CHAPTER - VI
Chapter VI

Socio-Religious Movements in the Nineteenth Century and Their Impact on Orissa

(a) The Quest For Social Reforms in Orissa

The social evils in India reached the climax in the second half of the eighteenth century which was called the "darkest" period in its history. The advent of British rule, raised high hopes due to the impact of renaissance, reformation and resurgence in the nineteenth century. But several highly abusive practices such as "Sati", "Infanticide", "Purdah", "Dowry", "Perpetual Widowhood", Early and "Unequal Marriages", "Polygamy", "Kulinism" and "Devadasi" system pervaded its social setting in the eighteenth century. The social reform movements in the nineteenth century sought to wipe out these evil practices as they were deterrents to "national resurgence and progress". Following their occupation of Orissa in 1803 however, the British witnessed several gruesome forms of social abuses such as "Sati", "Polygamy", "Infanticide" and "Meriah" ("Human Sacrifice") system. With their reforming zeal, they sought to deal with the situation initially with firmness. But after encountering stiff opposition from the native quarters, the Company decided to go through the process of wiping out these social abuses rather slowly and in a phased manner.
To begin with, the condition of women in Orissa as elsewhere in India was not much different during the nineteenth century. Also in a province like Orissa where illiteracy, ignorance and poverty were rather common, women in general constantly faced social ordeals in terms of prevailing customs and superstitious beliefs such as "Sati", "Polygamy", and "Infanticide". To elaborate, "Sati" means a socio-religious practice of burning a "chaste and virtuous" widow in the funeral pyre of her husband. It was believed that such an act was "so meritorious that it ensured for her and her husband a place in the heaven". While the exact period of the origin of Sati is not known, we find references of the system in the writings of great medieval Oriya poet, Sarala Das in the fourteenth century. The earliest recorded Sati was in 1553 when seven widows belonging to the royal family became Sati in the state of Hiradol and that the wives and mistresses of the Raja of Jeypore committed "Sati after his death in 1752. Further, at Narayan Patna in Koraput district a King ruled who married a new queen every day and all of them became Sati after his death.

The practice of Sati was particularly prevalent in royal and

298. J.C. Oman, Cults, Customs and Superstitions of India (Delhi, 1972), p.108.


301. R.C.S. Bell, Orissa District Gazetteer, Koraput (Cuttack, 1945), p.175.
The practice of Sati was particularly prevalent in royal and aristocratic families of Orissa. In ruling families of Ganjam particularly such inhuman practices were found in abundance. 302

It may be observed that the mental condition of the widows and social insecurities to which they were exposed as well as persuasion/pressures from relatives and priests often forced many of these unfortunate women to become Satis. The unwilling widow was at times intoxicated by applying opium and generally dragged to the funeral pyre by relatives who desired to relieve themselves of the liability of maintaining the concerned woman. They were often motivated by the greed for property succession of the deceased husband. As for the priests, they performed the Sati and took away all the precious jewels as well as other material possessions of the widow. 303 In this context, a tragic incident may be cited about the widow of Bawun Patnaik in Cuttack. After entering into the flaming pit on 10 December 1828 she made attempts to escape, but died of severe burns in the same night. 304 We have a contrary example at Puri where a Brahmin widow committed Sati smilingly. Several such happenings took place in Pattia (1827) and at Khandapada (1842). Also, a similar spectacle was witnessed at Cuttack on 19 August 1824 where a Telgu Brahmin widow immolated herself even

304. For details see N.R. Patnaik, op. cit., p. 95 and p. 102.
through the government officials strongly opposed her attempts to become Sati.\textsuperscript{305} Similar incidents took place in southern Orissa, where the daughter of Raja of Bogoda became Sati. Also, in the presence of British Officers, a Sati was committed on 5 November 1816 at Puri and that the widow of Digambar Mishra committed Sati at Balasore in 1823 with clear determination in her mind. Further, the three wives of Bhurut Narayan Deo, a relative of the Raja of Parlakhemundi became Sati in 1824.\textsuperscript{306} Instances of Sati were also found in Western Orissa at places like Deogarh and Patna.\textsuperscript{307} Also, mention can be made about two significant Sati occurrences. For instance, following the death of Raja of Angul, Jaya Singh, his queen committed Sati in 1809. Similarly in Kanika, nine queens committed Sati when the Raja died in 1812.\textsuperscript{309}

