze the internal evidence in Bhīma Bhoi’s writings and opine that Bhoi was not blind.⁴⁰ They quote some of the compositions of Bhīma Bhoi to prove their point as follows:

Everyday I used to take cattle to the forest. When I was hungry and thirsty I used to drink water from the hill streams. *Looking at the sky* often I used to doubt whether it is time to go back and whether some food would be in my luck toady. (*Stuti Chintāmani* 21st Boli).⁴¹

To my eyes the sixtysix crore of living being look like strand of straw (*Stuti Chintāmani*, 26th Boli).⁴²....

Seeing with my eyes I again forget...

I beseech your grace as I roam around *like a blind man*.

I am cutting my own tongue and *piercing a stick into my own eyes*.

I woke up immediately and found by my side the *śūnya* brahma; *when I wiped my eyes and looked again there they were*, the *guru* and the disciple.

I fell prostrate at their feet they blessed me.⁴³

According to Nepak and Meher, in the face of such information from his own writings, it would be wrong to assume on the basis of *mālikās* and other unauthentic sources that Bhīma

Bhoi was blind. Further they say that in his autobiographical work *Stuti Chintāmani* he has so many references of his life, miseries, sufferings, humiliation and other personal references. But nowhere he has mentioned about his blindness. Sitakanta Mohapatra who reviewed life and writings of Bhīma Bhoi in Makers of Indian Literature Series, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi writes, “it would be more reasonable to assume that Bhīma Bhoi was not blind.”⁴⁴ But Bhoi’s contemporary reports submitted by the Commissioners of Chhatisgarh and Orissa recorded Bhīma Bhoi as born-blind but endowed with natural talents of superior order.⁴⁵

From the above hagiographies of Mahimā Swāmy and Bhīma Bhoi we find that both of them had uncommon birth. One is *ayonisambhuta* (not from his mother’s womb), the latter was found by his foster parent. Mahimā Swāmy was considered *sākāra* form of *Alekh param brahman* and Bhoi as reincarnation of Rādha. Former’s early life is associated with holy places of India and Orissa, a *sādhu* taking care of the needy, diseased and improving the holy place of Kapilas, endowed with very super-human power. Bhīma Bhoi was a tribal cowherd boy, a blind illiterate. God transformed him into a poet and assigned the duty to propagate Mahimā Dharma. Mahimā Swāmy, after twenty-four years of penance became a wandering ascetic and remained so till his death. Bhīma Bhoi, an ascetic became a householder, had five wives. He had one son and one daughter. Both Bhoi and Swāmy predicted their death beforehand and sat on the *Samādhi* on the due date. Swāmy built *tungis*, received immense wealth but later he burnt them all. He was not attached to property. He did not recognize any body to inherit. But in case of any crisis among his followers it is believed that he communicated through *śūnya bāṇi*. Bhīma Bhoi selected one of his wives as his successor. Perhaps, there were attempts to overcome obscure and low origin of the propagators respectively. Hagiography played an important role. Perhaps it helped to overcome their shortcomings. A *Sādhu* and a tribal with little or no access to sacred text and almost a non-entity to formal education could claim devotional equality if not superiority over the orthodox ruling classes; at least in the eyes of their followers.

IV

Let us now focus on the writings of Bhīma Bhoi. His earliest work was *Nirbeda Sādhanā*. The entire text is in a dialogue form—dialogue between Mahimā Swāmy and Govinda Bābā; *Guru* and *śiṣya*. The latter is putting queries while the *guru* (*Anādi*) is explaining and teaching.

According to Bhoi, Alekh Param Brahma and Lord Jagannāth of Puri, appeared in his vision as Mahimā Swāmy and Govinda Bābā, when Bhoi was sixteen years old. In his vision Bhoi saw Mahimā Swāmy teaching *Nirbeda Sādhanā* to Govinda Bābā. In the process Bhoi learned *Nirbeda Sādhanā* and tenets of Mahima Dharma in revelation.⁴⁶

The story of *Nirbeda Sadhana* runs as follows:

Bhoi saw in vision Mahimā Swāmy initiating Govinda Bābā in which Swāmy gave orange colored loin' cloth to wear, and a *kumbhi pata* as *ādi baṇḍha* and asked him to proceed to practice *Nirbeda Sādhanā*, the essence of which is preserved in a village named Bala Singha near Boud, the earliest *Sidha Pīṭha* of the *guru* himself. Govinda Bābā, followed the unusually difficult *sādhanā* for twelve years—seeking cooked food, *Vikṣya*, from village to village without discriminating any body, not even the lowest of the low—transgressing the 'Hindu' laws and practices. Hindu God and Goddess became afraid of him, the fear was if Mahima Dharma succeeded on the earth people would forget the 33 crore *devā devis*. Therefore, they attacked Govinda Bābā. The latter in order to seek solution wanted to visit his *guru*, and proceeded to Kapilas. *Guru* could know the mind of his *śiṣya* and appeared before him. He was annoyed because the *śiṣya* was afraid of attacks and was proceeding to Kapilas where there is nothing but a stone *Liṅga*. The *guru* in order to test the capacity of the *śiṣya* shield Govinda inside a stone temple and left for Kapilas. The *śiṣya* sat on a Yoga *Sādhanā*, concentrated on Alekh Param Brahma, remembering his *guru*'s name. *Guru* came back and took him to the world of bliss. There Govinda put some of his queries. *Anādi* replied, first there was *Mahā Śūṅya* or the void, from void emerged letters *a, u, ma* and combinedly became *Om*, the first sound. From the first sound there emerged images, from image light came out, from light water, from water Veda, *Brahamāṇḍa*, *Pabana*, *Piṇḍa*, *Kṣymā* (forbearance), *dayā*, (benevolence) *śīla*, (modesty) and *śānti* (peace) which are the friends and companions of Śūṅya Brahma.⁴⁷

Govinda further enquired, “where from the seven-seas came, who created them? Anādi replied that in the beginning there was only one *Brahma*, he was formless, he desired to create. First he created a white substance and gave it shape of a beautiful young lady, Amāpa Kumāri and placed seed in her womb. But she could not bear and died immediately. He created three more ladies Akada, Ahanā, Amedhā. None could carry the seed and died. At last Brahma created the fifth one and went on *yoganidrā* or sleep. The girl grew into a young lady, searched for a partner, but there was nobody except the creator on *yoganidrā*. So she created *māyā* or illusion and slept with Alekh Brahma. The latter became victim of *māyā*, as a result the semen of Brahma came out of his body. It became three parts, one fell in the womb of the Ādi Śakti, one became the space, the third part was sub-divided into four and filled four directions of this world. The part, which fell in the womb, split into two. In this way many years past, in the world air and water flowed. Finally Ādi Śakti gave birth to Nirākāra, a hermaphrodite, half male half female. Former became very sad and decided to stay in a tree hole of *Baṭabrukṣhya*.⁴⁸

Nirākāra, fell on the ground and started crying. From, his cry, *Omkar* came out, from *Omkar* Veda and from Veda emerged seven seas. Nirākāra, meditated on Alekh Param Brahma. The latter gave Nirākāra the idea of creation. From the right part of her body Nirākāra created a woman and from the left part a man. The latter two fell in love. In the mean time truth emerged from the Veda. *Raja* accompanied the truth. From *raja tama* emerged. *Tama* gave birth to *kāma*, *kāma* manifested into *moha*. *Moha* created *māyā* from which emerged *buddhi*, *hiṅsā*, *kapata*, *chhandā*, *bāda*, *krodha*.

Nirākāra created fourteen brahmāṇḍas, and fourteen brahmās, placed them in each and went to *yoganidrā*. Lakṣmī, served him. (Here Nirākāra transformed into Viṣṇu Nirākāra) Lakṣmī saw a dirt on the leg of Viṣṇu. She threw it, this dirt gave birth to Madhu-Kaitava, two demons. They ate whatever was available and demanded more food from Lakṣmī. The latter asked them to eat all fourteen *brahmās*. The demons searched the brahmās but could discover only three and ate them. They came back and demanded more. They also demanded love from Lakṣmī. Lakṣmī was terrified, took shelter in the *nāvi* of Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu Nirākāra woke up from his *yoganidrā*. The demons fought

against Viṣṇu, who killed and threw both of them away. They became mountains on earth. Again he entered into *yoganidrā*.⁴⁹

Three thousand years passed, again Anādi asked Nirākāra to make love with Lakṣmī. From the conjugal life of Lakṣmī and Nirākāra, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva were born. Nirākāra then went to *baṭabrukshya*, asked *adimātā* to proceed to earth. Also he advised his sons to search the truth. Brahmā and Viṣṇu searched, but could not achieve. Śiva fell in love with *adimātā*, so he also failed miserably. All of them came back and asked Nirākāra to provide the clues to reach truth or Alekh Parmbrahma. Nirākāra rebuked Śiva or Hara for his mistake. He also rebuked *adimātā* as “frailty thy name is woman”. *Ādimātā* replied, “there is nothing wrong in love, woman is an embodiment of deep ocean, God is called a God only when they know us, if you do not allow a woman to cohabit how can you create the world. *Ādimātā* cursed Nirākāra and went away.⁵⁰

Nirākāra, taught *aṣṭāṅga sādhanā* to Hara or Śiva. He also taught Viṣṇu and Brahmā. Then he asked all of them to proceed to earth, and asked Śiva to practice *aṣṭāṅga yoga* on earth. All of them concentrated on Anādi and became successful. Anādi Jyoti, the formless came to bless them. The three appealed Anādi to reveal the secrets of creation. Alekh Brahma answered, all the *tīrtha*, *brata*, *karma*, seven seas, rivers, sun, moon, fire, air, *veda*, and *avatār* are here at my *āṅgyan* (Order). He prescribed duties to Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva for creation, maintenance and destruction respectively on the earth. They performed their duty according to his order.⁵¹

In the meantime three *yugas* passed away and came the *Kali Yuga*. Dharma had lost three legs out of four by that time. Anādi could know the suffering of his followers in this *Kali Yuga*. Therefore, to establish *Satya Yuga* and to save the followers of Mahimā Dharma, he descended on earth. Anādi said, ‘I am working day and night. I have set *anāhat dhuni* and am trying to established *dharma*’. He told to Govind Das, ‘I am no other than Anādi Puruṣa. The people in this *Kali Yuga* are unable to recognize me and criticize my *dikṣyā*. Govinda asked, “you have come as an *abadhuta* or *sannyāsi*, advise us the path to be followed in the *Kali Yuga*”. He answered, “the followers of

mahimā should tolerate the criticism and attacks, like mother earth, and concentrate on *Nāma Brahma*. Realization of *nāma* is superior to four Vedas. *Bhakta* or follower is my life, there is no difference between my *bhaktas* and me. We work together, and we are like *guru-śiṣya*. There is no caste bar, even if someone from lower caste recites my name, I am always with him. I stay in heart and provide *gyāna*. His heart is as sacred as river *Gaṅgā*. I am a guest and take food at every house. Whoever follow my advice, I serve them; irrespective of ascetic or householder”.⁵²

Anādi further said, ‘I am Omnipotent, Omnipresent as well as Omniscient. I am the creator as well as the creation. I am both male and female. I am husband, I am wife. I am the mother, I am the son. I am death, I am birth. I am *rājā* and I am *praṅjā*. I am everything. I am servant of my disciple.’⁵³

