CHAPTER- 4

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFORM MOVEMENTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN ORISSA

This chapter deals with the major aspects of socio-religious reform movements that came up in the 19th century Orissa. Various factors which contributed for the emergence of these movements to play a significant role have been discussed. The impact of education, emergence of educated intelligentsia, the role of Christian missionaries etc., have been examined to assess their contribution in bringing out reform in the society.

The socio-religious movement like Brahmo Samaj, which had a major presence in the 19th century Orissa, is being presented in this chapter. The district-wise presence and activities of this movement have been studied in detail.

Indigenous religious reform movement of ‘Mahima Dharma’ or Mahima movement is another area of study which also figures in this chapter. This movement had arisen individually from the Orissa soil which discarded and disbelieved the superstitious and complicated rules and rituals of Hinduism. Above all, it severely criticised the Brahmannical interpretation of the religion and condemned the role of Brahmans in the religious affairs. In its reformatory zeal, it encompassed large number of followers, mainly from lower castes and spread to various parts of the state and outside it.

The various social practices existent in the 19th century Orissa which have a bearing on the later on movements in the 20th century like female-infanticide, widow remarriage, child marriage etc. have been highlighted in this chapter. Because the 19th century socio-reform movements prepared the ground and formed a base for later developments in other fields. As a result of these movements the status of women was raised and they were joining the social movements and political struggles against the British rule in the 20th...
century. The continuity of these movements contributed for the larger national struggle against colonialism in the succeeding century.

After discussing all these developments in the socio-religious fronts, attention has been focussed on the change that was brought out in the society. The major thrust has been given on the status of women and their **upliftment**. The various contributory and facilitating factors like education through government and Christian missionaries have been analysed. The emergence and role of some of women leaders in the freedom struggle in Orissa are being discussed to highlight the role of education in bringing the women leaders to the forefront. As the social reform and women upliftment were connected with larger political struggle against colonialism, so also in Orissa, it was the women leaders who plunged into national struggle, simultaneously, strove to bring change in the society.

An attitude of revolt against the superstitious practices grew in the minds of the enlightened people in the 19th century. Some factors usually worked for a long time in providing inputs and background for such happenings. Some of the factors are discussed below;

The 18th century was marked by growing social insecurity and demoralisation prejudicial to the general interests of the people in India. Orissa was no exception to it. Being under the control of the Mughals and then the Marathas, the province of Orissa was neglected in every sphere by these rulers and economic exploitation was their supreme interest. This state of affairs in the 18th century Orissa indirectly contributed in creating a favourable condition to usher in social reforms in the 19th century. It was given a fillip and a proper direction with the British occupation of Orissa in 1803. With their ideas of liberalism and scientific attitude and rationalism, the age-old practices and customs were put to serious scrutiny. The growing emphasis and spread of education and teaching of western ideas and practices and moreover the activities of Christian missionaries helped the people of Orissa to re-examine and re-evaluate their superstitious beliefs, traditions and customs.
Last but not the least, Orissa was fortunate to have pioneers who were posted as Commissioners at that time like, Henry Rickets, A.J.M. Mills, G.F.Lockburn and T.E. Ravenshaw.

Despite their proselytising efforts, the role played by missionaries is conspicuous in preparing the ground for social reforms in Orissa. The Christian missionaries are the ones who initiated modern and meaningful educational system in Orissa. Bringing with them the store of western knowledge to Orissa, they became pioneers of education among the people, particularly among the backward classes in Orissa. The perceptible success of the missionaries was reflected in the education of girls including those of non-Christian and tribal families in Orissa. Even for the education of married women they started 'Zenana' schools to provide some kind of education and learning. Initially, the missionaries were not able to receive any support from the British Government and they sustained their movement through persistent effort. Though evangelisation was their prime motive, but the process of it and the spin-off effects helped in the wiping out of several superstitions and blind faiths, particularly concerning women.

Activities taken up by the missionaries included fighting against social evils like widow burning and issues related to women suffering. To educate and make aware of the people, they used to explain them the contents of their sacred text where there was no mention of the practices of social evils like Sati. They also tried to explode the myth relating to the cruel practice of self-immolation under the car of Lord Jagannath. In their efforts to rid the society of these blind faith system, they even entered into the tribal areas mostly 'Khond' dominated areas hither to untouched, where the natives resorted to horrid practices like human sacrifice and infanticide. They tried to bring the khonds under the spell of civilisation by instilling in them the ideas of getting rid of superstitious beliefs concerning human sacrifice and infanticide.

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304 See, C. Bychanon, An Apology from Promoting Christianity in India, London 1813, James Peggs, India's cries to British humanity, London 1830 - Asiatic Review.
In their ensuing efforts of reform in the society, the missionaries also involved themselves and succeeded to a considerable degree in removing caste prejudices. As the caste system was antagonistic to Christianity, their intervention was more vigorous. They criticised caste prejudices, their rigidity and restriction, particularly the superiority of the Brahmins.

Thus the missionaries through various efforts produced a sort of reaction leading to reform and reconstruction of the socio-religious system in accordance with the contemporary needs of Orissa.

But the single most important factor which facilitated for the ground for social reform was education. Spread of education in the beginning and middle of the 19th century created an atmosphere conducive to social reforms in the society. Considering the number of schools growing gradually both by missionaries and by the government, it reflected a change in the attitude of people towards education hitherto neglected and looked in suspicion. The spread of education, particularly western oriented education, drew the attention of the people to understand the need of their society on the basis of modern ideas. The upper class people having received such education started to examine their old customs and conventions in the light of the new knowledge that they acquired. Side by side, the common men, being literate, became keen for social change. "The spread of education" writes Hunter, "broke the old prejudices." With the spread of education, the influences of rigorous of caste system were lessened in the society. For example, the Brahmins of Puri also held the post of Sub-Inspector of Police and other professions, wearing leather belt which was forbidden by the custom, even the accidental touching of it invited wrath and expulsion. This practice was prevalent even as late as eighteen fifties.

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305 W.W. Hunter, op.cit., PP.141-142.
Thus with the spread of education in Orissa, there dawned a sense of enlightenment in the minds of the people and their conservative attitude underwent a change. Another side effect of the spread of education was the establishment of printing press and consequent publication of journals and periodicals gave a further momentum to social reforms of the 19th century in Orissa. Besides other matters, the evils of social prejudices and superstitions were reflected therein to bring in public consciousness about its validity. All those writings enlightened the readers and trained their minds to revolt against the pernicious practices prevailing in their society.

Another important development in the 19th century Orissa, as elsewhere in India, was the emergence of societies, associations and clubs. The main objectives of these were found to have discussed the social customs and religious prejudices with a broad objective of bringing a rational approach to society and religion. Issues ranging from window marriage or child marriage, women’s education and caste rigidly, drinking liquor, and gambling etc., were brought under scrutiny and led people to know of the evils and virtues of their social customs and get rid of such evils.

These associations and debating clubs involved in social gatherings, free mixing, discussions and debates and seriously pondered over the socio-religious problems affecting the society. As a result of this, the rigidity disappeared and in its place liberalism and rationalism prevailed. Especially in the cultural meetings, the address of persons of repute and erudition broadened the mental horizon of the people. In this respect, the founders of such associations, like the educated middle class and the local Rajas and Zamindars, contributed most to the ushering in of a general consciousness among the people.

\[309\] W.W. Hunter, op.cit., P- 149.
\[310\] Patnaik, N. R., Renaissance in the 19th century Orissa, Quarterly journal.

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These societies were assemblage of persons brought together for fulfillment of a noble cause. In various fields of national life and thought, encouraging efforts, and unending interests were revealed through these societies. Among these, some were purely cultural and literary, while some were engaged in social reforms or activities relating to common welfare.

In Orissa with the spread of English education in the second half of the 19th century, the educated elite came in close contact with the English people. They were initiated into their ideas and there was considerable interest to establish cultural societies. Bengal in respect of modern education, initiation of English ideas and thought was half a century ahead of Orissa. With the establishment of Royal Asiatic Society them started the opening for more societies for Socio-cultural awakening in the society.

Raja Rammohan Ray established Atmiya Sabha in 1815 and social issues such as caste distinction, Child Marriage, Polygamy, early widowhood etc., were discussed and denounced. The conservative aristocrats namely Radhkanat Deva and other established 'Dharma Sabha' to save Hinduism from the attacks of Christianity and Brahmoism. So these societies dealing with the socio-religious issues in the neighboring state of Bengal gave enough impetus towards the establishment of such societies in Orissa. In the 19th century any sort of cultural and academic activity in Bengal had its corresponding impact on Orissa.

Dr. N. Samantaray has given a long list of such societies in Orissa. The details of some of leading cultural societies of the 19th century Orissa are given below;

1. Mutual Improvement Society (Cuttack - 1859): The English elite living in Cuttack were active participants in it. There were deliberations on social and literary topics, papers were read and discussed.

2. **Utkal Bhasa Unnati Vidhyayini Sabha**: (Balasore- 1866) F.M. Senapti, Radhanat Ray and other prominent personalities were members of this society. The society had in view the new useful books published in Bengali and tried to publish such books in Oriya.