As for the British, following their occupation of Orissa in 1803, they seriously contemplated to suppress the Sati System as they regarded it as a social murder. But they did not venture to take any drastic step in view of the strong feelings

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{305} James Peggs, \textit{India's Cries to British Humanity} (London, 1830), pp.3-4.
\item \textsuperscript{306} Ibid, pp.5-6.
\item \textsuperscript{308} N. Senapati, \textit{District Gazetteer}, Dhenkanal, op.cit., p.62.
\item \textsuperscript{309} L.S.S. O'Malley, \textit{History of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa Under British Rule} (Calcutta, 1925), p.341.
\end{itemize}
on the subject in Hindus Orissa. Further, such a practice was
in vogue in states like Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Dhenkanal, Tigria,
Talcher, Hindol, Narsinghpur, Banki, Daspalla, Angul, Nayagarh,
Khandpara, Nilgiri, Ranpur and Athgarh.\footnote{For details see N.R.Patnaik, op.cit., pp.104-107.} It was Governor
General Lord Wellesley, who first sought to promulgate a
regulation in 1805 to restrict such practices. But he was
dissuaded from taking any major steps in that direction, lest it
might hurt the Hindu sentiments and provoke a mutiny in the
native army. His successors, in fact, took cautious steps for
its abolition and followed a policy of non-intervention in the
socio-religious affairs of Orissa. It was, however, the
protestant missionaries, led by John of Tranquebar and Fowell
Boxton, and the social reformers led by Raja Rammohun Roy who
successfully worked for the enactment of 1829 abolishing Sati.\footnote{For details see Ibid, pp.108-135.}

Another social custom bedevilling the society was
the practice of polygamy. It was in vogue among the Zamindar
and royal families of Orissa. Along with it was a system akin
to the practice of "Kulinism" in Bengal, such practices were
persisted with in order to highlight family pride as well as
strong feelings of casteism in Orissa.\footnote{For details see Utkal Dipika, 4 March 1876.}
During the British rule, another horrid social practice of female infanticide was prevalent among the Boora sect of Kondh tribe in southern Orissa. The existence of female infanticide was an ancient custom among that sect under which the life of the female child was not spared, except when a woman's first child was a female or when the head of a tribe or a branch wanted to form connections with inter-marriage. As for the infants, they were destroyed by exposure at the jungle ravines immediately following their birth. As a result of such practice, several villages existed without even a single female child. Such a practice, however, was neither a new crime in the "multitudinous catalogue of human guilts", nor was it confined to the Khonds of Orissa alone. Such a system prevailed also among the people of Rajputana and the Naga tribes of Assam. Thus, it was not rather strange that such a practice existed among the Khonds, "who were wild and barbarous in their ancestral traditions". It was, however, the British officials, who discovered the practice of infanticide among the Khonds of Orissa. For instance, it was George Edward Russell of the Madras Civil Service, who reported in 1836 that the practice of female infanticide was quite a common phenomenon among the

314. For details see John Wilson, History of Suppression of Infanticide in Western India (Bombay, 1855), p.17 and Lalita Panigrahi, British Social Policy and Female Infanticide in India (New Delhi, 1972); p.1, Prasanna K.Misra, Political Unrest in Orissa in the Nineteenth Century (Calcutta, 1983), pp.79-96 and Colonel Campbell, Thirteen Years Service Among the Wild Tribes of Khondistan (Calcutta, 1864), pp.139-140.
Khond tribe residing in the extensive regions comprising of the Zamindari of Surada, Korada, Bodoghor and Chinna Kimedy in Ganjam district. Also, apart from Chinna Kimedy, in a few taluks of Koraput district namely, Pootydeso, Sorrobissi, Korkahputtah, Jhoomkah and Rayagada, the practice of Infanticide male (for both and female) prevailed. However, in all these infanticidal tracts, Human sacrifices was not practised. 315