In the *Kali Yuga* on my free will I have come as *Abadhuta* with sixty four *sidhas*. We have set *dhuni* in this Jambu Dwīpa to establish Mahimā Sāgar. On my order my *bhaktas* are already there on Jambu Dwīpa in lakhs. Still a few more to come. The day the required number of *bhaktas* will be complete, they will rebel and kill the notorious people. The world will be lighter and peaceful”.⁵⁴

Govinda inquired, ‘what would happen in future? How will be the *Satya Yuga*?’ Anādi told, ‘innumerable *sadhu sant* would emerge in this world, sixty-four *sidhas* and other *sādhus* are already there in human form, both men and women to enjoy the future state to come. All will eat together’. Govinda asked, ‘how could all eat together? How is it possible?’ Anādi replied, ‘My *bhaktas* will blossom with their brightness. The umbrellas and flags of one lakhs *rājās* will be destroyed and buried on earth. I will be the Emperor, one lakh *chāmara*, one lakh umbrella will be unfolded on my service, one lakh *khañjani*, one lakh *gini*, one lakh *śaikha*, one lakh *mārdala* and *tāla* will vibrate at a time. My *lilā* would spread and my *bhaktas* will enjoy. Fourteen tanks will be dugged, golden steps will lead to the water of the tank. My flags will fly high, flowers will rain from sky. Kings will loose their power and authority. All will sit and take food together’.⁵⁵

“How can this be possible, when you are roaming like a *vikṣu*, and when nobody even your *devatās* are not aware of it, how

will the common man know”? Anādi replied, “Listen Govind, all these present rājās will obey my *ajñā* or order. They will construct temples for me and will serve as servants. They will surrender all their wealth, sons, daughters and administration and serve me day and night. Wealth will come from four directions, a golden altar will be constructed, lamps will be lighted, and people will come from all direction. For seven days and night *mahānitya* play will continue, coronation ceremony of me, as emperor, will be solemnised. One-lakh rājās will serve as *sāmanta*. They will grow *jatā* or matted hair. I will recognize them as my *sāmanta* and will distribute *pāta* or cloth, and wealth. I will also arrange marriage of my *bhaktas* according to their choices. Male and female will blossom equally. Woman will be faithful to her husband and serve his feet. They will respect elders and look after kinsman. They will follow *dharma*. All will eat together on golden plates and sleep on golden bed. They will spend their days with *sādhus* and *sants*. Nobody will be a worshiper of wooden image, they will only worship formless *Alekh brahma* in their heart”.⁵⁶

Govinda inquired as to how the innumerable *sādhu* and sixty-four *sidhas* will come together. Anādi said, “the earth and fourteen *brahmāṇḍas* will tremble, thundering sound will be heard for $2\frac{1}{2}$ *ghadi* i.e. 12 hours. *Ulka* will fall on earth. All my followers will take shelter in *Ekāmra* forest. People will chant the name of *Śūṅya Puruṣa*. My followers in crores will come from four directions. Do not be impatient, wait for the right time, in the *Ekoisa Anke Kali* will end, my *bhaktas* will stay, *staya dharma* will rule.’

The next important text of Bhim Bhoi is *Sruti Niṣedha Gītā*. This text seems to be an extension of *Nirbeda Sādhanā*. Here also in reply to Govinda’s queries Anadi has explained why Mahimā Dharma or Mahimā Sagar is appropriate for *Kali Yuga* and why other religious sects are rejected. Anādi explains to reject not only the Gods but also their *avatārs*, including Jagannāth and explains why thirty-three crores gods and goddess are totally discarded. Further, he informs that the rituals of the sacred days like *ekādaśī* and the sacred objects like *nirmālya*, *tulsi* are all together rejected. Only path is *Nirbeda Sādhanā* and complete surrender to Alekh Parram Bhrama. Essence of all *Vedas*, *tīrthas*,

rituals is in the body of Mahima Swāmy and he is preaching as *abadhuta sannyaṣi*. He is the *swarūpa* of Praram Bhrama, he is not an *avatār*. He has come to this world in his free will and not from mother's womb.⁵⁷

*Stuti Chintamāni*⁵⁸ is another important work of Bhīma Bhoi which was composed in the later part of his life. It depicts *Alekh Param Brahma* as formless and shapeless, who lives in the temple void. One cannot see his feet. He lives in an unknown nameless realm. Whoever realizes him in the void or silence can get *mukti* from this *samsāra* and merges with the *śūnya*. For this there is no need of *karma*, only a person has to concentrate on principles of Mahimā Dharma. The idea of cosmology is given in the sixth, eighth and ninth cantos. According to these cantos, in the beginning there was nothing, neither the earth, nor the water, nor the air; there was neither any form, nor any linear mark, there was only infinite vacuum (*mahaśūnya*). Parambrahma was alone in the *mahaśūnya*, he was shapeless, formless. From him came the word *swāhā*. This word became one thousand petals and from that a garden appeared. After first creation he became *Ādi-brahma bhagwān*. But it is impossible to describe him, he is beyond human perception, so his name is *Ananta*. In order to help the believers he himself initiated *Dīkṣā*. He is property of the poor. Irrespective of man and woman one can get him. Bhoi appeals the people to chant the name of indescribable *Brahma*, to herald *satya Yuga*.

In the tenth canto, he narrates that in the *Kali Yuga* everybody is under the spell of *māyā* or illusion. He laments, "in *Kali Yuga* the sin is on the rise? The world is running down towards abysmal darkness or hell". He appealed the people to set aside the *māyā*, to engage oneself in *niṣkāma karma*. He says, "set your mind on Parram Brahma, Yama will fear to touch you, in case of doubt search inside you, you will realize Him. He is neither black nor white. He is without form and colour". He requested all *mahimā* followers to pray Alekh Param Brahma and concentrate on the void because the *Kali Yuga* is coming to an end. He informs that there will be darkness of seven days and seven nights, sea will come with its full fury and stars from sky will fall on earth. This deluge will destroy all greedy, liars, cheaters, corrupts. To save

oneself from this deluge he advised to seek the grace of Alekh Mahima and follow the right path. He also predicted foreign attacks of *Yavana* and *firingi* and a bloody war for eighteen days. He foresaw that *-mahimā* followers would come from four directions of Jambu Dwipa. Grace of Alekh Param Brahma or Sri Guru will save the Jambu Dwipa and establish *satya Yuga*, where *mahimā* will prevail. (15th and 16th Bolis).⁵⁹

In *Stuti Chintāmanī*, he provides us many of his personal experiences: how miserable and pathetic was his early life, how his father died in his childhood, how at the age of four he encountered a *sannyasi* with orche coloured loincloth seeking *vikṣā*. Up to the age of eleven he was jobless and slept empty belly many times. At the age of twelve he became a cowherd boy. Even this job could not remove his miseries; rather he was subjected to torture and rebuke. He was at the mercy of his master for a lunch. He laments:

Bulu thāi bane niti prati dine bachhaku Sangate gheni, Kṣhyudha trusa kale jībana bikale piuthai jharapāni. Akāsaku Chāhin manare hetu karu thai pānche helā bela. Hoi nahin jībī mu ki hōi na miliba pāni peja. Dhanya a piṇḍa na hoi khaṇḍa khaṇḍa padi achhi jete māda gāli daṇḍa. Pachhaku pakāi ḥrude karipathi drudha Luha nuhe rakta bahu thai mora śrihaste diechhi pochhi. Kehi na jānai Śriguru Jānanti jete kaṣṭa pai achhi. Se samaya kathā mane kale chintā karati kātuchhi piṇḍa. Uthuachhi krodha hoi gadagada bukure paduchi kandā.⁶⁰

“I walk with the cattle every day into the forest. I take water from the stream in case of acute hunger and thirst. Gazing at the sky, I feel in my mind and calculate the time. It is not proper time to go back. How can I go and show my face? I lament, why this soul did not scatter into pieces in spite of thrashing it received. It received rebukes, punishments, in spite of that it retrained strong. It was not tears but virtually blood was coming out, I have wiped it in my own hand. Nobody knows except Sri Guru what sort of misery and hurdles I have faced. When I recollect those bygone days, my heart bleeds. My heart revolts but I have been able to subdue it. In this way my years from twelve to fourteen passed.”

According to Bhoi, ‘In the *Kali Yuga* sin and guilt are quite widespread and as a result the whole world is leading towards its end. The world is so sinful I wish I could destroy it. The world can be placed in a plate, 56 crores people look like blades of grass.

If my *guru* will permit I can topple this world in a movement. I have refrained myself in the absence of my *guru*'s orders.'

Bhoi appeals, 'The entire creation is yours, good or bad, happiness or misery.' He appeals to God to come to his rescue. He says 'for preaching your glory, my integrity has been subjected to doubt. For the teaching of the glory of the formless, they call me a Christian and rebuke and humiliate. When I teach the idea of Satya Dharma, the sinners attack me. When I spread the idea of equality of all mankind, they scold me and call me a dog. In the face of all the scolding, threatening where will I go ? Please tell me.'⁶¹

In his other work *Chautiṣa*⁶² he further repeats the essence of Mahimā Dharma. Perhaps it was composed after the death of Mahimā Swāmy. Here he is found waiting for the Swāmy to come back, but he again predicts the end of *Kali Yuga* by the grace of Alekh Mahimā. He also predicts the coming of a war, where all anti-*mahimāist* will die, *Satya Yuga* will be established, *mahimā* followers will rule.

'Aṣṭaka Behari *Gītā*'⁶³ is a small poem in comparison to Bhīma Bhoi's other poems. Here he reminds everybody to live a pure and simple life, acquire the qualities like *dayā*, *kṣhamā*, *śīla*, *śānti* and give away *lova*, *ahamkar* and completely surrender before the Brahma. He requests the *mahimā* followers to realize truth in one's body. *Mokṣya* can be achieved with a combination of *jñāna* and *bhakti mārga*. He asks the people to realize that Brahma is present in every *piṇḍa* or human body.

His other two works are *Ādi Anta Gītā*⁶⁴ and *Brahma Nirupana Gītā*.⁶⁵ In these works he concentrates on *Brahma* and its *Svarūpa*, its attributes and nature. In the former text he describes Brahma, through a series of binary oppositions, i.e. he is *Guru*, He is *śiṣya*; he is light, he is a darkness; he is ascetic, he is householder; he is truth, he is *māyā*. He said God can neither be realized through reading *sāstras* nor can he be realized through discussion and discourse. Brahma is beyond human knowledge. One can reach him by giving up ego, crave for God, like a child craves for his mother. He further says the Gods and Goddess, stars and moon, ascetics, *devas* could not comprehend and reach the Brahma. Brahma resides in void,

where there is eternal spring, no hunger, and no thirst. There is complete bliss. There lies the ultimate truth, the Brahma.