3. **Utkal Bhasodhi Puri Samaja (Cuttack-1867)**: The object of the society was to prepare a catalogue of old Oriya Books, to move the government for getting the privilege of approving suitable text-books for schools. Gourisankar Ray, the famous editor of Utkal Dipika was the secretary of the Samaj.

4. **Cuttack Debating Club - (1868)**: The educated persons of Cuttack started the society for discussing about English language. The famous ideologist of Bengal, Rajendra Lal Mitra read a paper in the society advocating Bengali language in Orissa Schools in place of Oriya language as the former was very rich compared to latter, which created deep resentment among the Oriyas there.

5. **Utkal Varsini Sabha (Cuttack - 1869)**: The language issue stirred the minds of the educated persons in Orissa and through this society they tried to fight for cause of Oriya languages.

6. **Utkal Brahmo Samaj (Cuttack - 1869)**: The society was established to propagate Brahmoism.

7. **Ganjam Utkala Hitavadini Sabha (Berhampore - 1872)**: Most probably this was the first political association. It represented to the Government for submitting petitions in Oriya, maintaining records in Oriya, conducting examinations in Oriya and arranging classes in Oriya in the schools. As Ganjam, mostly an Oriya speaking district, was then in the Madras presidency the aspirations of the people were expressed through this association.
8. Utkala Bhasoddipani Sabha (Cuttack-1873):- The object of the society was the development of Oriya language, through discussion about Oriya text-books, improvement of the creative faculty and debating capability of the educated persons.

9. Utkal Sabha (Cuttack - 1877):- This was primarily a society for literary deliberations. A comparative assessment of ancient and modern Oriya literature was made. In 1878 under the auspices of this society a periodical titled 'Utkal Madhupa' was brought out and many literary writings were published in it.

10. National Society (Balasore - 1878):- Fakirmohan Senapati as a delegate of the society went to Madras to attend the Indian National Congress.

11. Unity Association (Balasore - 1881): This society was striving hard to bring about a unity and amity among the Oriya and Bengalis by solving their differences.

12. Utkal Hitaishini Sabha (Paralakenedi):- Towards the end of the 19th century, the Raja of Paralakemedi, established this society. They agitated against the injustice done to Oriyas in Ganjam. This society sent delegates to India National Congress held at Madras, Poona and Calcutta.

13. Utkala Sahitya Samitani (Cuttack - 1886):- Through the initiative of Radhanath Ray, Madhusudan Rao and some other literatures, this society was formed. Its main object was to conduct discussion on Oriya language and literature and a critical estimate of newly published Oriya books.

14. Cuttack Alochana Sabha (Cuttack - 1893):- This society was established for the improvement of Oriya language and literature. The main object of the society was to discuss about old and modern Oriya literature. To work in a wider sphere and express the literary aspirations of Oriyas this society was renamed as Utkala Sahitya Samaja in 1903 and subsequently it became a premier literary organization.
15. Sanaranartha Sabha (Cuttack - 1898):- This was another society of the Brahmo,s where persons from different sects participated and discussed about the achievements of Ram Mohan Ray and Keshab Chandra Sen. Deliberations were conducted in Oriya, Bengalis and English.

16. Observer Club (Cuttack - 1898):- English and Oriya Poems and essays were read and discussed.

17. Graduate and Undergraduate Association (Cuttack - 1890):- Madhusudan Das was the president of the Association. In the sessions, resolutions regarding reforms of Hindu Society, glorification's of Women's education, denouncement of Child marriages and introduction of Widow remarriage. This gave expressions to the reforming ideals of the educated youth and their reaction against social superstitions and blind faith.

From the above mentioned societies the general characteristics of the cultural and social conditions can be examined in the 19th century Orissa. The societies functioned in the leading towns of Orissa such as Cuttack, Balasore, Puri and Berhampore where the newly emerged educated middle class group came into existence. These societies tried to express their ideas and ideologies for social upliftment and the growth of these societies by the third quarter of the 19th century was a remarkable development. An Oriya periodical remarked: "Orissa is gradually being flooded with societies in the western state like infectious diseases. For the last six and seven years it has became rampant. There are societies for school-founders, societies relating to social and political issues by the new youths, the exciting societies by the pandits and normal schools teachers, societies of old people also adorn this town of Cuttack."

These societies had some avowed purposes. During the period of language movement, different societies advocated for and against the presentation of Oriya language. Some
societies were formed for the propagation of Brahmoism and as its reaction some other societies tried to advocate the cause of old Hinduism. Same societies were formed in the towns of Cuttack, Balasore and Puri. In Cuttack, Puri and Balasore, Sanskrit societies worked for safeguarding the interests of Sanskrit. Barring a few, these societies did not engage themselves in political activities and were whole hearted by supporting the cause of social reconstruction and upliftment.

It is very interesting to study the growth and activities of different cultural societies of the 19th century which brought about radical charges in the cultural life of Orissa Society, formed public opinion and self consciousness in the minds of countrymen who with their relentless efforts tried to improve work state of Orissa in various fields. The spade-work done in the 19th century yielded results in the 20th century.

In this process of social change, the development of communications in the plains as well as the high lands of Orissa played an vital role. In its wake, there came the cultural contact between the people of the plains and those of the hinterlands namely the tribal people. The dissemination of ideas and awareness were made much easier and widespread due to the well developed communication system which in its way brought progressive changes in the society. It was against this background that the British Government in Orissa decided to intervene and suppress several gruesome practices such as widow burning, a mild and continuous policy in the beginning, extreme intervention later on became the landmark of their policy. In their effort, the government was supported by the educated middle class who with their newer ideas influenced by the western education strove to put an end to these social evils. As elsewhere in India, in Orissa, the newly emerged educated class gave the much-needed spirit through supporting and demanding the spread of education, particularly for women to achieve the objective. Due to the support of these educated classes, the government could step in and

311 Ibid.
312 Annual Administrative Report, 1873-74, P.5.
313 Patnaik, N. R, op. cit., P-615.
pass laws against the practices of various social evils. A brief account of the social evil and practices and their suppression is given below;

Suppression of widow-burning:

The practice of widow-burning (Sati) was socio-religious in nature in which a woman burnt herself on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. Though prevalent from the medieval times, its suppression was seriously thought with the advent of the British. It was after strengthening the foundation of the British rule that Governor General Wellesley, sincerely tried to combat the practice. Being cautious in his approach he tried to discourage the practice in a mild form in the beginning. Circulars were sent to the local officials asking them to dissuade the widows from recourse to this practice.

But in spite of these mild measures, the practice continued to take place in Orissa and during 1815-1816, eighteen instances of Sati were detected in Cuttack district. And in other districts, the numbers were also similarly alarming. However, the government adopted other measures to discourage the practice. Orders were passed to give a small sum as subsistence allowance to all those widows who were refrained from committing Sati. Another additional step was taken in disallowing the Zamindars to exercise any more the right of taking half of the property of the widows who have no children, as they did before. All these measures had some effects and brought down about a considerable reduction in the number of Sati in Orissa. The complexity of the social evil was such that even the government had two different kinds of views among various officials. One was active intervention through law to put down the practice and the other one through gradual and indirect approach to it. In 1828, Thomas Pakenhom, the Commissioner of Cuttack examined the cases of Sati to explore the possibility of suppressing the rite. He

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314 Patnaik, N. R. op. cit., p 615.
315 Papers relating to East India Affairs, Viz. Hindu Widows and Voluntary Innovations, 10th July, 1820.
made a mention of his findings with his suggestions for its complete suppression. The Commissioner opined that it would be far better for the government at once to enact a law in prohibition of the custom as regards this province\footnote{Patnaik, N. R., op. cit., p - 615.}. The question of abolishing the practice by legislation was discussed thread bare and a few British officials working in Orissa were still reluctant to abolish it by legislation. Even the successive Governor General till 1828 while condemning this practice still remained firm to the policy of non-intervention and the Governor General Lord Amherest (1823-1829) went further by saying that any stern action against the practice might cause unrest\footnote{Dodwell, H.H, ed., The Cambridge History of India, Vol.VI, New Delhi, 1958,p-140.}.

But by the year 1829, the British Officers working in Orissa saw the reason and felt the time was ripe for abolishing the practice by law. Thomas Pakenham was first to write to the Government that the prohibition of Sati might be ordered with perfect safety, although such a resource would occasion great dissatisfaction\footnote{Board proceedings, Judicial (West Bengal State Archives, Vol.- 541.)}. Similarly, W.Winkson, the Collector of Cuttack and Puri and H.Brownlow, the Magistrate of Santhem Division of Cuttack district, reported to the Government that the Sati might safely be put down by authority\footnote{Ibid,p.274,417-419, W.Winkinson, Collector of Cuttack and Puri to Govt. of Bengal, 25 April, 1829,Board Proceedings, Judicial (Orissa State Archives) Accession no.223, H. Brownlow to G. Stockwell, 1st August,1829.}.