The origin of Infanticide can be traced to the legends among the Khonds, as described by Colonel Campbell, Assistant Collector of Ganjam in 1837. According to him, these tribals developed a strong feeling against women because of a tragic episode surrounding the two daughters of a Kondh father Danks Malliks. It was mentioned that these girls failed to find out husbands for themselves in their community and that acting against social customs they cohabited with some of their own cousins. Their action highly infuriated their brothers and in shame the two sisters committed suicide. Following the tragic episode, their brothers vowed before their traditional deities, Pebody and Bura Pennu to destroy completely all their female progenies. Several other Kondh legends were associated with the origin of such heinous practice. 316


Apart from the Khond tracts, the future of a girl child was determined in Jeypore area by the "Janee" (tribal priest) who prepared her horoscope. Accordingly, a bad omen exterminated her life, whereas a good omen allowed her to live. The girl with a bad omen was either thrown into the river or administered poison for her death.317

Apart from the legendary account, however, the typical temperament of Khond male also contributed to the Origin of Infanticide. For instance, they somehow reached the conclusion that their impoverished condition was due to their female members, who were merely a financial burden with no utilitarian values to them. Also, they became quite frustrated with the "Saddee" system in marriage, under which the Khond groom was to pay to the bride's father a sum varying from rupees fifty to sixty.318

The eradication of the practice, however, posed severe handicaps for the British, as the Khond region was highly inaccessible, and that there was no education among the native aborigines. Further, such a custom became quite deep-rooted among them. Despite such constraints, the British initiated strong measures and succeeded in suppressing the practice during


the nineteenth century. For instance, in August 1853, Lord Dalhousie through a resolution prescribed that the convicts of female infanticide would be punished at par with the accused for murder. To facilitate such a process, however, the Meriah Commission of Ganjam handled the problem by rescuing the victims from different parts and by rehabilitating them in different missionary centres of Orissa.  

As regards the "Meriah" or "Human Sacrifice", such a practice prevailed extensively in a wide tract of territory inhabited by the Khonds such as Ghumsar, Baud, Daspalla, Chinna Kimedy, Maji Deso, Kalahandi and Jeypore. Such a system also existed among other tribals namely, the Kols, Santals, Gonds and Bhuyans. The Human Sacrifice, but not in the form of "Meriah", however, was practised by the more enlightened people in the plains, who resorted to the sacrifice of human beings to please some imaginary spirits.

The origin of Meriah practice can be traced to the legendary accounts as well as to Kondh's own religious belief. For instance, the "Tari Pennu" sect of the Kondhs believed that their unconquered Earth Goddess, "Tari Pennu" once appeared in a feminine form called "Umbally Bylee" and introduced the art of agriculture. According to the legend, the "Umbally Bylee", while slicing vegetables once cut her finger and that


her blood after entering the soft, barren mud, became dry and firm earth. The Goddess, thereafter, summoned the adherents of her faith to cut her body up and to fill up the earth. Such an order, however, was not complied to by her followers. They instead resolved to buy human beings from other places for fulfilling her wishes. Such a practice, in fact, was practised by all Khonds belonging to both the Tari Pennu and Boora Pennu sects.\(^{321}\)

It is further described that Tari Pennu was supreme among the eighty four tribal deities. She was the solemn symbol of the productivity of nature and her worship indeed united the whole of Kondh race by a nexus of blood into race.\(^{322}\)

The Khonds strongly believed that human sacrifice would give them good crop production. Further, they believed that shedding of blood was necessary to obtain an excellent turmeric crop, an important product of the "Maliahs" or hill tracts. The Meriah victims were both male and female, irrespective of caste, religion and age. The practice, however, was carried into operation through the help of other two classes of people namely, the "Pannas" and "Dambas", who after kidnapping human beings from the plains, sold them to the highland Khonds for sacrifice.\(^{323}\)

Generally, the person chosen for Meriah was from the low caste untouchable Hindus like "Paans", "Doms" and