In the latter text *Ādi-Anta Gītā*, he explains the secret of the body. We come across direct impact of Yoga. He says the body has ten gates, seven *dwīpas*. There are places for ten avatars, and there are ten *siddhas*. He explains through *Jīva* and *Parama*. *Jīva* represents female principle and *Parama* the male principle. The relations are of wife and husband. The sex union is explained in metaphysical terms. It is the union of soul (*Jīva*) with Brahma (*Parama*). In the later part of the text, he deals with *Kali Yuga*, how the people have forgotten their duties, how they have indulged in an *adhārmic* acts. Therefore, Alekh Dharma has taken the form of Mahima Swāmy. He will establish *Satya Dharma* in this world. Other than these texts, he composed hundreds of prayers for the propagation of the tenet of Mahimā Dhārma, especially to be recited in gatherings. Many enthusiastic *mahima* followers composed songs in the name Bhīma Bhoi. Many of his unpublished writing are still in the hands of *sādhus*, *sannyāsis* and *bhaktas*. Perhaps the first attempt was made by Arta Ballav Mohanty to publish his writings. In 1931, he edited and published *Stuti Chintāmanī* under the aegies of Prāchi Samiti.⁶⁶ Later, he published *Brahma Nirupāṇa Gita*, *Chautiṣa* and *Bhajanamālā*. In 1955 a collection of Bhīma Bhoi's writings was published by Vidya Dhar Sahu, Dharma Grantha store, Cuttack.⁶⁷ Another collection of Bhoi was published in 1960 by the same author and publisher. In 1971-72 two elaborate collections of Bhoi were published from Cuttack. I have utilized the second one edited by Karuna Kar Sahu published by Dharma Grantha Store, *Bhīma Bhoi Granthābālī*.⁶⁸

Bhīma Bhoi locates his God Arūpa brahma or Alekh Param Brahma in the Śūnya or void. He believes in His singleness. He is formless, shapeless. In that form He is *nirguṇa* or without attributes. Before the creation his God did exist in the *Sūnya Maṇḍala*, *Abana Maṇḍala*. He is ungendered in that state. He thought of a creation and became a creator. Alekh Parram Brahma manifested through his creation attained attributes in his *sagūṇa* state. In a way he revealed himself through creation. He is everywhere and in every being. Every thing is His wish,

irrespective of male and female, living and nonliving, thirty-three crore Gods and Goddess. Infact his first five creations were Women (Ādi-Śaktis). The sixth one was Nirañjan, a hermaphrodite, and a brahmā *jyoti* (light) of Arūpa. Later Nirañjan became the creator, his creation was endowed with attributes. From Nirañjan, a sound emerged—from sound water, space, and earth. Nirañjan was reminded by Alekh to go for further creation. Niranjan created a female and a male, from their conjugal life the following *gunas* emerged- *sata, raja, tama, kāma, lova, karma, maya, buddhi, hiṃsa, kapata, chhanda, bada*. Nirañjan further created Ādi Śakti, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Hara. Brahmā created the *Brahmaṇḍa*. Viṣṇu took *avatār* from time to time for the maintenance of the world. Hara also took form to teach *yoga sadhana*. Ādi-Śakti remained as *māyā* in this world. According to Bhoi all of them and their creation failed to reach the feet of Alekh Brahma, due to either *māyā or kāma or lova* etc.⁶⁹

According to him people believe the creation as an end in itself due to the evils of *Kali Yuga*. Those who worship Nirañjan, Hara, Viṣṇu, Brahmā and their *avatārs* including Jagannāth suffer in this world. They cannot find *mukti* and suffer again and again from the redeaths and rebirths. This type of myth creation is found in *dharma* cult, Nathism and Kabirpanthis.

According the Bhoi the leaving beings are tortured oppressed and are in misery, having been entrapped in the *Kali Yuga*. Aelkh Brahma has descended in the form of *abadhuta* or wandering ascetic, Mahimā Swāmy, in order to free them from this trap and establish *Satya mahimā* empire. He himself is the creator, who has come to this world in his free will. He was not born from mother's womb. He is the creator of the creator in the form of the Mahimā Swāmy. We come across similar story of Kabir in the myths of Kabirpanthi in Chhatisgarh. According to Bhoi, Mahimā Swāmy was moving among the most neglected beings of the world giving teachings himself. In this Bhoi went one step forward from his *guru* Mahimā Swāmy. His guru was teaching how the rituals, pilgrimages, idol worship, caste system are meaningless, in the process giving sermons about the unmanifest, the indescribable Alekh Parram Brahma, and the *bhakti marga* to reach them. But Bhīma Bhoi said Mahimā

Swāmy is the final and last manifestation of the un-manifest. People are unable to recognize him due to *Kali Yuga*, but he will definitely establish *Satya Yuga*. He prescribed duties to the followers to prepare themselves. He appealed them to follow right path and devotion.

V

So far, we have seen that Bhīma Bhoi's God is both *nirguṇa* and *sagūṇa*. He resides in all human body irrespective of caste and gender. Evil impact of *kali* has blocked our knowledge to realize Him in our body and foolishly we are searching Him in temples, pilgrimages, *sāstras*, rituals and Vedas, etc. Whoever will realize, follow the Mahimā rules will mingle in *mahāśūnya* irrespective of caste or gender.⁷¹

Due to *Kali Yuga* man and woman and people of all castes are engaged in *lova*, *moha*, *krodha* and *māyā*. In fact in many of his verses he informs about only two *jāti*s- man or woman. Both are well equipped for liberation. But in some of his verses, he equates woman with *māyā*. He warns man to be careful. Sex with woman for carnal pleasure, and extra marital sex leads to hell. In this woman becomes the part of *māyā*. He identified six types of woman and out of six one is part of *māyā*. He of course identifies six types of man also, *rajaloka*, *brahmhaloka*, *devaloka*, *vedaloka*, *gopaloka* and *muniloka*. His argument places both man and woman in equal footing. But he does not champion the cause of monogamy. For man's *mukti* he should possess good qualities like *dāya*, *kṣamā*, *śānti*, *śīla* and concentrate on Alekh Param Brahma. But for woman, in addition to these good qualities, he prescribes certain additional qualification like serving her husband and his family faithfully. Bhīma Bhoi creates better chance for woman's emancipation but under the patriarchal value system.

In Orissan tradition we come across instances of *sadhus* or mystics claiming yogic power and the Pañchasakhā with their *bhakti marga* counterpoising their powers of seeing the divine or Ādi Jagannāth against Brāhmaṇic claim to textual knowledge. Mahaimā Dharma is one step forward in this matter. They claim

the visual experience of the divine everyday. The nature of *bhakta* is in itself pure and therefore nothing can pollute him. Bhoi, being a *desia kandha* and a cowherd boy, was familiar with the sweat and pain of toil. In his compositions he expresses his anguish, injustice, poverty, inequality, exploitation and hopes that all this would come to an end with the victory of Mahima Swāmy and the subsequent establishment of Mahima Empire. Therefore, he claims the creator is amongst the people in *sākāra* form, which is superior to textual knowledge and even spiritual *darshan*. *Param Brahma* is available at the doorstep, along with the guardian deity of Orissa, Jagannāth. They are available for every ordinary sufferer in this world. Perhaps this was to valorize the life of the peasants, artisans and tribals etc. In this we also infer that physically seeing and meeting are held to be superior to hearing and reading. So physically having Mahima Swāmy amidst them and seeing him from a close quarter has been held as the highest spritual experience.

The peasants, artisans and tribals with oral tradition could claim devotional equality if not superiority over the orthodox ruling classes. The latter had almost monopolized not only property but also the *śāstras* and temples considered to be the path of salvation. Meeting and listening from a close quarter with Mahimā Swāmy generated straight, gratifying results like the day to day works of peasants, artisans and tribals. In Bhīma Bhoi we see a step forward than that of the Pañchasakhā of the mediaeval Orissa. Nineteenth century was the prime time for economic exploitation by the Garjāt *rājās* and zamindārs of Orissa. They imposed taxes on whatever were susceptible to taxation. They constructed *rājā uasa* or palaces and temples at the expenses of the common men. To make the ruler's act of taxing rightful an aura was created around the ruler as divine representative on earth. They needed extra revenue to satisfy the demands of the officials, administrators of the estates. Patronage of *tāntric pīthas* and shrines of tribal deities in the outskirts of the new capitals of the rulers were no longer suitable to legitimize the elevated position of the new Gārjat chiefs. Rājās as *ṣatriya* kings in the brāhmaṇic model needed temples at the capital town of the estates, in front or even inside the palace. This

served the religious as well as political purpose. It also had social impact. Communities were assigned various services to perform in these temples. Big temples, may be of the local deity or of Jagannāth with landed property and their daily rituals, in a way, were to legitimize the new status of the Garjāt rājās as the divine representative on earth called *rajā-mahāprabhu*. Against this we come across tribal-peasant uprising in 19th century Orissa. It was against *rājā-sarkār-thekedār* nexus. The rebels' main targets were land alienation, new taxation, *thekedārs*, and exploiters of forced labors. Therefore, legitimization of their position was crucial for the rulers to counter the rebels.

Rulers of Orissa utilized the ideology of *rajā-mahāprabhu*, *thākur-rājā* based on the principle of loyalty and allegiance. The power of the ruler, obtained through loyalty to a deity, was ideologically designed as a manifestation of deity on earth. The rājā was deputy of the deity on earth as well as the Lord of the land (kingdom), and the subjects subservient to them. Bhīma Bhoi in his writings counters the claims of these rulers. Trapping from the Orissan rulers concept of political authority Bhīma Bhoi depicts Mahimā Swāmy as living and loving Lord who is personally looking after everybody and attending to even the neglected one. Therefore, Bhoi asked *mahimā* followers to surrender everything to Mahimā Swāmy instead of the rājās or the rulers. In this, he countered the claim of the rulers and challenged the authority of the temporal kings. He questioned the authority of the king to impose restrictions. According to him the land and country is the creation of God and the Mahimā followers roam there by the grace of God and not by the mercy of the king.

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CHAPTER III

Institutionalization of Mahima Samāja

This chapter analyzes how socio-cultural ideas and values affected the formation and became embedded in the organizational structures of Mahima Dharma. “Institutionalization”, in this chapter denotes a course of action and norms by which the rules are made working, undeviating amongst a set of followers who partake, the transgression of which would amount to imposition of penalty by custom. From this angle, *mahimā* temples (the *sūnya mandira*, *samādhi mandira*, *dhuni mandira*)¹ and the serving priests (*nīti bābās*) would not be considered institutions in the sense of the cement and concrete buildings or individual job. They would rather be treated in the meaning of a collection of facilitative job expectations shared by those who assist, look after, guide and reinforce. Further it has been observed by J.T.O’ Connell that:

...Institutionalisation is not a once-for-all matter (of simply getting from a first ‘charismatic’ generation to a second ‘institutionalized’ generation of a movement), but an ongoing process, subject to changing historical circumstances that are ever in tension with the received ‘value orientation’ of a movement or community. It is also clear that, the process of institutionalization; explicitly religious motivation and meaning are inextricably bound up with mundane constraints and interests.²

I

Mahimā Dharma began in the 19th Century.³ In the beginning it was in a fluid and formative phase. From an unsettled state, gradually it flourished to a more definite and established state.⁴ In the process it passed from a situation of newness causing disruption of the Brāhmaṇ-ḷḷatriya maneuvered Oriya socio-

cultural status quo to a new height more or less pleasing to the *mahimā* followers and acceptable to Oriya Society. There are many dimensions to this voyage: from an unsettled stage in the mid 19th century to institutionalized devices in the last quarter of the 19th century and taking further new shapes in the 20th century⁵; passing ideas and institution from one generation to another. Mahimā Dharma, was initiated by Mahimā Swāmy, in the mid 19th century, by his charismatic leadership, and other leaders like Govind Bābā, Narasīma Bābā and Bhīma Bhoi. On the death of Mahimā Swāmy there was a crisis, as to how to transform the charismatic authority of the founder-when he had not recognized *guru paramparā*.