In the endeavour of doing away with the social evils, the British Government was not the only campaigner, but the natives of India also provided the much-needed support to the cause. These emerging social reformers being educated and impressed upon by the ideas of rationalism, liberalism and scientific temper viewed the practices in a more suspicious way. There emerged then a galaxy of social reformers who strove to convince their countrymen that "Sati" was not enjoined by the code of Manu and it was opposed to the gentle, benign spirit of their original faith\footnote{G.D.Oswell, Sketches of rulers of India, Reprint, Delhi 1972, Vol.111, PP 141-142.}. Most prominent among them was Ram Mohan Roy who was the first to get himself involved in the campaign for the abolition of
Sati. It was mainly his vehement denunciation of this practice, and the agitation that he fought against it which ultimately helped in the enactment of the stature of 1829 aiming at the abolition of Sati throughout British India. 321

The process of abolition of Sati was hastened with the appointment of Lord William Bentinck as Governor General in India, who represented the age of utilitarianism in India. After consulting the British Officers of whom majority were known to have favoured immediate suppression of the practice 322. It was on December 4, 1829 that a regulation was passed in the Governor-Generals in council declaring the practice of Sati as illegal and punishable in the criminal courts through out the territories immediately subject to the presidency of Fort William. And all Zamindars, Talukdars and other proprietors of the land and all native officers were to be accountable for the immediate communication to the officers of the nearest police station of any incident of state 323.

In spite of the clear-cut prohibition of Sati, the practice continued to occur in few tributary states of Orissa. The Government of India directed the Superintendent of Tributary Mahals to prepare some definite rules for the management of the Tributary Mahals. While preparing such rules a clause was incorporated therein making the practice of burning alive widows of Hindus within the Tributary Estates illegal and punishable 324. Any Raja or any other person convicted of aiding and abetting such sacrifices, whether voluntary or otherwise would be deemed guilty of the defiance of the government orders 325.

Not withstanding the strict law prohibiting Sati, there were instances where it was violated. One such case of violation was the state of Khandpara where, upon the death of the Raja in January 25, 1842, his queens and two slave girls immolated themselves on the

323 Ibid., p.616.
funeral pyre\textsuperscript{126}. The government taking the case as violation of the law accorded punishment to all those involved in the case and this also restricted similar cases to occur due to the heavy punishment. The rulers of the tributary states agreed to forbid this practice of Sati, undertaken either voluntarily or under compulsion. Thus by 1842 the Sati was accepted to have been abolished in Orissa.

**MERIAH SACRIFICE AND ITS SUPPRESSION:**

Another gruesome practice which prevailed in Orissa was the human sacrifice which was based on socio-religious custom of the tribes of Khonds. Since the victim was called Meriah, this practice was popularly known as Meriah sacrifice or simply Meriah\textsuperscript{327}. Besides the Meriah, human sacrifice was also known to have prevailed among other tribes namely Kols, Santals, Gonds and Bhuiyas. Even the more enlightened people of the plains used to sacrifice human beings to please some imaginary spirits.

Meriah sacrifice among the Khonds originated from their superstitious belief of keeping the Earth Goddess in a pleased state of mind by propitiating her with most valuable sacrifices, lest she should cause failure of rains leading to famines and droughts. And for this they considered human blood as the most precious offering\textsuperscript{328}.

Being practised by a number of tribes and also by people in the plains, the British discovered it 1836 and efforts for the suppression of this cruel practice finally succeeded. But the suppression of this practice proved to be a Herculean task for the British government as it was deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of the Khond society. Its religio-cultural belief of benevolent nature almost made it difficult to stop this practice.

\textsuperscript{325} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{326} Ibid., Mills Minute, 23\textsuperscript{rd} January, 1847.
\textsuperscript{328} Ibid., Influence of Religion upon Khond society in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Manav, Journal of Anthropological society of Orissa, IV, 1990-1993,p-52-53.
The people of the place almost equated this practice with the nature God. Moreover, the British association with the people was established very recently.

Thus it is to be observed that the British Government rightly realised that the character of the khonds and the physical nature of their country combined to preclude any attempt to effect the suppression of their great religious rite by force as a primary measure. Moral influence, rather than power be more effective. Coercion, they thought, could not succeed. Thus the primary policy pertaining to suppression of the practice as suggested by G.E.Russel, was to accomplish it by slow and gradual process and not by rash action. On the whole the policy of the British government was to make the Khonds integral, central and progressive members of the British Indian Empire from their heathen practices, and win them over to start humanitarian reforms themselves.

Knowing the fear and superstitious practices of the khonds against famine, disease and worldly misfortunes, the Government started initiating measures during such calamities through redressing their miseries and setting their tends and disputes.

In 1845, a Meriah Agency comprising the whole tracts of Madras and Bengal Presidencies was constituted by the British Government and Capt. Macpherson was appointed the first Agent for the suppression of Meriah practices. The agency officers like Macpherson and Campbell made plans and executed programmes such as making roads, easing and safeguarding transport, increasing markets and fairs, establishing schools and encouraging communications between the hill tracts and the plains for lasting effects and impact.

To generate awareness among them the British officers called periodical assemblies of the Khond chiefs and explained to them the cruelty of human sacrifice. Furthermore, the agents also put necessary pressures on the Rajas and Zamindaris to use their moral

330 Ibid.
influence and power for the effectual suppression of human sacrifice. Other measures like promotion of education and medical aid, construction of roads, establishment of fairs and appointment of the police were taken up to develop the area. All these efforts gradually penetrated into the minds of the tribes and slowly they were drifted away from the practices. The cruel practice was at the end came to an end with a policy of persuasion and development and not by coercion.

Widow-marriage:

The practice of Sati and its abolition discussed earlier in this chapter, saved the women from the gruesome killing. After it was suppressed and young widows were allowed to live, there was an positive response from the people about their remarriage in order to remove their sufferings and at the same time to get their valuable services for the family and the society at large. The social reformers around that time, prominent being Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar, were pioneers in taking the cause of widow suffering and advocating their remarriage. Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar published his work on widow remarriage in 1853 to broad base and advocate his points. In the year 1856, the widow Remarriage Act was passed permitting the widows to remarry if they so desired, and declaring the legitimacy of the issue of such marriage.

The 19th century Orissa, though not fully observing and accepting the idea, did not oppose it either. It stirred the imagination of the people so much so that they started to discuss its merits and demerits at different forums. One such forum was "Aryani Pradip Samaj" of Biranarasinhapur, where a discussion on the social problems was held on 1st March, 1885 and regular debates on widow-remarriage were held thereafter. Yet another forum called "Cuttack Graduate Sabha", where a meeting was held on 29th December, 1889 and Kalidasa Mukherjee delivered a speech on "Hindu Social Reforms".

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311 Ibid., History and culture of Khond tribes, New Delhi, 1992, p-256.
312 Desai, Neera, Women in Modern India, Bombay, 1957, p-72.
313 Utkal Dipika, 21 March, 1885.
in which he spoke in favour of widow remarriage and also evil consequences of child marriage\footnote{Patnaik, N.R, op. cit., p-625.}.

Apart from this, through various literary activities like poems and stories, the idea of widow remarriage was popularised. One of them was the greatest writer Fakir Mohan Senapati who reflected the miseries of the widows in his literary works. His poem entitled \textit{"Bidhabara Abhisapa"} (Curse of the widow) dealt with the cruelties inflicted on the widows and he appealed therein for the amelioration of their condition\footnote{Senapati, F.M, Fakir Mohan Granthabali, Reprint, Calcutta,1963,Vol.1,pp-545-546.}. Although no widow-remarriage was known to have taken place in Orissa in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, it was permitted by certain classes in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. In this century widow marriage and divorce were permitted among the Khandaitis in the Feudatory states of Orissa\footnote{Patnaik, N.R, op. cit., p-622.}. Similarly in the coastal region to a certain degree it was permitted except in the high caste Hindu families. In this context, S.L.Maddox has made a mention in his report of 1900 thus, "in most cases of Orissa, widows may remarry and even among the Brahmins and Karans the widows do not lead the hard life they do elsewhere\footnote{S.L Maddox, Final Report on the survey and settlement of the province of Orissa, 1890-1900, Calcutta,1900,pp-123.}.

Child-marriage:

Another social evil widely prevalent in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century Orissa was the child marriage. It was found most common among the Bralimins who were liable to ex-communication of their daughter if attained puberty before marriage. Different socio-cultural forms took up and raised the issue of evils of child marriage in order to bring consciousness among the practitioners and the people of the state. A society called \textit{"Balyabidhaba Nibarini Sabha"} was established at Cuttack\footnote{Ibid.}. In its monthly session in 1873, this Sabha discussed child-marriage and then fixed the age of the girls and boys for marriage as
above 14 and 21 respectively. Another Sabha called, "Aryaniti Sabha" of Biranarsimhapur was a centre of discussion on child-marriage. The emerging and conscious intellectuals of Orissa like Pyarimohan Acharya, fired with reformative zeal, came forward to discuss the matter before the public. Pyari Mohan Acharya delivered a talk at Cuttack on February 24, 1879, against child-marriage, focussing on its evils like physical weakness and even ruination of certain families.

Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar was the first Indian to speak both against the consummation of child marriage. Being pressurised by British public opinion and persuaded by the Indian humanitarians, the Government of India contemplated legislation in 1890 to raise the age of marriage for a girl. From Orissa the opinion of about six professors of the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, in favour of proposal was voiced to the government. The Rajas and Zamindars in Orissa were asked to mobilise public opinion in its favour and the local periodicals also highlighted the matter. Sambalpur Hitaishini, in its issue of June 18, 1890 appealed to the Rajas and Zamindars to use their influence against child marriage.

Finally, the introduction of an Act, entitled Act of 1891, the Governor-General of India and his Council, which raised the age of Consummation of marriage of girls from ten to twelve years and provided absolute legislative protection to the girls upto the age of twelve. These measures ultimately led to the minimisation of child-marriage in the 19th century Orissa.

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340 Utkal Dipika, 5 April, 1873.
342 Ibid.
344 Sambalpur Hitaishini, 18 June, 1890.
345 Journal of Indian History, XLIX, 145-147, April-December,1971, p-300.
Socio-religious reform movements:

In the 18th century, the Indian society and religion presented a gloomy picture - bundle of superstitions, society grew rotten and stagnated culture. As the Hindu social system is strongly based on and mostly guided by religion, it is difficult to say where religion ends and social institutions begin. All most all social evils were given the garb of religious sanction by Brahmins and religious leaders in the name of Hindu Dhanna. Religious sanction was accorded to rituals, caste hierarchy, superstitions and idol worship.

But with the advent of the Europeans, Western ideas, thoughts and learning were gradually disseminated in India. Educated Indians after a careful examination and scrutiny of their religion in the light of western education and ideas realised that superstition and barren formalism had sapped much of the dynamism of Hinduism. Hence, to restore the original purity and simplicity were established to carry out the crusade of reform. These religious movements revived in the people's minds, memories of their glorious past and contributed to the new conscience among the educated people.

The educational system in Orissa before the British rule was mainly oriented towards religion, philosophy, logic etc., But with the emergence of British rule in India, secular education was imparted and religious neutrality was maintained generally. The Government was not keen to touch the moral and religious subjects as it feared that any interference in social and religious institutions would endanger their power in India. Even the Commission of 1882 prohibited religious teaching in government and board schools during school hours since it could not cater to the needs of pupils of all faiths.

The strict religious neutrality of government encouraged beliefs that, (1) religions had no relevance to the main course of curriculum, (2) education was for all, not only for the higher castes and classes unlike previously practised, (3) superstitions and customs which

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346 Religion, philosophy etc., were taught in the Hindu Gurukul schools. In Mission schools Bible was taught even in the 19th and 20th century though it was not forced on the unwilling students.
were taught traditionally in the name of religion and pure social life were given up and secular and scientific forces emerged gradually. This ultimately developed rationalism, scientific attitude, dissociation of religious institutions from social institutions and finally helped in the formation of new socio-religious reform movements like Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, Theosophical Society and other organisations and conferences.

**Brahma Samaj Movement:**

The Brahma Samaj was a socio-religious reform organisation born as a sequel to the introduction of new education. The liberal, rational and scientific knowledge, clubbed with the knowledge of Hinduism led to a decision to reform Hindu society. The Brahma Samaj was started in 1828 by Raja Ram Mohan Roy to stop the tide of proselyzation and to introduce reforms in religious and social spheres on an organised basis. He wanted to shape the religion according to needs and exigencies of social relations. His aim was to acquaint the people with the original Hindu scriptures which did not profess the crude forms of idolatrous worship. He also condemned the Brahmin priest who were adept interpreting the worldly desires of the Gods and Goddesses.

With these objectives Ram Mohan Roy established Brahma Sabha which subsequently became Bramho Samaj. Brahma faith propounded by Ram Mohan was a reformative trend of Hinduism questioning the infallibility of the Vedas and also coming up against some of the institutions of Hinduism, as widow-burning, child-marriage, prohibition of widow-remarriage, caste restrictions and the like. The Brahmoism believed in the worship of the universal God, the infinite benefactor of the universe.

Brahmo movement appeared in Orissa in the beginning of the second half of the 19th century. It was the accidental visit of Orissa province by Devendranath Tagore in

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348 Pannikar, K.M, Culture and Consciousness in Modern India, New Delhi, 1990, p-7.
connection with the supervision of his estate paved the way for Brahmo movement in Orissa. It was in 1849, that Mahesh Chandra Roy, the Munsiff established a Brahmo Samaj for the first time at Cuttack. Later on, Jagan Mohan Roy, the Dy. Magistrate of Cuttack organised this Samaj on the model of Adi Brahmo Samaj of Devendranath Tagore and it was named as Cuttack Brahmo Samaj. A journal named 'Utkal Subhankari' was published in 1869 to reflect Brahmo faith in Oriya language and a beautiful Brahmo temple was constructed in 1871, where prayers were held. Another Brahmo organisation entitled 'Utkal Samaj' was established at Cuttack in 1869 under the leadership of Prof. Haranath Bhattacharya. It was a branch of Brahmo Samaj of India founded by Keshab Chandra Sen. However, both Cuttack Brahmo Samaj and Utkal Brahmo Samaj were established by Bengali gentlemen and the pastors made their living by some secular vocation, receiving no stipend for their ministrations. But this reformed faith was not regarded in Cuttack as a distinct religion from Hinduism.

Another extension of Brahmo Samaj called Prarthana Sabha was founded at Mangalabag of Cuttack town 1883. In the same year few students of the medical school of Cuttack established a Brahmo Samaj in the name of Prathana Samaj. A Mahila Samaj, was founded in the residence of K.C.Gupta, where his wife assembled other ladies from well-to-do families and used to hold religious discussions every fortnight. In 1886, Chaturbhuja Pattanaik, renowned Brahmo reorganised another Brahmo Samaj and named it as "Bidhan Samaj".

The Brahmo organisations continued to work in Cuttack, though it was not so popular and progressive. In the second half of the 19th century the Brahmo preachers from Bengal made frequent visit to Cuttack. Performing Upasana at various places, they delivered

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350 Utkal Dipika, 18 December, 1869.
351 Samantray, N., op. cit., p. 34.
352 Utkal Dipika, 18 December, 1869.
354 Utkal Dipika, 15 September, 1883.
356 Utkal Dipika, 23 January, 1886.
talks to the people about Brahmo faith. Many persons, particularly the educated Bengalis serving in the town came under the influence of these preachers and joined the Brahmo movement\textsuperscript{357}.

The main activity of the Brahmos centred around the 'Upasana' a congregation of all the Brahmos to discuss about the main contents of Brahmoism. This also served as a prayer congregation, and prayer halls were opened for workshop of universal God and it also served as a meeting place of the devotees of all faiths.

The Brahmos of Cuttack used to assemble once a week for Upasana. After singing Brahmo songs, the religious discussions were held. The discussions ranged mostly against idolatry, casteism, child marriage, polygamy, addiction and other irrational socio-religious customs. Learned persons of Cuttack town or the Brahmo preachers coming from outside also delivered talks on Brahmo faith. On special occasions, community prayer and Nagar Sankirtan were held. The Brahmo prayers were also attended by the women\textsuperscript{358}. Sometimes, the local British officials were invited to Brahmo functions. The Brahmo function held on 22\textsuperscript{nd} February 1870 in the house of Ramnath Roy Chowdhary was attended by W.W.Hunter, the Commissioner of Orissa Division\textsuperscript{359}. On certain occasions, food and clothes were given by the Brahmo Samaj to the poor and the handicapped. To promote charitable activities, Utkal Brahmo Samaj opened a small dispensary in November 1866 to provide medical help to leprosy patients\textsuperscript{360}. The Brahmos of Cuttack town also tried to perform missionary activities. In the gathering of festivals like Balijatra, they used to preach their faith like Christian missionaries. With all these activities, the Brahmos of Cuttack could influence and bring the youth of Cuttack, particularly the students, even students from conservative Brahmin families. In July 1887 two students of Cuttack Medical School were converted to Brahmo Dhanna. They were Loknath Kar and Raghunath Singh. Lokanath Kar, the first Brahmin in

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{358} Utkal Dipika, 7, July, 1883.
\textsuperscript{359} "Ibid, 28, February, 1870.
\textsuperscript{360} Ibid, 6, November, 1886.
\end{flushleft}
Cuttack District who had embraced this new faith openly\textsuperscript{361}. Same Brahmo marriages were solemnised in Cuttack, according to Brahmo rituals. Same marriages were attended by the Hindus, Muslims and Christians\textsuperscript{362}.