"Hadis". The Kondhs were very particular about making payment to the guardian of the victim. The price varied from rupees sixty one hundred thirty and it was paid was in grain, cattle or a piece of land. The Meriah was treated with extreme affection and welcomed everywhere before the ceremony. The sacrificial activity was also a regular ceremony, as the victim was dressed in new garment and taken to the Meriah ground little away from the tribal village in great procession with music and dancing.\textsuperscript{324} According to Campbell, the Meriah practice usually consisted of the sacrifice of three human beings, two to the Sun and the east and west of the village and one in the centre, with the usual barbarities of the Meriah system.\textsuperscript{325}

As regards the discovery of Human Sacrifice, the British military commander G.E. Russel, while conducting operations against Raja Dhananjaya Bhanja of Ghumsar ascended the Ghats of Ganjam for the first time to make acquaintances with the Kondhs. It was in the Maliyah tract of Ghumsar that Russell discovered the existence of human sacrifice among the Kondhs and brought the matter to the notice of the Company government. He observed further that the inhuman practice was in vogue for centuries due to inaccessibility of the region as well as indifference on the part of local Raja to the issue. Infact, the Raja never questioned the merit of the practice and

\textsuperscript{324} For details see O'Malley, Bengal District Gazetteer : Angul, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.23-25.
\textsuperscript{325} For details see Campbell's Narratives, \textit{op.cit.}, p.113.
indirectly allowed the system to persist. For instance, he was not in favour of antagonizing the Kondhs, as they always remained extremely loyal to him. In the circumstances, Russell suggested extreme caution in dealing with the Meriah issue. Instead of measures of coercion and intimidation, he emphasised on the exercise of moral influence as well as establishment of rapport with the Kondhs based on goodwill and understanding. 326

In the meanwhile another British Officer, belonging to Ghumsar operation, Charles McPherson of 43rd Madras Infantry took keen interest in studying the Meriah practice from a close angle. Also, Captains Miller and Stevenson of his regiment actually rescued 29 Meriah victims in February 1836 during the Ghumsar operation. 327 Further, Captain Campbell, Assistant Collector of Ganjam sought permission to climb the hill tracts to persuade the Kondhs to desist from the ill-practices. In fact, he remained in the region during 1836-1840 and succeeded in persuading the influential Kondhs to release about 130 victims destined for sacrifice. 328

In the meanwhile Campbell was succeeded by William McPherson. He was entrusted with the task of suppressing the Meriah Sacrifice. After analyzing the inaccessibility of the

region and the barbaric nature of the Kondhs, McPherson reached the conclusion that "any interference with the age-old socio-religious customs and practices would certainly set the whole of Maliah highlands ablaze." 329

Following such a recommendation, the British decided to form a Meriah Agency on 19 July 1845 with McPherson as the first Agent with headquarters at Russell-Konda to deal with the situation. He was to be assisted by Cadenhead, the Assistant Surgeon. 330 But the Commanding Officer of the British regiment Brigadier General Dyce severely criticized both McPherson and Cadenhead for their inability to deal with the situation firmly. This prompted the British to suspend both McPherson and Cadenhead and to put General Dyce in full charge of the Meriah Agency. In course of time, however, the British government initiated effective measures for the suppression of the practice through a band of sincere and selfless officers belonging to the Meriah Agency. They succeeded in their efforts by 1861. 331 However, analyzing the Meriah scenario, Campbell concluded:

"... The entire abolition of the rite of human sacrifice, which so recently prevailed throughout the extensive areas of Orissa, is a subject of sincere congratulation. Not one drop of blood has been shed on the altar of their barbarous superstition, nor was there manifested in any

quarter the least disposition to break the pledge of abstinence which they had vowed since long. The whole of these hills have been traversed and the pleasing results exhibited in every quarter ...”

Thus, like the evil practices of Sati and Infanticide, the custom of Meriah or Human Sacrifice was wiped out rather gradually in Orissa.