There was also no elite core group or rather the group lacked the faith of his followers. So it was assigned to the cement concrete structure meant for the founder's *samādhi*, dwelling places and worship places.⁶ In other words, in the process of institutionalization the first step was to identify the sacred spots, dwelling places of the founder, and in the second place to have control over these sacred places. In the next phase the need was the formulation of mode of worship, rituals and festivals according to local calendar. This gave rise to the framing of rules for daily, monthly and yearly rituals and the rules concerning the life style of the priests and the *bhaktas*. These are crucial modes of institutionalization. Complimentary to this was the composition and compilation of prayer, *bhajana*, *janāna*, *chautisa* in praise of the creator, Alekh Bramha, and also in praise of the founder. These devotional compositions in the process took the form of sacred literature, almost equivalent to sacred script of Mahimā Dharma. The dissemination of the main tenet of Mahimā Dharma was possible through these devotional songs amongst the literate and illiterate *bhaktas* and *jagata*. Here it may be recalled that in the 19th century Orissa, oral tradition was very strong. It was a powerful means of value orientation amongst the followers. In the process the commitments of the *bhagats* or *āshritas* or followers were ensured. Thus it was a useful means in institutionalization of their crucial duties.

II

The condition in the 19th century Orissa had generated a socio-political restlessness. The Garjāt rājās, zamindārs, brāhmaṇs, moneyedmen established a nexus with the colonial rulers. The gradual transformation of what had been gift into dues, monetization, commutation of feudal dues and services into cash had their impact on the society. This affected its social structure, economic and agrarian institutions and political system. The Garjāt rājās, in order to enhance their status and political position, started constructing palaces and temples. Each Garjāt chief, zamindār, and even some *gāotia/thekedār* started building temples, palaces and buildings.⁹ The people had to bear an additional burden, *beth-beggār* or forced labour. For the temples they needed brāhmaṇs and for both temple and brāhmaṇas they needed land. The ruler at the expense of the peasants granted land. In some places, the Garjāt rājās put tax on every thing, which was susceptible to taxation.¹⁰

In the 19th century, the Jagannath cult was under the iron grip of rājā-brāhmaṇ nexus. The *śavara-devatā* had been hijacked by the ruling classes of Orissa from the *ādivāsīs* and was used as a tool to exercise their authority over the latter.¹¹ *Dinabandhu* (the friend of the downtrodden) had been brahmanised as Badathakura virtually going beyond the reach of the downtrodden. Sabars, being bird eaters were not even allowed to enter the temple dedicated to their God.¹² This went against the basic principle of universality cult of Jagannath.

The *ādivāsī*-peasants and the lower *jātis* considered the orthodox Jagannath cult and rājā-brāhmaṇ nexus responsible for the loss of their traditional cultivable areas. This antagonism was hardened by the cultural differences between the *ādivāsī*-peasant and brāhmaṇ-ḥṣatriya, which was accentuated by the latter's ideas of purity, pollution, dietary restriction and rigid caste distinction. Coincidentally, in the great famine of Orissa in the 19th century, lakhs of people died.¹³ A section of people started thinking that it was due to the *pāpa* or sin committed by the ruling classes. Some saw the *rājā*-brāhmaṇ combine and their

associates as the cause of their miseries, and the Lord Jagannāth as the protector of the former. However, it would be wrong to assume that under such emerging order and social pressure all groups revolted *en masse* against the oppressor. As a matter of fact, we find that reaction of each group in Orissa arose out of its own historical context. The meaning a people give to an entity or an event is out of a range of meanings and options available to them at the time of their particular experience of that entity or event.

The lower strata of the society in Orissa were thus chaffing under emerging unequal system. While in some areas they accepted a low position, in others, they aspired for high position and became a part of the *garjat* estates. Yet other groups could not cope with the external pressure and withdrew to the inaccessible areas and at other times revolted against exploitation.

It has been observed elsewhere that religious ideas have long been the language of protest, innovation and expression of individual and separate identities.¹⁴ They provide vast scope for reinterpretation in order to legitimize the aspiration of various sections of the population and justify changes in the existing social relationship. Mahima Swāmy, drawing inspirations from various available options, provided a new and separate identity for the people chaffing under the emerging unequal system.

The scope for *mukti* was extended to all human beings in Mahima Dharma irrespective of his social position. Thus the floodgates of emancipation project was opened even to the lowest strata of *jāti* society.

III

Mahimā Swāmy, the founder of Mahimā Dharma, was a historic personality who believed and preached the meaninglessness of stone and wooden idols. He was against rituals and brāhmaṇic interpretation of *dharma*. He propounded the worship of only one invisible almighty creator, Alekh Param Bṛahma. His eloquent and convincing sermon appealed to and created a deep impression on the mind of Madhusudan, the father

of Oriya nationalism, in 1874 at Patia.¹⁵ Madhusudan later remarked that, if he had met the Swāmy before his conversion into Christianity, his course of life would have been different. He believed that "If Swāmy had been born in Bengal or Punjab he would have become a world figure."

In addition to Mahimā Swāmy, this *dharma* is linked with the names of Govinda Bābā, Narasingh Bābā and Bhīma Bhoi. They were the earliest and foremost disciples instrumental in making the teaching of Mahimā Dharma available to all. Under their guidance, the Mahimā Dharma matured into a meaningful, clear-cut campaign in the 1860s and 1870s. Within twenty years, it could attract 30,000 people of Orissa as its followers.¹⁶ It had mustered enough strength and power to challenge the dominant rājā-brāhmaṇ combine and their associates and brāhmaṇic interpretation of Jagannath cult.

The followers of Mahima Dharma were forbidden to accept anything from the rājā-brāhmaṇ and their associates. They were also prohibited from taking Jagannāth *prasād*, worshipping idols, and taking part in traditional rituals. Bhīma Bhoi went one step ahead and preached that 'the final deliverer' had already appeared in Orissa in the form of Mahimā Swāmy. He also said that God Jagannāth left his temple and became a disciple of Mahimā Swāmy.

Mahimā Swāmy traveled from place to place offering his insight in the second half of the 19th century. He set up *tungis* in the Garjāts of Orissa.¹⁷ A *tungi* is a hut of special purity for *mahimā* ascetics. He also established mud altar and set sacred fire at its centre. This was the only media for worshipping Alekh Brahman. He ordained two categories of *sannyāsis* (ascetic disciples) called *kaupīnadhāri* (loin cloth-wearer) and *kumbhipatadhari* or *balkaladhāri* (wearer of *Kumbhi bark*).¹⁸ He always insisted that the purpose of ascetics is not to attain personal salvation but to work for the *bhagats* and *jagata*, the *mahimā* followers and the *mahimā* universe. Those who received this sanyasitood should travel and spread the *mahimā* or glory of Alekh Brahma. The *sannyāsi* should not stay more than a day in a village. To become a *sanyāsi* and not work for the *bhagatas* and *jagata* was a fundamental breach of the principle of Mahimā

Dharma. It was an itinerant active *dharma*. Self-perfection and social interaction were at its core.¹⁹ It blended the pursuit of wisdom and fellow feeling.

Mahimā Swāmy was against showing miracles. According to him, it testifies to an incomplete spiritual development to do so. After attaining *siddhi* (spiritual realization), a *sannyāsi* should work for the emancipation of the society instead of showing off his powers of *siddhi*. Besides, his ascetic disciples, he also created a large number of *grihibhaktas* or *āśritas* (householder followers). Mahimā Swāmy left behind no written works. He addressed hundreds of formal and informal gatherings of the *sannyāsi* and *bhaktas* over nearly ten years. In their memories the latter must have preserved some of the key ideas. Later, these ideas became reflected in their composition and teachings. One such person was Bhīma Bhoi, who composed both during the lifetime of Mahimā Swamy and after his. It is widely accepted by *mahimā* followers that Bhoi was empowered by the Swamy to compose *mahimā bhajanas* and *janajas*.²⁰ These contain the essence of Mahimā Swāmy's teachings. Other than Bhoi many *sannyāsis* and *āśritas*, being participant of the oral traditions only, could transmit their experiences and encounters to their respective disciples and near and dear ones only in oral forms. This gave rise to contrasting interpretations after the death of Mahimā Swamy. It seems Mahimā Swamy himself was at the root of this multiplicity of interpretations—by avoiding a canon of his teachings, by not choosing a successor, and by not specifying the relative positions of the two orders of the *sannyāsis*. His *bhagats* and *sannyāsis* perceived and interpreted his ideas initially explained by him in Oriya and preached about them orally according to their respective understanding. It also resulted in more than two groups, each with its own rules, ideals, followers and institutions. The shape of the ideals and institutions depended on their different geographical locations and their respective stands on the position of women.²¹ At present there are four such areas: *uttara* (North), *dakṣiṇa* (South), *paśchima* (West), and *pūrva* (East).²² The *sannyāsis* have their own bands of followers. *Kumbhipatias* are against accepting women as *sannyāsinīs* (women ascetics). *Kauṣīnadhāri sannyāsis*

allow women to become *sannyāsinīs*, but do not allow them to travel. Of late a *mātā maṭha* has been built in Joranda. Women ascetics stay there.²³

IV

Two years before his death, Mahimā Swāmy denounced all kinds of permanent structures and destroyed some of the important *tungis*. He did not appoint any successor. He was not even in favour of any line of successor. He refused to initiate new *sannyāsis*.²⁴

His first and foremost disciple, Govinda Bābā, had died before him. The second important ascetic, Narasiṅgh Bābā, implicated in a murder case at Banki, had virtually got withdrawn to himself. Also he was not accepted by the *balkaladhāri sannyāsis*. Bhīma Bhoi, who popularized Mahimā Dharma through his *bhajana* and *janāna*, was no longer a celibate, having taken to the life of a householder. For the followers of Mahima Dharma, Mahimā Swāmy was not supposed to die. His followers had deified him. He was identified with the Creator, who had taken human form of his free will in this *kaliyuga* to establish *Satya Yuga* and *Satya Mahimā Sāgar*. But he died in 1876. The new *dharma* was left without a leader. There were but two categories of *sannyāsis*, *kaupīnadharis* and *balkaladhāries*, and their relative positions were not defined. Thus the situation was open and fluid, as well as susceptible to a variety of interpretations.

There was a great crisis in Mahimā Dharma after his death. Many *āśritas* reverted to their earlier faiths.²⁵ The *āśrams* of Malbeharpur and the *tungi* of Joranda were sold by the government as intestate property. Whatever little belongings of Mahimā Swāmy had at Banki were auctioned.²⁶

In this extraordinary crisis, *sannyāsis*, *bhaktas* and *āśhrītas* met in a council at Joranda in 1876. In the absence of the founder and without any consensus leader to succeed him and without any scripture or systematic written document to follow, they searched for ways and means to overcome the critical situation. They decided to build one *samādhi mandira* of the *guru* at Joranda. In the absence of the *guru* his *samādhi mandira*, or

gāddi, became the focal point. Land and donations from the *bhaktas* and sympathizers were invited. Within a year the *samādhi mandira* (or *gaddi*) was ready.