Apart from Cuttack, Balasore was yet another chief centre of Brahmo movement in Orissa. As early as 1885 Isan Chandra Basu of Adi Brahmo Samaj of Cuttack came to Balasore to preach Brahmo faith. Another Brahmo, Prasanna Kumar Chatterjee came to Balasore from Bengal and started Upasana in a home located near Jhadeswar Mahadeva temple. A Brahmo Samaj was founded in Balasore town in October 1869\textsuperscript{363}, and a Brahmo periodical named “Dharmabodhini” was published from Balasore town in 1874.

The activities of Brahmos gradually spread from town to village areas of Balasore and in the village of Sindhia of Balasore, a Brahmo Samaj was established\textsuperscript{364}. In its weekly Upasana, the ladies of upper Caste used to join along with male members\textsuperscript{365}. So also many low caste people were participating in the Upasana showing the popularity of the movement. Similarly other villages also started their own Brahmo Samaj at the same time. Few other Brahmo centres located in and around Balasore town were at Manikhamb, Amara, Sorisakotha, and Vimadin\textsuperscript{366}. Thus, next to Cuttack, Balasore emerged as a leading centre of Brahmo movement in Orissa.

After the formation of Balasore Brahmo Samaj, the Brahmos were interested to organise different Samajs outside the town area. The Samajs developed outside the Balasore town were, Dinamaradinga, Navagama, North Nuapur, South Nuapur\textsuperscript{367}. At different places of these centres, Bramho Maunders were established for Brahmo Convenant advocated that the members should carry out the Samaj work at the instruction of their leaders.

\textsuperscript{361} Ibid., 16, July, 1887.
\textsuperscript{362} Ibid., 9, June, 1888.
\textsuperscript{363} Hunter, W.W, op. cit., p-278.
\textsuperscript{364} Patnaik, N.R, op. cit., p-626.
\textsuperscript{365} Ibid., p-622.
\textsuperscript{366} Utkal Dipika, 18, June, 1881.
In its endeavour for educational developments, the Brahmo followers opened one Sangeet school at the Balasore district working every Saturday. Besides a number of members from both the Adi Samaj and New dispensation order, used to attain the school. The subjects discussed in the Samajs covered various problems related to human life and its course.

Apart from this, the Balasore Brahma Samaj also opened one middle English school, one night school, one girl's school, school for spiritual and educational upliftment of the students.

To its credit, the Brahmo Samaj of Balasore adopted various humanitarian activities like setting up of different ashrams such as, orphan ashram, leprosy ashram and destitu tes homes to shelter the needy and to preach the Brahmo cult among them. In 1875, a Brahmo teacher called Ram Kumar came to Balasore and established two schools in town, one school spread this idealism and another imparted general education.

The Brahmos also organised 'Tatwa Bodhini Sabha' in 1871 for discussion of different religious and Brahmo philosophy and Ram Kumar Bhattacharya, a member of Brahmo Samaj of India, visited different places of Orissa to supervise the Brahmo Vidyalays.

The spirit of earnest work and active participation was started by Nandalal Banerjee, a missionary of New Dispension in 1887, who made Balasore station as the Principal sphere of work. The Samaj mission work contained lectures, delivered in English, Bengali and Oriya at different places of Orissa by prominent Brahmo teachers and kirtans were chanted in the streets and towns, which seemed to have caused great sensation among the people of different areas.

\[368\] Ibid., p-33.
\[369\] Annual Report of Brahmo Samaj of India, p-38.
The Brahmo movement in Balasore attracted the attention and later on the involvement of people and most importantly prominent persons of the area. For example, Fakir Mohan Senapati, a great literateur of Orissa was attracted towards the Brahmo philosophy, though he was not formally initiated to it. In one of his short stories, ‘Revati’ Fakir Mohan emphasises the women education and women liberation and in ‘prayaschita’ one of his greatest novels, he narrates the Brahmo concept of realisation\(^\text{370}\). Fakir Mohan launched a crusade against social labours and advocated widow remarriage. Fakir Mohan published a number of short stories, novels criticising the social evil customs of Hinduisim which was the aim of Brahmo movement.

Brahmo movement also spread to Puri district. In 1866 Brahmo Samaj was founded in the town by Prasanna Kumar Ganguli\(^\text{371}\). During 1880-1890 Brahmo Samaj\(^\text{s}\) were established at different places of Puri district. In Puri town, Nilachal Brahmo Samaj was founded with Narendra Nath Sarkar as its secretary\(^\text{372}\). The Brahmo Samaj in Puri also involved themselves with the kind of activities, their counterparts at Cuttack and Balasore used to do.

However, the Brahmo movement in Orissa could not spread much as it was expected. The major lacunae of the movement was that it could not attract the masses resulting the absence of mass base. It remained confined mainly to the urban elites of Orissa society. The people of Orissa also did not consider Brahmoism as a distinct religion from Hinduism\(^\text{373}\). The strong orthodox section of the state, afforded small prospect of conversions on a large scale\(^\text{374}\). The pioneers of Brahmo movement had little contact with the common people. And the high ideals of Brahmoism could not be grasped by the people and there were not any proper attempt by the reformers to do that. Furthermore, the Brahmo movement elsewhere in India did not adopt any spectacular programme for the socio-economic regeneration of Orissa. It was towards the last decade of 19\(^{th}\) century.

\(^\text{370}\) Nayak, G, op. cit., p-38.  
\(^\text{371}\) Mukherjee, P, History of Orissa, New Delhi.  
\(^\text{372}\) Samantray, N, op. cit., pp-36-37.  
\(^\text{373}\) Hunter, W.W, op. cit., p-69.
there was a growth of political consciousness in Orissa due to the national movement for independence. And its dominance over socio-religious reforms affected the progress of Brahmo movement. The political activities took precedence over the socio-religious reforms of the young men. Furthermore, the persons who joined the Brahmo Samaj were socially boycotted by the conservative Hindus. The internal quarrels and subsequent division in the Brahmo Samaj weakened the movements in Orissa.

Though the Brahmo movement could not succeed as a religious movement in Orissa, it had its deep repercussions on the socio-religious set up of Orissa.

First the Brahmo movement helped to spread education in Orissa. That was because Brahmo adherents of the province created consciousness among the people for education. Madhusudan Rao founded the Victoria Town High School. By the effort of Haranath Bhattacharya, Cuttack Abaitanika Vidyalaya was established. Pyari Mohan Acharya established an educational institution entitled "Cuttack Academy" which was subsequently known as "Pyari Mohan Academy". The female Brahmos of Cuttack opened a Sunday school to impart moral and spiritual education to the children. Many teachers of the schools were Brahmos. All these helped in the growth of education in Orissa.

Second, the Brahmo movement led to the publication of new periodicals which were the mouth-piece of Brahmo Samajas. Those were *Utkal Subhenkari, Dharmabodhini, Brahmo, Naba saampad, and Asha*.

Third, the renowned Brahmos like Chatterbhuja Pattanaik, Madhusudan Rao and Biswanath Kar contributed a number of creative writing to Oriya literature. Thus the Brahmo movement played an important role in the growth of Oriya literature and language. Lastly, the Brahmo activities created social consciousness among the people of Orissa. It advocated the women education ad their gradual emancipation from social

374 ibid,p-278.
restraints. The Brahmo professed widow-remarriage and inter caste marriage and opposed polygamy and child-marriage. The Brahmo faith devoted too many rituals of Hindu marriage, which were also expensive. Some Brahmo marriages were also solemnised in Orissa. Furthermore, Ram Mohan Roy’s campaign against the Sati custom influenced the British officials and the people of the Orissa to prevent Sati occurrences in Orissa. The Brahmos also spoke against the addiction of opium and liquor. The Brahmos also criticised the eroticism in literature and architecture.

The Brahmo movement helped in synthesising religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. As the exponents of the Brahmo faith were much influenced by Christianity, the Hindus of Orissa tried to assert the supremacy of Hinduism over Christianity.

MAHIMA MOVEMENT

In the last quarter of 19th century, an indigenous religious cult, prevalent among lower castes and tribals of the hilly regions of central and western Orissa, called Mahima Dharma gave an unqualified challenge to Brahminical orthodoxy. As else where in India, during that period, the supremacy of the Brahminical and traditional order were challenged by the newly emerged religious reform cults. About Mahima Dharma, Anncharloff Eschamann observes:

"Mahima Dharma is an autochthonous Hindu reform movement that turned against Jagannath workshop in Particular. Unlike the so-called neo-Hindu reform movements, as for instance the Brahmo Samaj which came into being as a sequel to the encounter with Christianity and the philosophies of west and obtained from there, i.e., from outside, the criteria of their criticism of its own tradition, no intrinsic direct western influence in the emergence of Mahima Dharma can be traced. On the contrary, this movement derives criticism of the Hindu tradition directly from the tradition itself, thus standing an almost

paradoxical two-fold relation to the tradition which it accepts on the one hand and rejects on the other.\(^{376}\)

In the 19th century the Mahima cult spread throughout Orissa and common people were very much attracted towards it. It was a powerful challenge to counteract on the one hand, the aspects of the Christian missionaries, and the other hand, the appeals of Brahmo movement.