(b) **Socio-Religious Movements in the Nineteenth Century**

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Indian society was caught up with the "Vicious Circle" as created by religious superstitious and social obscurantism. As for the Hindu religion, it became a "Compound of magic, animism and superstitions". With the advent of British rule and Renaissance, however, such lofty European ideas such as "liberalism", "rationalism" and "humanism" were introduced to the Indian scene. Being inspired by such ideals, the Christian missionaries launched a major offensive on Hinduism by describing it as a "pagan and idolatrous religion laden with barbaric customs". As for the Indians, they responded to the attack under the leadership of an elite group of social reformers namely, Raja Ram Mohun Ray, M.G.Ranade, Debendranath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen, Dayanand Saraswati, Rama Krishna and Vivekananda. Besides these prominent reformers, some orthodox section in the Hindu Community also felt a strong

desire to revitalize the Indian society with a new religious fervour. Out of all these developments emerged a series of socio-religious reform movements in India. These have been categorized into "transitional" and "acculturative" movements by Kenneth W. Jones.

To begin with, socio-religious developments in Orissa on the eve of British occupation was not particularly different from the national scene during that period. At the same time it may be observed that socio-religious perspective of Orissa always centred around the institution of "Jagannath Cult". There were, however, several attempts initiated by prominent saints in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries for the reformation of Jagannath Cult in Medieval Orissa. They were namely, Sarala Das and the "Pancha Sakhas" as well as the Gaudiya Vaishnavite Bhakti preacher Sri Chaitanya.

The intervening period upto the middle half of the nineteenth century, however, was dominated by religious philosophy as propounded by a dissident Vaisnavite thinkers. They challenged the dogmatism of Vaishnavism, and denounced idolatry as well as highlighted the Buddhist doctrine of "Sunyata" and the formless and non-attributive aspects of Brahman of "Advaita Vedanta". They spearheaded socio-religious movements for reformation of the institution of Jagannath Cult. The most prominent among them was Baba Mukunda Das, alias Jogeswara Baba, Dhulia Baba or Mahima Goswamy
who brought thousands of followers to his fold especially from the rural masses of Orissa. Apart from him, others who spearheaded socio-religious movements prior to the domination by the Christian Missionaries were Sadhu Sundar Das, Arakhita Das, Ghasidasa, Bhikuru Chamar and Birsa Munda. While Sadhusundar Das, Arakhita Das and Mukunda Das propagated their ideology mostly in the coastal plains of Orissa, Ghasidasa, Bhikuru Chamar and Birsa Munda preached their ideals in the Gadjet region of Western Orissa. Further, the ideology, as preached by them was "indigenous" in character. It strongly influenced the "Mahima Dharma", the most dominant socio-religious movement of Orissa in the second half of the nineteenth century.

To elaborate, Sadhusundar Das established his Ashram at Kujibar near Cuttack. He made an in depth study into the literature and pamphlets as distributed by the Christian missionaries in Orissa. He developed a keen interest for "monotheism" and advocated for the worship of one God. He believed neither in ritualism, nor in the efficacy of the priesthood. He despised casteism as prevalent in Hinduism and accepted the doctrine of "void". His supporters, however, embraced Christianity following his death, bringing success to the energetic missionaries working in Orissa.


334. For details see P.K. Misra, History of Orissa, (Sambalpur, 1999), p.298.
As for Arakhita Das, he was a strong advocate of the doctrine of "Void", who mostly operated from his Olasuni Cave. The lifestyle of the third preacher namely, Mukund Das was quite mysterious. For instance, he wandered mostly as an ascetic for about ten years before he landed himself at Puri with a new nomenclature called "Dhulia Baba". Thereafter, he practised penance at Khandagiri and later on at Kapilasa for a long period from 1832 to 1868. After a long "Sadhana", he laid the foundations of a new faith of reformative cult called "Mahima Dharma", which in course of time spread far and wide in India. 335

As regards Ghasidasa, he founded the "Satnami Cult," whose followers remained mostly in Sambalpur region and around. Ghasidasa was a Cobbler by Caste, who was highly disenchanted with the way of life as enjoyed by people of his caste and creed. For instance, he strongly reacted against the food, liquor and evil customs as prevalent in his community and retired to the forest regions of Bilaspur for meditation and prayer. After such meditation for about six months, he returned to Sambalpur to proclaim himself as the recipient of a new divine message from God. Following this, he preached a new way of life and advised his followers to observe abstinence from