A new phase in the history of Mahimā Dharma started. The founder—who fought against rituals and acquisition of landed property and against any permanent structure—was buried and worshipped in the concrete cement structure. As time rolled on, the founder of Mahimā Dharma, Mahimā Swāmy, who once physically traveled amongst his *bhaktas* became a legendary figure. His *samādhi* became the heart of Mahimā Dharma. Joranda, the village where it was located, became the pilgrimage centre for Mahimā followers. In addition to the *samādhi mandira*, there was a need to accommodate *bhaktas*, sympathizers and others during their visits to the pilgrimage centre. The *bhaktas'* enthusiasm to gain *pūnya* (merit) by contributing for the *guru's* cause resulted in lavish donations both in cash and kind. *Āśrams* and *tungis* were built in large numbers at Joranda. Gradually, all places associated with the life of Mahimā Swāmy were considered sacred and *mandiras* were built and worshipped as *dhuni mandira* or *śūnya mandira*.

This institutionalization of *āśramas*, *tungis* and *mandiras* was the beginning of a semi-sedentary life, as opposed to the former itinerant life, for every wandering *sannyāsi*. Here there was a clear shift of emphasis, which resulted in partial distancing between *sannyāsis* and *āśritas* or *bhaktas*. Other than *sannyāsis* visiting the *āśritas*, now the *āśritas* were invited to visit pilgrimage centre at least once annually during *guru pūrṇimā* (full moon day of *māgha* (Feb-March) dedicated to the *guru*). Perhaps it was because social interaction was confined to a particular place and time of a year that framing of rules and regulations became essential.

The permanent structures, landed property, development and maintenance of *mahimā gāddi* (or pilgrim centre), *sebā puṣā* and *nīti* or daily rituals required rules and regulations. They also needed some semi-sedentary *sannyāsis* to perform *nīti*. Mahimā Dharmis had to formulate a set of rules and decide whether *nīti* should be performed by the *balkaladharis* or on a rotation basis, whether to permit the *sannyāsis* to stay at one place in order to perform *nīti*. They also discussed as to who would be the

competent authority to formulate these rules and whether the decisions would be taken by all collectively or only by the senior *sannyāsis*.

As *sannyāsis* were supposed to travel from place to place (though some had to stay back at *gāddi*) and would come together once a year there was need to convene a *satsaṅg* or communal meetings.³⁰ As there is no distinction, theoretically, between *sannyāsis* and *āśritas*, they could sit and eat together. Each has to confront and confess any infringement of rules that he or she may have committed and face the *prāyaścitta* (penance).³¹ Sometimes they have to pay a fine and in case of serious breach of rules they have to relinquish Mahimā Dharma. The latter punishment is especially meant for the *sannyāsis* in case of murder, theft or infringement of celibacy rules.³² As mentioned earlier, Mahima Swāmy had initiated two categories of *sannyāsis* without specifying their relative positions.

Mahimā Swāmy initiated two orders of *sannyāsis* i.e., *kaupīnadhāris* and *balkaladhāris*, without specifying their relative positions. There was tension between the two orders of *sannyāsis* during the lifetime of Mahimā Swāmy. However, it had never reached the level of an open conflict. The death of the Swāmy marked the beginning of an open conflict. Joranda became the centre of a strictly organized monastic order where celibacy was strictly observed. Bhīma Bhoi on the other hand, built an *āśrama* at Khaliapali, Bolangir, in the year 1877 where women were accepted as laypersons of the Dharma.³³ Bhoi lived with five female companions, three spiritual and two worldly. Bhoi never visited Joranda thereafter.³⁴

The *balkaladhāris* claimed a superior status over *kaupīnadhāris* on the grounds that the *guru*, Mahimā Swāmy, himself and his first disciple wore *balkala*.³⁵ The claim was opposed by *kaupīnadhāris* on the ground that they also, like the *balkaladhāris*, were ordained by the guru himself. The *guru* in the early stages of his life and his second important *śiṣya*, Narsiṅgh Baba, wore *kaupīna*. So, according to them, *kaupīna* is the *ādibānā* of the *guru*.³⁶

An important development took place in the Mahimā Dharma in 1896, a year after the death of Bhīma Bhoi. Up to 1896, no new *sannyāsi* had been initiated, as per the decision

taken by Mahimā Swamy two year before his death. But in 1896, the last of the first line of *balkaladhāris*, the *Siddha* Nanda Bābā, received a *śūṇyabāñī* (the manner in which the Guru is believed to communicate with his *śiṣyas*). The *guru* asked him to ordain new *sannyāsis* amongst the probationers who in the meantime had joined the order. Accordingly, 200 *sannyasis* were initiated over the next 16 years.³⁷

In 1912, the same *Siddha* received another *śūṇyabāñī*: to promote 56 *kaupīnadhāri sannyāsis* and to award *kumbhīpat*. However, Kṛipāsindhu Bābā, another *kumbhīpatadhāri Siddha*, suspected the claims of Nanda Bābā. He opposed the decision of Nanda Bābā to award *balkalas* to some *sannyāsis*. He managed to get the support of the *rājā* of Dhenkanal estate. Nanda Bābā and his followers were asked to leave Mahimā *gāddi*. But a few years later, another *Siddha*, Anama Bābā, gave *balkala* to 33 *sannyāsis*. Some followers close to Kṛipāsindhu Bābā insisted that he should also award *balkala* to his close followers. In disgust he gave them *balkala* but left Joranda.³⁹ So there emerged within *balkaladhāris* four groups, called *chhapanamurtis*, *tetis-murtis* and *kodiea-murtis* and a final one that opposed the award of *balkala*.⁴⁰ The promotion of *sannyasis* added new motivation among these *sannyāsis*. The *guru*'s teaching was reinterpreted and the festivals were celebrated with a new vigor. New *āśrams* and *maṭhas* were built.⁴¹ Biśwanath Bābā occupied the centre stage among the new *balkaladhāris*.

The next important phase of Mahima Dharma's history was marked by the influence of Biśwanath Bābā. At the age of 13, he received the *kaupīna*, and in 1925, when he was 21, he was initiated as *kumbhīpatia*.⁴² In the 1920s and 1930s, he wrote *Mahimā Dharma Pratīpādaka* and *Mahimā Dharma Itihās*, published in 1931 and 1935 respectively. For the first time, Sanskrit *śāstras* were quoted to establish Mahimā Swāmy as *Īswara Puruṣa* and *Prabudha avatara*. In his book Bābā informs, the first person to locate Mahimā Swāmy while the latter in *nirbikalpa Samādhi* at Kāpilas Mountain, was Sadānanda Śābar. Sadānanda saw a seven-headed serpent spreading its hood over the Swāmy and immediately recognized him as *Īswara Puruṣa*. He was the first to obtain the right to supply fruits for twelve

years to the Swāmy during his *sādhanā*. Here is a clear reflection of the Jagannāth myth as *Śabara Devatā*. This description is not there in Bhīma Bhoi's writing. This is an additional information printed by Biśwanath Bābā. His *Itihās* also displays the *mahimā* of Mahima Swāmy in curing the sick, giving life to the dead and many more miraculous activities.

The above beliefs indicate at once Mahimā Dharma's conception of the past and their creation of a mythic tradition by drawing from symbols embedded in diverse traditions of Orissa. Mahimā Swāmy evolved from an ordinary *sannyāsi* to become a pure incarnation of Alekh Param Brahma, Prabudha Swāmy, Īswara Puruṣa.

Biśwanath Bābā deeply influenced the *kumbhipatia* group. He reinterpreted the teachings of Mahimā Swāmy. For that he preferred *Saṅskṛt Vedānta* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as spiritual proof. In the process, the anti establishment orientation of the early phase gradually subsided. *Brahma-upāsana* was declared the most important aim of this *dharma*.⁴³ In a way he made Mahimā Dharma's coexistence acceptable to Oriya-Hindu society.

The followers of Mahimā Dharma, or *Brahma-upāsakas*, as they were called, were broadly divided into two categories: the *bābās* (*abadhutas* or ascetics) and the *grhīs* (householders). *Sannyāsis* were expected to possess qualities like simplicity, mercy, and calmness, purity of body and mind and selflessness. They were placed higher than *grhīs*. These *sannyāsis* were further divided into groups, *apara* and *para*. An *apara sannyāsi* was one who had renounced the world and material comfort and who could attain the higher grade of *para sannyāsis* by successfully learning and internalizing Mahimā Swamy's teachings and understanding their deep meaning. It was at a later stage that *sannyāsis* would be capable of receiving *balkala*. So the *apara sannyāsis* wore *kaupīna* and *para sannyāsis* wore *balkala*.

Thus a clear distinction was established between *kaupīnadhārī* and *balkaladhārī*, placing the latter at a spiritually higher level. This interpretation came along with the construction of new architectural structures and with the expansion of the *gāddi mandira*.

Earlier, the *gāddi mandira* was a simple *samādhi*, open from all sides. Later a small temple was built over it. In the first decade of the twentieth century, a big temple was built over the smaller one with a boundary wall having four gates.

According to the information given by Biśwanath Bābā in his *Itihās*, the *madira* was built according to the desire of the vision seen by Anama Dās Bābā, a *balkaladhāri abadhuta*. Nanda Bābā⁴⁴ offered the first *nīti* or daily rituals. The design of the temple, the right to perform *nīti*, the procedure for the offering, the right of entry into the inner sanctum, management of *gāddi*—all were monopolized by the *balkaladhāri*. The job of the *kaupīnadhāris* was to sweep and clean the outer compound.⁴⁵ Gradually, the norms and hierarchies of Mahima Dharma were becoming rigid.

In the year 1929, Kṛpāsindhu Bābā returned to Joranada. He refused to join the *balkaladhāris* and built a small *tunḡi* near the *gāddi mandira*.⁴⁶ The *kaupīnadhāris* and the dissatisfied *sannyāsis* who had been denied *balkala* started rallying behind Kṛpāsindhu Bābā. His *tunḡi* became the pivot of separate order, the *Kaupīnadhāri Samāj*. Kṛpāsindhu took the help of the king of Dhenkanal and was able to shift the *akhaṇḍabāti* (perpetual fire) of the *guru* to a place of his choice.

The *balkaladhāri* treated all these developments with contempt. They did not like the emergence of a rival order at the nerve centre, i.e., the *guru's gāddi*. They lost faith in the traditional way of solving disputes and finally, in 1930, took the case to a court of law.⁴⁷ They sued Kṛpāsindhu for building *tunḡis*, *āśramas* and a *dhuni mandira* within the *gāddi* compound. They appealed for an order for the demolition of the structures built by Kṛpāsindhu and to issue an injunction against any new construction.⁴⁸

This led to the final breach between the *balkaladhāris* and *kaupīnadhāris* and the establishment of two rival *samājas* to mobilize resources and strength for legal battle. The confusion created on the death of Mahimā Swāmy regarding the relative position of the two orders of *sannyāsis* led to this bitter rift, which gradually widened with the new force joining in. This finally resulted in a split. Internal conflict gave rise to several subgroups, which were grouped broadly under the two

prominent *samājas*. These *samājas*, over the years, organized themselves with their own sets of rules and ways of interpreting the *guru's* teachings. The requirements of law compelled each to explain its own views and standpoint. They had to form their managing committees and, in order to mobilize public support, they had to organize texts and counter-texts. Thus, we see proliferation of Mahimā literature. Now each *samāj* has its own *paricālanā samitis* (management committees) to supervise its work, with *adhyākṣas* (presidents) and *sampādaks* (secretaries) with definite rules and regulations.