Mahima Movement was the latest religious movement in Orissa originated from an indigenous cult known as Mahima Dharma or Alekha Cult. Mahima Swami was its founder and his life-history is still shrouded in mystery. It is said that Mahima Swami went to the Kalizas hills of Dhenkanal in 1838, where he betook himself to severe meditation for 22 years. Thereafter, in 1862, he started to propagate his faith among masses. In 1876, Mahima Swami passed away at Joranda in Dhenkanal district.\(^{377}\) This Joranda has now become the chief centre of Mahima Dhanna.

The emergence of this movement in Orissa can be attributed to several factors inherent in the socio-economic and cultural life prevalent at that time. Orissa after coming under the British rule in 1803, was experiencing various upheavals in the socio-economic and cultural spheres. The people were worst-hit on account of the repeated famines, in accessible roads, non-recognition of the native language, division among the native rules some of whom exploited the men of the soil, some others supported the British rule and, were in conflict among themselves. The age old values were in course of time, lost sight of. In the circumstances, it is natural to find protests and programmes of action in operation both from within and without from time to time with a view to arresting the pace of degradation and degeneration and also to reviving the restoring truth, non-violence, equality etc., in the light of these developments, Orissa was environment conducive for Mahima Swami, as he was called the originator of the faith. The decadence

of moral and spiritual heights, polytheism and stratification of caste/sex structure being rampant and corruption, inaction and despondence being widespread made the ground necessary for some kind of reform and regeneration. Moreover, the colonial rule itself was considered by people as a kind of imposition of alien values and culture as the society and practices of the native people.

The essence of teaching of Mahima Swami i.e., Mahima cult is that people should workshop Brahma who is said to be Alekh (indescribable) Anadi (without beginning), Nirakara(formless), Anent (endless), Nirvana (attributes) and Niranjana (spotless). Mahima cult did not believe in any form of idol worship. Even the Mahimites completely disclaimed the famous Jagannath deity. Their chief place of worship and meditation at Joronda is Sunya Mandira where clsuarz or Bralima is directly meditated upon without any medium of image or idol. Mahima Dhanna gave emphasis to prayer, but it should be directly to the Lord himself, the form less 'Sunya Brahma' not to any particular image of the Lord. Besides idol worship and meaningless rituals, Mahima cult went against irrational social practices like casteism, child-marriage and polygamy. The salient features of the code of the conduct prescribed for Mahimaities are as follows; Brahma is one and the only one. Except Brahma no other deities should be worshipped. Polytheism should be discarded. A casteless society should be made. Any type of rites and rituals are forbidden for the Mahimaites. The followers of Mahima Dhanna should not attend dance, dram, musical performances and any other type of recreational activities, rather they should spend their leisure time in Bhajan, Kirtan and Smarana. Intoxicants should refrain themselves from egoism, anger, cruelty, passions, unholy deeds and robbery. Being the believers of non-violence, they should not go for animal sacrifice.

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378 Nath, S, Mahima Dhanna, Retrospects and prospects, in A Comprehensive History and Culture of Orissa, N, Delhi,1997,p-480.
The Mahimaites contend that the Mahima (real) is also Iswara. They hold that the realisation of Brahma can be attained by Bhakti (devotion) primarily.

For the highest attainment (Moksha), the rigorous yogic practices are prescribed in Mahima Dharma. The Mahima Cult has got same affinity with the Hindu religion. It believes in doctrine of Karma, rebirth and transmigration of souls which are similar to Hinduism.

In the true sense, Mahima Dharma synthesised the Vedic traditions with a reformative trend. Its aim was to purity Hinduism by denouncing the blind beliefs and irrational practices. Therefore, Mahima Dharma can be considered as a reformist movement within the Hindu fold.

Mahima Dharma attracted many low-caste Hindus into its fold. They got admitted in order to raise their social status. Some tribal people of Orissa also embraced this faith.

Like other religious movements coming of during that period, Mahima movement was also radical socio-religious movement seeking to change the vices afflicting the socio-religious spheres, like breaking the age-old customs and practices of Hindu society. It never intended to promote a new religion in the society. But it made an attempt to force human beings from the narrow social divisions in the case-ridden society of Orissa. It denied the priesthood and did not require the services of Brahmins to perform socio-religious rituals. The Mahimaites discarded the idol worship and never attended the feasts and festivals associated with rituals. Even the tribal people who used to take liquor and indulged in dances, gave up them after converting to Mahima Dharma. The greatest disciple and preacher of Mahima was Bhim Bhoi, a greatest poet through his lyrical poetry. A tribal by birth, Bhim Bhoi popularised the main tenets of the Dharma through

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77 Nath, S. op. cit., p-483.
381 Patnaik, N.R, op.cit.,p-630.
his Bhajans and songs. According to a report in Utkal Dipika in 1881, some followers of Bhim Bhoi raided the Jagannath temple. They declared that under the command of Alekha Swami they had come to burn the images of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra and they had came upto the central part of the temple. In the scuffle between the temple guards and the intruders in which one of the intruders died. The other intruders were tried and sentenced jail terms for their severe act. Similarly several lower caste people being sidelined and oppressed by the higher caste people had joined the Dharma in all districts and the regulation districts also. Notable example of the Dharma is the 'Panas; of Angul, a lower caste notorious for stealing seemed to have given up their hereditary profession of burglary under the influence of Mahima religion, but the followers of this new religion were seen to have outcasted or ex-communicated by their Hindu brethren and to have formed a community of themselves.382

The Mahimaite also condemned polygamy, child marriage and even expensive forms of marriages. The marriageable age of them was fixed. For the males it was 24 and for females it was 16. This measure indirectly helped to reduce the number of child widows in the society by increasing the marriage age. By introducing and adhering to the ideals of monogamy, the Mahimayites did not marry more than one wife. All these practices helped to improve the status of women in the then society.

The Dharma initially started as a socio-spiritual renaissance movement, both revolutionary and humanistic in the 19th century. Within the boundary of the state, it gradually spread to the country particularly in the neighbouring states such as Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam etc., Anthrative text in Itihas, Darshan, Bhajanas, etc, have been translated into Telugu, Hindi, Bengali, English etc., Thus the Dharma had spread beyond the boundary of the country and is available in USA, UK, and Germany etc.,

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But Mahima movement failed to bring about any innovation in the socio-religious life of Orissa on a large scale. It was because of slow rate of conversion. Moreover, it also found difficult to wipe out casteism, idolatry, polytheism and other deep rooted customs and practices in the traditional Hindu society.

The followers of this faith were reported to have been tortured by the Brahmins and some Zamindars. But it established itself as a radical socio-religious doctrine of the subaltern classes.

In any case, this socio-religious reform of 19th century Orissa influenced later the life of the people so much so that those can be rightly called the harbingers of the prosperity and progress which came in the 20th century. The entire society and culture underwent a transformation.

The ideals of Mahima Dharma indirectly contributed for the raising of status of women. The Principle and practice of monogamy helped in reducing polygamy in the society, at least the followers adhered to it. By stipulating the marriageable age of girls and boys, it continued the incidence of child marriage to a large extent, thereby reducing the number of widows at a early age.

The conversion of tribals into this cult helped in raising their status in the society. A process change occurred in them where in gave up their traditional practices and took up healthy and simple life like other people from plains.

Above all, Mahima movement was a indigenous reform movement arising out of the existent socio-religious milieu and not influenced by any other religion. In that way, it stands as a supreme challenge to the Hinduism and its practices in the 19th century.
WOMEN EDUCATION AND THEIR UPLIFTMENT:

The two main issues on which the socio-religious movements of 19th century focussed on were the abolition of the rigorous practices arising out of superstition, blind faith etc., and the improvement of the conditions of women in the society. All most all the reformers laid emphasis on the necessity of the upliftment of women from the subordinate and marginal status in the society. For this to achieve, the approach adopted was the education of women so that they will be in a better position in terms of literacy and awareness. This awakening of women was much required to rid them and the society from the clutches of medievalism and conservatism.

Women occupied a very low status in medieval and early modern society in Orissa. Lack of educational facilities, child marriages, Prohibition of widow remarriages etc were some of the social factors responsible for the low status and misery of women who were reduced to the position of glorified slaves. Social barriers, conservation and female ignorance reigned supreme. Therefore, the crusade for the emancipation of women became the first objective of the social reform movement, in the 19th and the early 20th centuries. Because they were of the firm believe that with the emancipation of women, the family and later the society progress in the modern way.

The efforts of various socio-religious reform associations, reformers and government were aimed at the progress and emancipation of women. The female emancipation and the reform movements were the direct off shoots of western humanism which came along with the introduction of English education. 383

In these efforts education received greater attention as it encountered less resistance and secondly, it was felt, through education people in general and women in particular could be made to know the consequences of social evils and would develop an awareness about

the magnitude of the problem. Other reforms like the abolition of child marriages, enforced widowhood etc., could be neutralized with comparatively less resistance because of education. Therefore, education and other reforms engaged the attention of the rationalists, revivalists and people in Orissa in the second half of the 19th century and more particularly in the first decade of 20th century.