335. For details see B.B.Misra, Religious Movements in Orissa, op.cit., pp.176-177.
liquor, meat, tomatoes, idol worship, polygamy and asked them not to show undue regard to the Brahmins in the sphere of religion. He preached for the abolition of the Caste system and for preservation of equality of all men in the society. He considered himself and the members of his family more equal for holding the priesthood of the new faith called "Satnam" or the "True Name". His teachings undoubtedly created a great furor among the members of his community and that through his leadership, he threw a challenge to the caste-ridden Hindu society of the period. Following his death, however, the Satnami cult revived in Sambalpur and Bolangir regions under the leadership of one Bhikuru Chamar of Sonapur. But Bhikuru Chamar subsequently embraced the Mahima Cult at Khaliapali in Bolangir district. As regards Birsa Munda, he was a Munda by birth, who mostly worked in the Chhotanagpur region during the closing years of the nineteenth century. As for Birsa, he urged upon the members of his tribe to establish a kingdom of Munda Tribes, as parallel to that of the Chhotanagpur rulers. He undoubtedly was revivalistic in his outlook and that he emphasised on the retention of tribal faith unchallenged. He protested strongly against the establishment of foreign Christian Church in the tribal lands of the Mundas. His

followers, however, resided mostly in the Munda dominated areas in Sambalpur and Sundargarh, where his influence was quite strong and dominant.  

As for the Christian missionaries they landed in Orissa sometime in 1821. They decided thereafter to settle down at Puri and Cuttack to intensify their proselytization activities in Orissa. While indulging in such religious activities, however, they severely attacked the idolatry of Lord Jagannath, the symbol and pride of Orissan culture. As mentioned earlier, they achieved great success in their conversion endeavours due to energetic efforts spearheaded by some prominent Missionaries namely, Revered W.Bampton, James Peggs, A.Sutton and C.Lacy. Infact, these converts turned out to serve their religious cause better than the original missionaries. For instance, all of them severely castigated the Hindu Orthodoxy, idolatry and superstitious customs and thereby magnified the goodness of the Christian doctrines. Even one of them namely, Gangadhar seemed to have addressed a petition to the British government to permit him to destroy the idol of Jagannath at Puri. Further, talking in native language, they could impress upon the local people especially about the dark side of the superstitious customs such as Sati, Infanticide and Meriah. Also, there was a lot of change in the attitude and behaviour of the newly-converted Oriya Christians. For

338. For details see James Peggs, A Brief History of the General Baptist Mission, op.cit., p.251.
instance, their life style became more disciplined and systematic than before. Also they wore neat dresses and became more soft-spoken. They changed their food habits as well. Further, their marriage system worked for the removal of age-old caste systems in Orissa. Further, the Missionaries made attempts to purify the character of the converted Christians as to make them honest, benevolent, decent with due regard for truth and chastity. All these developments, created a great impact on the prevailing Oriya society in the first half of the nineteenth century.

As the missionary activities gained momentum, some intelligent and progressive section of the Hindu society, led by Raja Rammohun Ray and M.G. Rande, sought to safeguard their religion from further damage as caused by mass conversion. In the process emerged a vigorous socio-religious reform movement in Bengal called "Brahmo Samaj". Led by Rammohun, this group of Bengali people, who were English educated raised their strong voice for the protection of age-old Hinduism. Infact, they sought to give a new life to the Hindu culture with western ideas.

As for the Brahmo movement, it reached Orissa in the second half of the nineteenth century through the immigrants, absentee-landlords, teachers, job-seekers, shop-keepers and civil servants who hailed from Bengal. Its advent, however, coincided with the activities of the Christian missionaries as
well as the "indigenous" Mahima movement which was in full fury in the coastal areas of Orissa. 339 Besides the Bengali immigrants, the Brahma movement received an impetus in Orissa when one of its major proponents Devendranath Tagore visited Cuttack in the middle part of the century in connection with the supervision of his estate. His arrival was greeted with the establishment of a Brahma Samaj unit at Cuttack. on the model of "Adi Brahma Samaj", which was called Cuttack Samaj. Jagmohan Roy and others established such an organization. In course of time, A "Mandir" for Upasana prayer was built where the Brahma members used to congregate to offer prayers on Saturday evenings according to Adi Samaj rituals. 340 Also, at Cuttack, another propagator of Adi Brahma Samaj namely, Iswar Chandra Bose established a "Synod". It used to be attended by the famous Oriya novelist Fakir Mohan Senapati for sometime. Fakir Mohan, however, discontinued attending such prayer meetings latter on. 341 Also, an employee of a sweet shop at Cuttack called "Nimki Mahal" started the congregation of Brahmos at his own house. He, however, shifted the venue of Brahma Samaj to the "Mayurbhanj Kothi" palace later on. Further, some young Brahma men of Cuttack under the leadership of their distinguished teacher Haranath Bhattacharya established the Utkal Brahma Samaj at