V

Nowadays, the followers of Mahima Dharma are found in every district of Orissa. But it is impossible to ascertain their exact number because the census does not enumerate them separately. They are also in the neighboring states like Chhatisgarh, Jharkhanda, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Assam. At present there are more than 2000 *tungis* and *āśramas* in Orissa. These *tungis* and *āśramas* not only provide shelter to the ever-mobile Mahimā ascetics, but also function as an organ propagating Mahimā Dharma. These shelters, which were in an obscure state during the lifetime of Mahimā Swāmy, achieved an important status later. With the spread of Mahimā Dharma, these *tungis* and *āśramas* became important centres of activities, which received patronage from the *bhaktas*. Their number is ever growing. In 1870s, there were hardly five such shelters in Orissa. According to the survey conducted in the 1970s by Eschmann,⁴⁹ it increased to 1372, and our survey in 1994 records 2,157 *tungis* and *āśramas* in Orissa.⁵⁰

Thus, Mahima Dharma which became popular among certain lower section of *jāti* society and tribals in the nineteenth century with its anti-establishment, iconoclastic and radical orientation, mostly drawing from the teachings of Mahimā Swāmy and his followers, later managed to institutionalize its own sectarian organizational structures.

Regardless of the pull and pressure of the competing *samājas* and their sub-groups, in the 20th century, Mahimā Dharma has spread widely throughout Orissa and the neighbouring

states and has remained alive in the present. They have adapted to the changing historical circumstances. Therefore, institutionalization is an ongoing process.

Notes and References

1. On the spot where Mahimā Swāmy, the founder of Mahimā Dharma, breathed his last, a temple called *sūnyā mandir* was built. It is completely empty. *Dhuni Mandira* serves as one of the sacred temples of *mahimā* followers. It contains a sacred fire, which is ever burning. According to popular belief, Mahimā Swāmy, lit the *anāhata*, *dhuni* or inextinguishable fire. The ashes of the fire also are considered sacred. *Samādhi* mandir is also known as *gaḍḍi mandir*. Gaḍḍi means a seat or throne, but here it has been used as equivalent to *samādhi*—burial of the saint. *Nīti* means daily rituals and *nīti bābā* means *sannyāsi* who perform *nīti*.
2. J.T.O' Connell, 1999, 'Introduction', J.T.O' Connell (ed.) *Organizational and Institutional Aspects of Indian Religions Movements*, Manohar, IAS, Shimla, pp. 9.
3. A Eschmann, 1978, 'Mahima Dharma: An Autochthonous Hindu Reform Movement', A. Eschmann et al. (eds.), *The Cult of Jagannath and Regional Tradition of Orissa*, pp. 375-410; Das Chittaranjan 1952, *Odisara Mahima Dharma (Oriya)*, Biswa Bharati Calcutta.
4. F-Deo, 1999, "Institutional and Organisational Aspects of Mahima Dharma", J.T.O'Connell (ed), *op.cit.*, pp. 137-151.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. F-Deo, 1999, "Socio-Political Change in Nineteenth Century Orissa and the Rise of Mahima Dharma", *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, vi, 1, Sept, pp. 19-80.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*; H. Kulke, 1978, "Early Royal Patronage of Jagannath Cult", Eschmann et al. (eds) *op. cit.*, pp. 139-155; 1993, *Kings and Cults*, pp. 81-80.
10. Deo, F., *op. cit.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
12. Banerjee Dube Ishita, 1978 "Religion and Society in Orissa, Mahima Dharma in the 19th and 20th Century", Ph.D. thesis, Calcutta University.
13. K. C. Jena, 1978, *Socio-Economic Condition of Orissa*, Delhi.
14. S. Rao, 1984, XXIV.

15. Das, *op. cit.*
16. S. Pattnaik 1961, "Orissa in 1867", *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, X, 3, pp. 61-73.
17. *Jagnmath Temple Correspondence*, Acc No. 438, 441, 4465, Bod. Doc, 1978, Orissa State Archives; Asiatic Society of Bengal, Proceedings, January, 1882, pp. 2-6.
18. B. Nepak, 1974, *Kabi Bhima Bhoi O Mahima Dharma Parichaya*, Bhubaneswar; Biswanath Bābā, 1935, *Mahima Dharma Itihas*, Cuttack; K. Pal, 1994, *Kaupinadhari Sangha Dharma Dhama Itihas*, Bhawanipatna.
19. F-Deo, 1999, p. 40.
20. This was informed by the *sannyāsis and bhaktas* during the author's field study; K. Sahu (ed) *Bhīma Bhoi Granthavali*, Cuttack.
21. F. Deo, 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
22. The author collected the information during the Magha Purnima Festival, (February-March 1994).
23. *Ibid.*
24. Biswanath Bābā, 1935; K. Pal, *op. cit.*
25. Jagnnath Temple Correspondence, *op. cit.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. Biswanath Bābā, *op. cit.*, p. 282.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Joranda has several *mathas* or monasteries. *Balkaladhāris* have built two big mathas, called Bada Maṭha and Latā Āśram. These *mathas* were built on the boundaries of two villages. This enables the *sannyāsis* to stay for a longer period without breaking the norms set by Mahimā Swāmy. Within *Bada Maṭha*, there are several *tungis* for ascetics, rooms for pilgrims, a library, a Sanskrit *tol* (school), a *bhaṇḍara* (granary), a big meetings hall, and a store room. The northern gate is very large and is called *Siṅhadwāra* (liongate). Near *gaddi mandir* the *Kaupinadhāris* have built their own *śunya mandir* and *dhuni mandir*. They have their own *mathas*, the most important being the one, just in front of the *gaddi mandira* known as *sana maṭha*. There is also one *mātā maṭha*, for women ascetics.
29. Eschmann; *op. cit.*; Banerjee Dube, *op. cit.*
30. The author attended one such *satsang* in 1994 at Joranda during field visit.
31. Biswanath Baba, *op. cit.*
32. Nepak, *op. cit.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. Biswanath Baba, *op. cit.*

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35. Pal, *op. cit.*; Nepak, *op. cit.*
36. Biswanath Baba, *op. cit.*, pp. 306-07.
37. A Eschmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 385-86.
38. Pal, *op. cit.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. Deo, 1999, *op. cit.*
41. Eschmann, *op. cit.*
42. Biswanath Baba 1931, *Mahima Dharma Pratipadaka* (Oriya, Cuttack).
43. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 151
46. Eschmann, *op. cit.*
47. *Ibid.*
48. Banerjee Dube, *op. cit.*
49. Eschmann, *op. cit.*, p. 387.
50. F. Deo, 1999 (a), *op. cit.*, p. 142.

CHAPTER IV

Conclusion

We have seen in the previous chapters that tribal-peasant and lowly placed *jāti* in Orissa reacted and protested against the hegemony of the new order propounded by the *rājā-brāhmaṇ-sarkār* and their associate in the 19th century. The reaction arose out of its own historical context. That does not mean that all the dominated/exploited groups participated in it. The meaning people give to an entity or an event is out of the range of meanings and options available to them at the time of their particular experience of that entity or event.

In the 19th century, some groups encountered the new socio-political-religious order from a position of some prior strength, and consequently they were ready to struggle against the intervention of the new forces. On the other hand some groups, in their powerlessness, found the new social dispensation too powerful for them to resist. They did not see any benefit in the new order, and they preferred to withdraw. Some other groups accepted a low position and some aspired for higher position and became a part of the new order. Yet other groups drawing upon religious ideas and ideas from the tradition itself, created a separate space in the society. Religion became a language of protest, innovation and expression of individuality and separate identity. We have seen that Mahimā follower in Orissa drew religious ideas from classical “Hinduism”, text and *Purāṇas* and regional traditions. They pocketed them, re-interpreted to interrogate and disapprove the authority and domination. They broke many of the norms, which the dominant groups were propounding to strengthen their hegemony. They entered the Jagannāth temple, breaking the laws. They publicly took cooked food together, breaking the caste laws and laws of food pollution, rejected all gods and goddesses, rituals, pilgrimage and denied the authority of the Vedas and brāhmaṇs.

All these acts provided atleast consolation to some exploited and marginalized groups of Orissa a space to breath a sigh of relief and live a meaningful life. Religion played crucial role both for the dominant and dominated at different historical points of Orissa. Religion is double-edged sword as we have seen in our study. Sometimes it became reactionary under the hands of rājā-brāhmaṇ alliance. It was utilized to block the freedom of worship, thinking and interpreting. On the other hand the same religion became an instrument to address the miseries and suffering of the people. It, at least helped marginalized people to question the authority even if it did not provide complete solution to come out of the vicious circle. Dominant Jagannāth cult in Orissa and its relation with kingship was based upon ritual hierarchy, political power. Mahimā followers rejected all these by their interpretation, “God is in every soul, he is available to all, he is formless or *nirguna* and at the same time he is *saguna* or *sākārā*. He is available to the marginalized section of the society”. In this they rejected the role of *brāhmaṇ* in the society, challenged the authority of the rājā. They refused to take *vikṣā* from the rājā-brāhmaṇ and their associates. In this, they could pin- point their counter action to rājā and brāhmaṇ, politics and ritual, and their propounded hierarchy. Thus in short they challenged the power exercised by the authority in the name of religion, caste system and hierarchy based on purity and pollution.

In Orissa, there were instances of *sādhus* claiming *yogic* power, and the *Pañchasakhā* or Chaitanya Das with *bhakti marga*, had counterpoised their power of seeing the divine or Adi Jagannāth against brāhmaṇ’s claim to textual knowledge. They conceived this human body as a replica of the *brāhmaṇḍa*. They also believed in the universal presence of *Brahma* in every soul and that for the realization of this *Brahma* there was no need of a priest, idol worship, pilgrimage and external rights. It was only through *nirguṇa bhakti* one could transcend *karma* and attain *Śūnya Bhārma*. In this way they negated the authority of *veda* and particularly that of the brāhmaṇ and the *jāti* system.

Mahimā Dharma in the 19th century drew inspiration from the tradition of Orissa which were influenced by the ground

realities of the time. To them Hinduism, Buddhism, Nāthism, Tāntricism, Dharma Cult, Kabirpanthis, Jagannāth cult, Pañchaskhā concept of śūnyatā, Chaitanya Das' nirguṇa bhakti, ādivāsī religion, Islam and Christianity, all were available. In their interpretation we come across reflection of all the above traditions. But they interpreted with new meaning. That is their novelty. They went one step forward. Their *Alekh Param Brahma* was both *nirguṇa* as well as *saguna*. In this we find the reflection of Vaishanava concept of *avatār*; Mahimā Swāmy, being the last and final *avatār*. One may here infer the influence of Islam, its concept of Mohammed as the last prophet. But *Mahimā* concept is different. Mahimā Swāmy is not a prophet but he is the God himself, more powerful than the Hindu *avatārs*, he is the *avatāri*. In *Mahimā dharma* we come across *satsaṅg goṣṭhī*, communal eating and confession. *Satsaṅg* is widely prevalent in Hindu tradition. But in *Mahimā satsaṅg* in the 19th century, Mahimā Swāmy's personal presence was making the difference. It was either followed or preceded by a communal feast. In Jagannāth temple also there is communal eating place, which is free from pollution or caste discrimination. All take cooked food together. In Mahimā Dharma also all take cooked food together in the open.