In the second half of 19th century Orissa, the slow progress of women education was started when certain enlightened families of Orissa thought of educating their female children.

But the first step in this regard was taken by the Christian Missionaries. They opened schools to remove the ignorance of the Oriya females\textsuperscript{384}. The missionaries spread the female education through the Zenana agencies. The lady missionaries and teachers formed groups who entered into the inner apartment of the ladies and taught them. In this type of system "Zenana", the teachers went to the pupils’ house. The lady teachers generally visited the houses of educated men to impart education to their ladies\textsuperscript{385}. Zenana work was first commenced in Balasore in April 1869 and one Zenana Association was started by Mrs. Satish in 1869 for educating the married girls of Balasore\textsuperscript{386}. One hundred and twenty-six women were taught in their houses by Mrs. Satish and her associates. In 1936, there were six centres at Cuttack and Balasore under the supervision of missionaries\textsuperscript{387}. Furthermore, the indigenous schools in the country side also helped in promoting women’s education in Orissa.

In Balasore a boarding school for native girls was started in 1841 with Bachelor as its patron\textsuperscript{388}. Likewise in the missionary school at Pipli, Orphan girls were given excellent training. At reaching the marriageable age, they were given in marriage to Christian

\textsuperscript{384} Sutton, A. Orissa and its Evangelisation, pp 263-264.
\textsuperscript{385} General report of public instruction in Bengal, 1871-72, pp 377-380.
\textsuperscript{386} Swaro, D. Christian Missions and their activities in the nineteenth century, p 466.
\textsuperscript{388} Sutton, A. op. cit., p 297.
cultivators at the missionary settlement\textsuperscript{389}. Similarly in 1871 Miss Crawford, an American Missionary, started a missionary girls' schools at Jaleswar. That year in September Abinash Chatterjee started Cuttack girls' school at Balubazar area of the town. Side by side with increasing number of girls attaining schools, books for them were also published. It was in 1878 that B.N.Dey published "Balikapatha" in Oriya which was the first ever book of its kind\textsuperscript{390}. Bhadrak, under the patronage of Chaturbhuja Pattanaik, a girls' school was established in 1879. Financial support for its maintenance was known to have been received from Zamindars like Baikunthanath Dey of Balasore and Brajabullah Pandhi of Eram, paying Rs. 6 and Rs. 10 respectively\textsuperscript{391}. Further at Soro, it was under the patronage of the same Chaturbhuja Patnaik that another girls' school was established in 1879 with twenty students on the roll. Similarly at Dhenkanal garh some girl students were found on the rolls of Madhyayubraj school\textsuperscript{392}. Another Hindu Balika Bidyalaya was established by some Bengalis in 1881 at Balika Bidyalaya was established by some Bengalis in 1881 at Cuttack in which there were 45 girls students on the rolls in 1882\textsuperscript{393}. For the maintenance of the school, financial help was received from the Maharaja of Keonjhar, the Rani of Talcher and others. The Government also extended its help in running the school\textsuperscript{394}.

All these schools were of the lower vernacular standard and it was only in 1882 that some girls for the first time appeared at the middle English examination\textsuperscript{395}. They were pupils of the girls schools started by Miss Crawford at Jaleswar and the Cuttack Municipality also opened four lower primary girls schools in 1883\textsuperscript{396}.

\textsuperscript{389} Hunter, W. W., op. cit., p 171.
\textsuperscript{390} Orissa Historical Research Journal, XV, 1-2, 1967, p 123
\textsuperscript{391} Utkal Dipika, 1\textsuperscript{st} February, 1879.
\textsuperscript{392} Ibid., 12\textsuperscript{th} April, 1879
\textsuperscript{393} Ibid., 2\textsuperscript{nd} October, 1880
\textsuperscript{394} Patnaik, N. R., Social History of nineteenth century Orissa, p 283.
\textsuperscript{395} Annual report on education, 1881-82.
\textsuperscript{396} OHRJ, XV, 1-2, 1967 p123.
One orphanage for women called the 'Cuttack Female Orphanage' was established at Cuttack under the patronage of Rev. J. Buckley. Though its inmates were Christians yet education was not religion-oriented 397.

It was towards the end of the 19th century that Ravenshaw Girls school was started at Cuttack. By 1897 a few more girls' schools had been established in Cuttack. In the same year in July 1897, two women students took admission in the Ravenshaw College398.

However, despite all these efforts the progress of women's education was not satisfactory and was definitely slow. But undoubtedly the introduction of female education improved the status of women in the contemporary society.

These educational development certainly increased the number of schools in the province for the girls. But there was stagnation in the higher education for girls, as after passing out of the schools very few of them joined the collegiate institutions. And in the technical education the number of girls was abysmally low. The reasons for this state of affair was mainly the conservative attitude of the people and particularly the parents of the girls. Due to these reasons, the desired change in the society was very slow. Because age-old customs and traditions do not change over-night and as a process it takes a lot of time which picked up after independence. Nevertheless the social reforms laid a strong foundation of social prosperity over which the superstructure was built in the 20th century.

**THE GROWTH OF FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS:**

The feminist consciousness usually involves the realisation and achievement of the role and rights of women in the society. This consciousness resulted in the participation and contribution of women in the activities and issues afflicting society, economy, culture etc. This feminist consciousness first came in Bengal in the last phase of the 19th century

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397 Utkal Dipika, 6th June, 1885.
398 Mukherjee, P. op. cit., p 448
among the women. The most powerful periodical ‘Banga Mahila’ appeared in 1876 expressing the nationalistic thought of Bengali women. The social reform movements of 19th century also involved the marginal status of the women and highlighted their issues like widow re-marriage, Sati, education etc., Due to these developments some of the cruel practices like Sati and female infanticide were stopped officially. It also created a platform for further progress of women in the coming years. Emphasis on women education by the British and the reformers resulted in the breaking up of social restrictions and women advancement in different fields of the society.

It was in the second decade of 20th century only the Oriya women got their first periodical ‘Paricharika’ to express their feelings. There were women poets like Sulochana Devi and Sulakshana Devi who had the courage to speak against orthodoxy in a well-known periodical like Sambalpur Hitaisini, but the tone was very mild and was not still comparable with that of the Bengali women. Orissa till the 20s of this century lacked the leadership of the powerful woman like Sarala Devi Chaudhurani - the first Bengali women leader in the national movement.

In the 20th century Gandhian phase, women in India participated in large numbers against British colonialism. Their involvement in the national movement had a linkage with the women's movement and its implications for the sharing of feminist consciousness. Orissa like Bengal, during the Gandhian phase provided a good ground for female participation. In Orissa the role of women in the anti-colonial struggle led to the concurrent progress of feminist consciousness about realities of a patriarchal culture. This feminist consciousness along with women participation in the national movement constitutes a vital aspect of the history of freedom struggle.

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400 Asha, 8th September 1919
401 See Bharati Ray, op. cit., p324.
402 Ray, Bharati, op. cit..
During the first quarter of 20th century, the consciousness for female education became more intense and meaningful. There emerged a group of enlightened educated Oriya women who played an important role in the general awakening of women in Orissa. This group of women including Reba Ray, Sailabala Das, Kuntala Kumari Sabat, Sarala Devi, Rama Devi and Malati Devi made their efforts at reforming the society and raising the standard of female education through various means and methods.

In Orissa women writings were not found relating to the political problems in the country even in the beginning of the 20th century. Kuntala Kumari Sabat, Sarala Devi and Basant Kumari Devi actually set a stage, for women consciousness which became widespread with others participation. Kuntala Kumari through her patriotic poems stimulated the Oriya women and particularly her ‘Ahwana’ and Gandhian movement became very popular with women in rural areas.403

It was Sarala Devi who stood as the most prominent women activist in the anti-colonial struggle in Orissa. Her participation in the national movement and her consequent effort to feminize political and social discourse to create feminist consciousness in Orissa are interesting aspects of social change during that period.

When Sarala Devi started her political, social and literacy career, a band of women activists had already come to the forefront-Manorama Mahapatra, Nishibala Naik, Pramoda Devi and Jahanavi Devi. They were actively engaged in the reforming activities for women’s uplift in the society.404

As early as 1928 women’s demand for reform of the society was forceful in Orissa. Sarala through her discourses created a new consciousness regarding the marginal and subordinated status of women. Her important articles containing the problems of women in India - ‘Hindu Samajare Nari Samasya O Samsthit’ (women problems in the Hindu

403 Mahapatra, Chakradhara "Kuntala Kumari Jeevan Charita" (Oriya).
'Adhunika Yugare Odia Nari; (Oriya women in the modern age), 'Kana sunarkatha' (about the purchase of girls on payment for marriage) appeared in the periodical Asha, in 1929 and subsequently by 1935 she had composed booklets like 'Utkalara narisamsya,' Narina Devi, Bharatiya Mahila Prasanga, Narira Jagator and Virangana. These discourses were bent upon creating feminist consciousness in Orissa. No women writer could write such powerful prose pieces like that of Sarala Devi in the thirties and forties of the 20th century particularly with the purpose of activising the women and consciously engaging their attention to the constructive works in the society as well as articulating the neo-identity of the Oriyas. Sarada Devi was responsible through the feminization of social and political discourages in creating feminist consciousness in Orissa. The articles written by her were full of revolutionary and radical ideas and they were intended to attempt to reform the patriarchal cultural set up prevalent that time in Orissa.