Cuttack on 1 July 1869. It was reported in the *Utkal Dipika* that the Brahmo Samaj institutions at Cuttack intensified their vigorous activities for over fifteen to twenty years and that they were contributing membership money regularly to the Indian sessions of Brahmo Samaj held regularly at Calcutta.

It may be mentioned that Brahmo movement received tremendous boosting after Haranath Bhattacharya joined the Cuttack College in 1871. For instance, Haranath took great interest for the promotion of the Samaj as he successfully persuaded a large number of students belonging to his college to attend the "Upasana" meetings regularly. He was also a great scholar and sincere devotee of the Brahmo religion. The Brahmo movement also received tremendous encouragement when Madhusudan Rao, the great poet and educationist joined the Samaj in 1870. He was instrumental in promoting its cause further and was honoured with the prestigious title of "Rai Bahadur" by the British government.

In course of time, however, the Brahmo movement spread far and wide in Orissa to other places like Balasore, Mayurbhanj, Sambalpur, Dhenkanal, Talcher, Angul, Pallahara, Bamra etc. It was, accepted by the distinguished elites and progressive-minded

---

342. For details see N. Samantray, *op.cit.*, p.34.
344. For details see N. Samantray, *op.cit.*, p.34.
345. For details see B. S. Das, *Glimpses of Orissa*, *op.cit.*, p.139.
persons as well as literatures like Madhusudan Rao, Peary Mohan Acharya, Biswanath Kar, Sadhu Charan Roy and Fakir Mohan Senapati. Also, under the aegis of the Barhmo Samaj, efforts were made for arousing socio-cultural awakening among educated women in Orissa. For instance, the wife of K.G. Gupta, the Commissioner of Orissa, established a Mahila Samaj at Cuttack, which was attended to rather regularly by women of well-to-do families in the city. The wife of one Brahmo leader, Sashibhusan Majumdar also established a School inside the Brahmo Mandir for imparting religious and moral lessons to the children on every Sunday morning. Also, the Brahmo adherents in Orissa published journals and books like *Sangita Puspanjali*, *Varnamala* and *Jatakarma Utkal Subhakari* and *Dharmabodhini* to propagate the ideals of the movement along with newspapers like *Bahika*, *Sevaka*, *Sanskaraka*, *Nababidhana*, *Naba Sambada* and *Samyabadi*. They also published many of their books in Oriya language. Also, the wife of another prominent Brahmo leader, Sadhu Charan Roy established a school to provide education to women. Also, under the banners of the Samaj, many social marriages were performed breaking traditional superstitions and prejudices.

It may be mentioned that when the Brahmos of Calcutta agitated for the adoption of a new Act for civil marriages in 1871, the younger member of Samaj in Orissa joined with them in

347. For details see Ibid, p.139.
348. For details see Ibid, p.141.
sending a memorandum to the British government. But this was, opposed by the members of old Adi Samaj in Orissa who sent a counter-representation to the government. Ultimately, however, the matter was settled by the government allowing services for both the groups, one on Sundays and the other on Saturdays. 349

In the meanwhile, Brahmo activities took place at Balasore vigorously under the leadership of Bhagaban Chandra Das and Nandlal Banerji towards the last part of nineteenth century. 350

These developments created great influence on the cultural life of Orissa especially in the coastal areas. But all these created no impact on the western part of Orissa, where the Mahima movement was at its peak in the second half of the nineteenth century. For instance, Nandalal Bhattacharjee travelled to a number of Gadjat areas like Dhenkanal, Talcher, Angul, Pallahara, Bamanda and Sambalpur to propagate the religion but achieved very little success in this regard. 351