The basic difference between these two is the Jagannāth *prasād*. It is the nature of food, which blurs caste distinction, but in Mahimā feast it is the nature of *bhakta*. He is above purity and pollution. In their confession one may see the reflection of the Christian concept of confession. But there is a lot of difference between the two. In Christian belief system, one confesses before the God and it has certain private repentance. But in Mahimā Dharma, it is meant for both ascetic and *gruhī*. Confession in *Mahimā Dharma* is arranged once in a year during the time of *guru pūrṇimā*. After the communal feast, the ascetic and *gruhī* are asked to confess their breach of rules in the previous year during their travels or in performing their *gruhī* rules, in public before everybody. According to the nature of violation of rule he or she is given punishment. In case of major breach, he or she is expelled from the *dharma*. All these activities, *satsaṅg*, festivals, *dīkṣā*, *śaraṇa*, *darśhan* helped to rejuvenate the Mahimā

Dharma every year. It is the for the ever-mobile *sannyāsis* and their *bhaktas* time to get together. It provides them strength to proceed further.

Bhīma Bhoi played an important role in putting the tenets of Mahimā Dharma into vibrant poetry. He was radical in his interpretation and predicted the coming of the *Mahimā* Empire and equated it with *Satya Yuga*. His God Alekh Param Brahma is indescribable, powerful, merciful to his followers and fearsome to the corrupt and wrong doers. His God is his personal god. He is achievable and even available in the *sakara* form at the doorstep. In this process he placed *bhakti mārga* above *Karma* and *jnāna mārga* for salvation. He denied the authority of rājā, brāhmaṇ and their associates. He even rejected all 'Hindu' gods and goddesses, Veda, Purāṇas, rituals on the ground that they were only means and not end in themselves. He rejected them because people were forgetting the Creator of the creators.

In the process he surpassed all his previous *bhaktas* and interpreters. For Bhīma Bhoi, *mukti* is open to all, even to the lowest. In fact, in his writing there is no concept of lowliness. There are only two *jatis*, men and women. Both are capable of achieving *mukti* and hell. "Follow *satya dharma* get *mukti*, otherwise you will be placed in hell" was the call of Bhoi. But his rules were based on patriarchal value system. Another important aspect of his writing was to remind the people to maintain pure life. The concept of *kali Yuga* or evil age runs through all his writings, *bhajanans*, *janāṇa*, *chautiṣa* and even in his long poems, *Stuti Chintāmani*, *Nirbeda Sādhanā*, *Ādi Anta Gītā* etc. We find the reflection of *mālikā*, a form of popular writing in Orissa. It is based on the concept of Vaiṣṇava *avatār*. According to Vaiṣṇava belief in Orissa, Viṣṇu will take *kalki avatār* in *kali Yuga*. *Pañchasakhā* interpreted *Kalki* as a wandering ascetic. *Mālikā* compositions began in the 16th century and are very popular in Orissa even today. In this literature, the composer uses apocalyptic vision to foresee the end of kaliyuga. It is vulnerable to interpolation.

Bhīma Bhoi interpreted Mahimā Swamy as an *avatār* in *kali Yuga* but he is in actual sense not an *avatar* but God, himself. Being a Kandha and a cowherd, he knew the sufferings of life. Therefore in his interpretations he predicted the end of *kali*

Yuga, where upon the rule of the poor will be established. Like the founder of Mahimā Dharma, Bhima Bhoi became a God for his followers but with a difference. Mahimā Swamy, remained an ascetic until his death. He was accepted by all his followers as God and was worshipped. His followers deified him. Bhima Bhoi became a householder and accepted five wives. He established his *āśhram* at Khaliapali. There his followers worshipped him. After his death a temple has been built and even his *Kathāu* is worshipped. He is no more acceptable to the *Kumbhipatadhāri* group of Mahimā followers but his *bhajans*, *Chautiṣa*, *Janāna* are recited every day and he has been accepted as *gruhībhakta*. At present, there are two groups, one valorizes Bhoi and the other accepts his writings as authentic but not Bhīma Bhoi as celibate.

We have also observed that after Mahimā Swāmy, there was a crisis in Mahimā Dharma in 1876. Mahimā Dharma was left without a leader. There were two categories of *sunnyāsis*; *balkaladhāris* and *kaupīnadhāris*, and their relative position were not clear. His main disciple Govind Bābā had preceded him. His second and third important disciples, Nṛshīma Bābā and Bhīma Bhoi were not acceptable to all.

Thus, the situation was open, fluid, as well as susceptible to a variety of interpretations. Mahimā Swāmy always insisted that the purpose of sannyasi-hood is not to attain personal salvation but to work for the *jagata* and *bhagatas*. It was an itinerant and active *dharma*. Self-perfection and social interaction were at its core. Swāmy was against showing miracles. He denounced all kinds of permanent structures and destroyed some of the important *tungīs*. He did not appoint any successor. But in the *absence* of the founder, on his death, the followers searched for ways and means to overcome critical situation. Subsequently they decided to build one *samādhi mandira* of the *guru* at Joranda. This *mandira* became the focal point. We have observed that a new phase in the history of Mahimā Dharma started. The founder-who fought against rituals and acquisition of landed property was buried and worshipped in the concrete cement structure and his followers fighters for the landed property.

We have also seen how the *bhaktas'* enthusiasm to gain *pūṇya* started making them contribute for the *guru's* cause.

They built *mandīras* on all the important spots associated with the life of Mahimā Swāmy. All of them became sacred places of pilgrimage. There was a clear shift from the itinerant life of *sannyāsis* to semi-sedentary life. This was followed by framing of rules for both *sannyāsis* and *āśhrītas*: introduction of *seba pūjā* and *nīti* or daily rituals and *nīti bābās* or *sannyāsis* to perform *nīti*. This also gave rise to internal difference between two sets of *sannyāsis*; *balkaldāri* and *kaupīnadhāri*. We also came across how these initial differences resulted in clear-cut division and how these two groups fought and took the help of the court of law.

In the process the anti-establishment, antiiconoclastic and radical orientation gradually diminished and later managed to institutionalize its own sectarian organizational structure. In this they adopted the model available to them in Orissa but they did not lose their innovative character. It is an on going process. Regardless of pull and pressure of the competing *mahimā* groups and their sub-groups it is growing. Radical stands are coming from within. It happened in 1877, when Bhima Bhoi built an *āśhram* at Khaliapali, where women were accepted. This paved way for women to become ascetics. At Joranda, woman ascetics live with male ascetics in *kaupīnadhāri samāj*. In early 1990s a *mātā maṭha* started and during my field visit in 1994, I witnessed women ascetic initiating new *bhaktas*. It is a clear-cut innovative and radical step. Earlier, in the 1930s, when Mahimā Dharma was keeping low profile in eastern Orissa because of the historical circumstances of 1881, Biśwanath Bābā, reinterpreted the teachings of Mahimā Swamy. In order to make Mahimā Dharma acceptable to Oriya Hindu elite in particular and Oriyas in general, he accepted Sanskrit Vedānta and Bhāgabata as spiritual proof. He also established Mahimā Swamy as *Īswara Puruṣa* and *Prabudha avatāra* and Mahimā Dharma as *biśudhha advaitabāda*.

There are also new instances of ongoing changes. At present the *ādivāsīs* of Koraput reinterpret Mahimā Dharma and perform *Gurumāi* practices i.e. inviting spirit of *mahimā*. We also know that in 1981, there was an attempt to capture *Mahimā Gāddi* by a section of *mahimā* followers who felt marginalized by the dominant *balkaladhāri* ascetics.

Therefore, institutionalization is not a once for all process. It is rather an ongoing process and the pull and pressure comes not only from spiritual reason, it also adapts to the mundane constraints and interest.

Lastly, we conclude that, in Orissa the reaction of each group arose out of its own historical context. The meaning people give to an entity or event is a part of a range of meanings and options available to them at the time of the particular experience of that entity or event. It is an ongoing process and Mahimā Dharma is no exception. Their number is ever-growing with new groups and individuals and new interpretation depending upon the historical circumstances and need of the hour.

Abbreviation

AAR	-	Annual Administrative Report
AHRS	-	Andhra Historical Research Society
AR	-	Asiatic Researches
ASI	-	Archeological Survey of India
BCE	-	Before the Common Era
BRR	-	Board of Revenue Records
BDG	-	Bengal District Gazetteer
CDR	-	Chhatisgarh Divisional Record
CE	-	Common Era
CII	-	Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum
Cons	-	Consultation
CP	-	Central Province
EI	-	Epigraphia Indica
EIC	-	East India Company
EPW	-	Economic and Political Weekly
FDP	-	Foreign Department Proceeding
GG	-	Governor General
HDP	-	Home Department Proceeding
IA	-	Indian Antiquary
IHQ	-	Indian Historical Quarterly
IHR	-	Indian Historical Review
IO	-	Inscriptions of Orissa
JAHRS	-	Journal of the Andhra Historical Research Society
JAS	-	Journal of the Asiatic Society
JASB	-	Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal
JBORS	-	Journal of the Bihar Orissa Research Society
JIH	-	Journal of Indian History
JKHRS	-	Journal of the Kalinga Historical Research Society
JNSI	-	Journal of the Numismatic Society of India
JOR	-	Journal of Orissan History
JRSA	-	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society

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MRR	-	Madhya Pradesh Record Room
NAI	-	National Archives of India
NRR	-	Nagpur Residency Records
ODGB	-	Orissa District Gazetteers, Bolangir
ODGK	-	Orissa District Gazetteers, Kalahandi
ODGS	-	Orissa District Gazetteers, Sambalpur
OHR	-	Orissa Home Records
OHRJ	-	Orissa Historical Research Journal
OPS	-	Orissa Political Records
OSA	-	Orissa State Archives
OSM	-	Orissa State Museum
PIHC	-	Proceedings of the Indian History Congress
Pol.	-	Political
Rev.	-	Revenue
SP	-	Sambalpur Papers

Glossary

<i>Abkāri</i>	excise
<i>Adhipati</i>	owner
<i>Ādibasi</i>	tribals, Original dwellers
<i>Advaita</i>	without a second, a philosophical system of monism
<i>Agnikuḷa</i>	the family of fire from which certain Rajput clans claim descent
<i>Alekha</i>	indescribable
<i>Amla</i>	an officer of a revenue or a judicial court
<i>Amātya</i>	official designation for civil governor
<i>Amin</i>	a revenue officer,, inspector, an officer of a civil court
<i>Anādi</i>	eternal
<i>Arzee</i>	a petition, a request from an inferior to a superior
<i>Āsār</i>	season of gentle rain
<i>Āshram</i>	refuge
<i>Astasakhā</i>	eight branches, eight exogamous phratries
<i>Astasodara</i>	eight brothers
<i>Ātabika</i>	forest
<i>Aṭṭargarh</i>	eighteen forts or regions, a king (who rules over such Area
<i>Avtār</i>	Incarnation
<i>Avadhi</i>	a dialect of Avadh, now in Uttar Pradesh
<i>Bachha</i>	calf
<i>Bādu</i>	a tribal group
<i>Bāgh</i>	tiger
<i>Bāhābandha</i>	bonded servant
<i>Bandhle</i>	tied