In her association with the anti-colonial struggle, she also strove to and participated to improve the standard of the villages. Her commitment and dedication for female education was total. A good example of this was her admiration for nationalist institutions like Alakasrama of Jagatsingpur and Gandhi Sevasram of Champapur, which was established by the famous Gandhian, Govinda Mishra. In 1931, Sarala Devi visited the area and presented an account of the institution and wished to convert this centre to be a centre of congress constructive programmes.

In the thirties and forties she was very busy in the making of the feminist consciousness in Orissa. In her paper published in different periodicals and journals she demanded economic independence for women. She gave a new discourse on womanhood in another article.

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404 Rama Devi, "Jeevana Pathe" (Oriya) Cuttack, 1984, p86.
Her articles in large number focussing specifically women's movement in Orissa were published in the well-known periodicals like Asha, Nabeen and in the journals like Utkala Sahitya and Sahakara. Highlighting her contribution in 1934 Modern Review of Calcutta (in its November issue remarked):

“Srimati Sarala Devi of Utkala is the first lady to be appointed as the director of the Cuttack Central Co-operative Bank. Orissa owes much to her activity, both in the political sphere and social reform activities. She has given a strong impetus to the progress of the women’s movement in that province. She has broken through the long-standing purdah system prevalent in her community. She is a member of the All-India Congress Committee. She presided over the Tamil Nadu Women’s Conference held at Erode in the Madras Presidency. She is a self-made lady, having fought her way in all her struggles with orthodox society and adverse circumstances.”

Some feminist magazines were published in Orissa during this phase. The first was Paricharika or Sikshya Darpan which was edited by Basanta Kumari Devi in the middle of the second decade of the 20th century. For its publication Sarala Devi had contributed Rs.24 in 1919. She edited a women's magazine named ‘Sabita’ which was short lived. On behalf of Bihar and Orissa women council, Shakuntala Rao had published and edited ‘Aloka’ which contained women writings.

Sarat Kumari Samantrai on behalf of Utkal Christian Association also edited for some time a women magazine called Prabhat which was more on missionaries activities in Orissa than on women problems in general. However, from 1937 Sarala Devi published her views for feminist consciousness in Orissa in a permanent column called Mahila Mahala in an well-known monthly magazine named Sahakara.

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408 Asha, 8th September 1919.
409 Nanda, C. P. op. cit., p 85-88
410 Sahakara, 18th March, 1937.
Another leading and renowned women leader of Orissa was Rama Devi, who by all means is considered the greatest woman freedom fighter and pioneer in women and social upliftment in the state. Being born in a family of great freedom fighters of Orissa, Rama Devi displayed untiring efforts for the cause of social evils. Though her main involvement and contribution lie in the freedom struggle against colonialism side by side she also contemplated to bring about reform and change in the society. Rama Devi fits very well into the Gandhian paradigm of the man-woman relation in the context of Satyagraha.\footnote{Pradhan, A. C, Rama Devi, The Profile of a Gandhian Congress woman., in Role of Women of Orissa in the Freedom Struggle, OSA, Bhubaneswar, 1998, pp 26-27}

Enlightening family influences and affluence notwithstanding, she had to face difficulties which Oriya women in those days were subjected to. But by sheer dint of merit and committed work she called overcome all the hurdles coming in her way.

Towards the end of 1932 Rama Devi and her woman co-workers, such as Kokila Devi, Susila Devi, Godavari Devi, Tulasi Devi, Manika Devi, Chandramani Devi, Annapurna Roy, Amiya Ghose, Malati Choudhary Purabai and Nathibai took up anti-untouchability work.\footnote{Ibid.} For some time Rama Devi worked as she Secretary of Orissa Branch of Harijan Sevak Sangham. In Cuttack town Rama Devi, Malti Devi, Binapuri Devi and Kiranabala Sen rendered services to the untouchables. They went to the scavengers’ colonies and rendered such services as teaching their children persuading them to give up wine and beef and reading out scriptures like Ramayana, while carrying on anti-untouchability work, Rama Devi, became convinced that women as mothers had great roles to play in the society and that the awakening of the country was impossible without the awakening of its material force. Rama Devi and Malati Devi and a number of other women workers participated in Gandhi's Harijan Padayatra (foot march) which began at Parion 9th March, 1934.


\footnote{Ibid.}
After the Civil disobedience movement, a number of women workers took up constructive work in the villages, following Mahatma Gandhi’s line of action. According to Annapurna Maharana, about twenty women workers worked in various rural areas of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore districts. Six other ladies - Godavari Devi, Sushila Devi, Tulasi Devi, Mangala Sengupta, Annapurna Devi, Manika Devi and Shobha Panda, also joined hands with Rama Devi in the constructive work at Bari. They propagated and implemented such items of constructive programme as promotion of Khadar, service to the Harijans, spread of Hindu as the national language, women’s upliftment, basic education, prohibition, adult education etc., Being trained by them some village women took up spinning and tried to implement other items of the constructive programme. The constructive work, undertaken by Rama Devi, Gopabhandhu Chowdhary and their co-workers, prepared the ground for large-scale participation of the common people of Bari in the subsequent movements especially Quit India Movement.

As the social consciousness and movement were deeply linked with the political struggle against colonialism, the women leaders being actively engaged in the larger struggle, also put emphasis on the social front and reform simultaneously. The Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930s undoubted by brought about an unprecedented awakening among the women of Orissa as elsewhere in India.

"The eternal problems of female education and emancipation that has been baffling social workers 'seemed' to have solved themselves". The participation of women in the movement of 1930s in an appreciable number was itself an index of awakening among them. Women leaders like Rama Devi, Malati Choudhary, Sunamani Devi, Janhavi Devi, Subhadra Devi made praiseworthy efforts to mobilize women in the nationalist movement as well as bring about awakening among them. By their exertions they elevated the position and role of women in public life. These women leaders belonged to the congress-oriented families. Rama Devi, Malti Choudhury and Kiran Bala Sen mostly

418 Ibid., pp 70-71.
worked among women in the Cuttack district. Sarala Devi worked among the women in the Puri District. Janhavi Devi, Kokila Devi and Subhadra Devi worked in the Balasore District. The woman workers generally belong to the caste Hindu middle class families. Out of forty five line resisters who were in Cuttack jail in 1932 sixteen belonged to the Karan caste, seven to the Khandayat, seven to the Brahmin caste and ten to other castes (which included one Harijan woman named Hiramani Behera) and five to Bengali families.

The women's participation in the public life particularly in Cuttack to bring gender justice in the society is another aspect of ensuing freedom struggle. The women, especially those belonged to the middle class and those who had early education, did show the political and social consciousness by showing interest and by actively participating in the public affairs, as their sisters elsewhere in India. The twenties of the present century witnessed the heightened women's activism in the political and social life of Orissa, particularly in the context of Gandhian era of freedom struggle. Mrs. Sailabala Das had organised a women's conference in the Ravenshaw Girls School in 1918, with a view to establish a branch of All India Women's Conference. During his visit to Cuttack in February 1921, Mahatma Gandhi addressed a meeting of about forty women at Vinod Vihari, Cuttack. Though efforts of the leading women of Cuttack such as Sarala Devi, Rama Devi, Sarojini Chowdhury, Hiramani Devi, an All India Women's Conference was held at Cuttack on 30th June, 1924 and it was participated by around 200 women. Women such as Rasamani Devi, Sarala Devi etc., participated and addressed the conference on the subjects varied as education, Oriya nationalism untouchability, and pleaded for opening a branch of All India Women's Conference in Orissa at Cuttack. At the all India level, several women from Cuttack, Rama Devi, Hiramani Devi, attended the Gaya

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415 Pranakrushna Padhihary's reports.
417 Choudhury Rama Devi, op. cit., p 85.
418 Ibid.
session of Indian National congress in 1922\textsuperscript{419}. Further, the Calcutta session of Indian National Congress in 1928 was also attended by leading women leaders of Orissa like Rama Devi, Sarojini Chowdhary, Sarala Devi, Jahnavi Devi, Kokinal Devi and others.

However, an analysis of the nature and the types of women’s participation in the freedom struggle and other public activities shows that the lead was taken by women only from the heading, respectable and educated families. They came mostly as wives, daughters, sisters etc., of the leading public figures of Orissa.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the women’s leaders participation in the local and national level struggle was quite creditworthy. They were arrested and put in jails several times during the Civil Disobedience movement and other movements. These women despite heavy odds against them as natural in an obscurantist society as Orissa of the time, through their untiring efforts continued in the mobilisation of rural women in various social and political movements.

\textsuperscript{419} Utkal Dipika, 26\textsuperscript{th} July, 1922.