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<i>Bania</i>	trader/shopkeeper/moneylender
<i>Bar</i>	Bridegroom
<i>Barkandez</i>	a guard– commonly applied to a native armed with a sword and shield
<i>Bazar</i>	market
<i>Begār</i>	forced labour
<i>Betā</i>	son
<i>Bethi/Betti</i>	forced labour
<i>Bhāga</i>	share
<i>Bhagat</i>	the devout
<i>Bhāgavata</i>	a cult of devotion to Vishnu
<i>Bhage</i>	direction
<i>Bhakti</i>	devotion
<i>Bhandāri</i>	Barber
<i>Bharan pôsak</i>	maintenance estate
<i>Bhet/Bhett</i>	presentation
<i>Bhoga Mandapa</i>	the refectory hall of a temple
<i>Bhogapati</i>	one who has the right to enjoy, and therefore a term used for those who enjoyed revenue rights over certain lands.
<i>Bhōgra</i>	land enjoyed for a service
<i>Bhukti</i>	an administrative unit of a kingdom
<i>Biāsi</i>	ploughing time
<i>Binjhal</i>	a tribe
<i>Bisi/Bisoi/Bissoyi</i>	the family title of Paiks; chief, head of a mutta or District
<i>Brāhmana</i>	the first in rank among the four castes of Hindu society
<i>Brāhmi</i>	the earliest know and deciphered script of India
<i>Chakravarti</i>	emperor or universal monarch
<i>Cam</i>	skin
<i>Chandravansi</i>	belonging to the lunar race of royalty
<i>Chaurāsi</i>	a unit of 84 villages
<i>Chutianagpur</i>	Chhotanagpur
<i>Cowrie/kauri</i>	shell
<i>Dābhetti</i>	gift of labour with sickle; forced labour

<i>Daffādār</i>	forest officer
<i>Dān</i>	gift
<i>Dāroga</i>	head constable
<i>Dāsa</i>	slave
<i>Desāri/deiri</i>	tribal magician, priest
<i>Desh</i>	Territory, clan territory of Kandh
<i>Deshi</i>	local, indigenous
<i>Devnāgari</i>	the script in which modern Sanskrit and certain Indian languages are written
<i>Dewān</i>	chief minister
<i>Dhānya</i>	paddy
<i>Dharni</i>	earth
<i>Dhoblā bokā</i>	white he-goat
<i>Dhur</i>	dust, lowly
<i>Diguījaya</i>	ritual conquest of the four quarters
<i>Diku</i>	the aliens
<i>Dom</i>	a group from the out-caste section society
<i>Dorā</i>	leader
<i>Durbar</i>	court
<i>Dussera</i>	a hindu festival
<i>Firman</i>	royal, official order
<i>Eṣṭa Devi/Iṣṭa Devi</i>	tutelary goddess
<i>Gadi/gāddi</i>	throne Gahatia/gartia
<i>Gāotia</i>	village headman
<i>Gajpati</i>	elephant kind, title adopted by the kind of Puri
<i>Gandā</i>	a group from the outcaste section of society
<i>Gāon</i>	village
<i>Garh</i>	fort, territorial division, a centre
<i>Garhpati</i>	ruler/administrator of a fort or a territorial division
<i>Garhājāt</i>	tributary estates of Orissa and Chhatisgarh between 15th and 18th century
<i>Gauda/Gaur</i>	milkman, village servant

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<i>Ghānsi</i>	a group from the outcaste outcaste section of the Society
<i>Ghati</i>	hill pass
<i>Gherao</i>	to besiege
<i>Gond</i>	a tribal group
<i>Gondi</i>	language of the Gond; a Dravidian language
<i>Gore</i>	leg
<i>Gotra</i>	'cow pen' exogamous clan unit
<i>Garma</i>	village
<i>Grampolis</i>	village headman
<i>Guru</i>	teacher or spiritual guide
<i>Hal</i>	bullock
<i>Haldi</i>	turmeric; <i>cururma longa</i>
<i>Harida</i>	<i>terminalia chebula</i>
<i>Hāt</i>	Weekly market; fair
<i>Havaldar/havildar</i>	sergent; head constable
<i>Hikoka</i>	horse
<i>Hiranya</i>	gold
<i>Inām</i>	gift; a favour from superior
<i>Jāgir</i>	a service tenure
<i>Jāgirdar</i>	holder of jagir
<i>Jak</i>	pot
<i>Jamā</i>	land revenue paybale by a cultivator or a zamindar including all cesses.
<i>Jamābandi</i>	rent roll
<i>Jamādar</i>	a military officer
<i>Jana</i>	tribe; people
<i>Janapada</i>	region
<i>Jāni</i>	tribal priest
<i>Jāti</i>	caste/sub-caste
<i>Jātiya</i>	national, people's
<i>Jatra</i>	festival
<i>Jauhar</i>	immolation on the funeral pyre
<i>Jhankar</i>	tribal priest
<i>Jhankari</i>	land enjoyed by jhankar
<i>Jhi</i>	grass

<i>Jhi</i>	daughter
<i>Jhum</i>	shifting cultivation
<i>Juanpial</i>	son-in-law
<i>Kabuliyat</i>	agreement
<i>Kalī Yuga</i>	the fourth and final age of the aeon Kandh/Kandha/
<i>Kond/Khond</i>	a tribal group
<i>Kandhan</i>	the tract inhabited by Kandh
<i>Kane</i>	where
<i>Karan/Karana</i>	writer caste
<i>Karma</i>	action or deed
<i>Khachda</i>	mixed one
<i>Khālsa</i>	land or village held directly by govern- ment; direct management
<i>Khamār</i>	village or land held rent-free by the ruler's relations for their maintenance
<i>Khās</i>	own cultivation; self-proprietorship
<i>Khorak posak</i>	maintenance grant
<i>Khudkatti</i>	self-cleared
<i>Khut</i>	tree; pole; forest.
<i>Kirri</i>	weapon
<i>Kisan</i>	peasants
<i>Kist</i>	installment
<i>Kshatriya</i>	the second among the four varna of Hindu society
<i>Kshitesvara</i>	lord of the earth
<i>Kolku</i>	mountain
<i>Konjaka</i>	monkey
<i>Kosali</i>	the language of western Orissa
<i>Kosalendra</i>	Lord of Kosala
<i>Kui</i>	a Dravidian language
<i>Kunabara</i>	Prepuberty marriage
<i>Lagan</i>	levy
<i>Lambardar</i>	gaotia
<i>Li</i>	one-sixth of a mile
<i>Linga</i>	the phallic symbol worshipped largely by Shaivites
<i>Mad</i>	liquor

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<i>Mādla</i>	Records maintained in the Puri temple; family history
<i>Māgan/Magun</i>	subscription; cess
<i>Mahājan</i>	moneylender
<i>Mahal</i>	territorial division of state
<i>Maharaja</i>	King of kings
<i>Mahārāni</i>	chief queen
<i>Mahimā</i>	glory; radiance
<i>Majhi</i>	village headman
<i>Mālika</i>	an Oriya text of 15th and 16th century; its form was used again by Bhima Bhoi in 19th century
<i>Maliah</i>	hilly area, highland
<i>Malikana</i>	proprietary right
<i>Malick/Mallicko</i>	administrator of a district, Lord
<i>Maṇḍala</i>	an administrative unit
<i>Maṇḍalesvara</i>	administrator of a mandala
<i>Mandigna</i>	earthen pot
<i>Mantri</i>	minister
<i>Mauḍi</i>	free
<i>Mel</i>	join
<i>Meli</i>	uprising
<i>Meriah</i>	human sacrifice
<i>Mīta</i>	friend
<i>Moharir</i>	a writer or a scribe
<i>Mokṣa</i>	salvation
<i>Mughalbandi</i>	the coastal plain of Orissa which was under the direct management of Mughals.
<i>Mukhia</i>	headman
<i>Muktir/mukteer</i>	an authorised agent; a court official
<i>Munshi</i>	clerk
<i>Mutha/mutta</i>	a union of villages; sub-division of a country
<i>Muthadar/muttadar</i>	chief of mutha or mutta
<i>Nāg/nāga</i>	serpent
<i>Nagavamṣi</i>	belonging to the serpent race of royalty
<i>Nagara</i>	town

<i>Naik</i>	headman, leader
<i>Nariha</i>	village servant; water carrier
<i>Nazrana</i>	Levy, Presentation
<i>Nelena</i>	took
<i>Nirākāra</i>	formless
<i>Niranjana</i>	without support
<i>Nirguṇa</i>	without attributes
<i>Nisān</i>	drum
<i>Nuakhāi</i>	a festival to celebrate new production paddy. It is a most important festival of western Orissa
<i>Padar</i>	open field; village; hamlet
<i>Paik</i>	militia
<i>Pachayat</i>	a council of five important person
<i>Panka Pathar</i>	ring stone
<i>Panda</i>	priest
<i>Parab</i>	festival
<i>Parbat</i>	mountain
<i>Pardeshi</i>	outsider
<i>Parganā</i>	a unit/division of administration
<i>Parwana</i>	notice
<i>Pāt</i>	turban; chief
<i>Pāṭjani</i>	chief priest
<i>Pātmajhi</i>	chief majhi
<i>Pathan</i>	local term for follower of Islam
<i>Paṭṭā</i>	a land record of a raiyat
<i>Patwari</i>	a village revenue official
<i>Podh</i>	buffalo
<i>Podhpujā</i>	buffalo sacrifice
<i>Podu</i>	slash and burn
<i>Prajā</i>	subject
<i>Pujā</i>	worship
<i>Purāṇa</i>	texts sacred to Hinduism composed in the first millenium C.E. and containing traditional material referring back to an earlier period
<i>Rāj</i>	Kingdom/ruler

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<i>Rājā mahāpuru</i>	God king, God sent person; patrimonial head of the society and state
<i>Rajapurāna</i>	a text referring back to an earlier period of a royal Dynasty
<i>Rajya</i>	Kingdom
<i>Ranaka</i>	a feudal lord
<i>Rāni</i>	queen
<i>Rasad</i>	supplies
<i>Rastra</i>	country; an administrative unit
<i>Rastra Devta</i>	God of a region
<i>Rath</i>	car, chariot
<i>Rengal</i>	forest
<i>Sabara/savara</i>	a tribe
<i>Sahaj/sal</i>	a plant, shorea robusta
<i>Saheb/sahib</i>	Europeans
<i>Salāmi</i>	a present; an offering
<i>Samanta</i>	Vassal
<i>Sanad</i>	grant
<i>San̄nyāsi</i>	ascetic
<i>Sardar/Sirdar</i>	leader, head
<i>Sarkar/Sirkar</i>	government
<i>Sarvadhikaridhrita</i>	chief minister
<i>Suā</i>	parrot
<i>Sūnya</i>	emptiness
<i>Suryavamsi</i>	belonging to the solar race of royalty
<i>Swāmi/Swamy</i>	saint
<i>Taluq</i>	a sub-division
<i>Taluqdar/Talikdar</i>	an officer-in-charge of a sub-division
<i>Theka</i>	contract, secured through auction
<i>Thekadar</i>	thekaholder
<i>Tithi</i>	date
<i>Toki</i>	sheep; girl
<i>Umrāo</i>	Kandh chief
<i>Varna</i>	colour, four fold classification based on <i>birth</i> an occupation
<i>Visaya</i>	an administrative unit
<i>Virodh</i>	restriction

Yajnya

sacrifice

Yoga

one of the six major schools of philosophy in ancient India

Yuga

an age of the world

Zamindār

owner of an estate

Zamindāri

estate of the zamindar

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Samadhi Mandir – Joranda



Sarana Darshana – a ritual denoting total surrender



Sarana Dasshana by Babas in the presence of
Kunjabiharibaba – Lata Ashram



The community feast—Jorananda Mela—Lata Ashram—Feeding each other symbol of unity.



The young initiation by the Mata – a radical stand



The Head of the Matas of the Mata Matha