The spread of Brahmo movement did not make much headway in Orissa largely because it was pioneered by progressive middle class families and landlords who mostly hailed from urban areas. Also it was mostly concentrated in the towns of Orissa. It did not percolate either to the lower class people or to rural areas. Further, it met an untimely death due to the fact

350. For details see Ibid, p.522.
351. For details see Ibid, p.522.
that the Brahmo movement migrated from the neighbouring state of Bengal. Its culture was quite difficult for Oriya people to assimilate especially in the background of the first language agitation which engulfed the province only in the recent past. Also, the movement suffered due to its internal limitations. For instance, pioneers of the movement emanated from the progressive middle class families, with little contacts with the common people of Orissa. Further, the movement confined itself only to socio-religious activities and demanded only for the eradication of social evils. It did not address itself to the major socio-economic needs of common people. Despite all these limitations, it may be concluded that in limited centres of Orissa, the Brahmo leaders did pioneering work in inspiring the women folk of the province to shake off their old prejudices and to emancipate themselves from the taboos of male repression and social turpitude.

Thus, Samaj activities in Orissa present a typical case study of "acculturative" movement on the model of Kenneth Jones in the nineteenth century. For instance, it belonged to the Liberal-Reformer category which acknowledged the coercive character of Hindu social institutions and customs. It however, emphasised for social reforms by highlighting lofty European ideals such as "individual liberty", "equality for all" and "respect for the personality of the individuals". In the process it sought for a cultural synthesis in India between the new western norms and cultural themes along with the traditional systems of Hindu culture.
Out of all socio-religious movements in the nineteenth century, the "Mahima Dharma" constituted the most revolutionary of all religions in Orissa. It was founded by a religious ascetic named Mukunda Das, popularly known as "Jogesvar Baba", "Dhulia Baba" and "Mahima Goswami", some time in the second half of that century. The movement, originated at a time when the missionaries and the Brahmo Samaj were working in full fury in the province. Its foundations, however, be attributed to the strong feelings of reactions and resentment as aroused against socio-cultural domination by both the groups operating in Orissa. Further, the movement worked strongly against the orthodox Hindu Jagannath worship. It spearheaded movements for the upliftment of the down-trodden, and for the abolition of the caste system. It also emphasised on social service based on religious practices. As for the Mahimites, they adopted a more vigorous practice of "self-renunciation" and organised a large number of "Ashrams" for propagation of the cult. In such activities, they were almost emulating the christian missionaries in Orissa. With their utmost love, self sacrifice and sincere devotion, they successfully arrested the spread of Christianity and prevented the utter collapse of the Hindu structure from the hands of missionaries in Orissa.
To begin with, Kenneth W. Jones categorized the socio-religious movements in British India into two categories namely, "transitional" and "acculturative". This was on the basis of "uneven development of the colonial milieu" as well as the "persistence of indigenous forms of socio-religious dissent" in India. According to such a categorization, the "transitional" movements evolved out of indigenous forms of socio-religious dissent in India with virtually no influence from the "colonial milieu", whereas the "acculturative" movements emanated from the "colonial milieu" and that their propagators were strongly influenced by western and especially the English culture. Jones, however, concluded by stating that the "transitional" movements, became "acculturative" in course of time and that the essential difference between these categories was "mainly at their points of origin".

Adopting such a framework for Orissa, it may be observed that while Brahmo Samaj belonged to the "acculturative" category, Mahima Dharma constituted a "transitional" movement on the pattern of Arya Samaj and Kabirapanthi activities in the nineteenth century. However, the "Mahima Dharma" as an indigenous transitional movement became somewhat "acculturative" in course of time. Such a scenario is illustrated by the fact that Mahima Dharma incorporated the basic principles of Brahmo Samaj. For instance, the Mahimites did not believe in idol

352. For details see Kenneth W. Jones, Socio-Religious Movements in British India (Hyderabad, 1989), pp.3-4.
worship and regarded God as "formless" but "omnipresent" and "omniscient". Like Brahmo Samaj, they did not believe in caste system, priesthood and followed the doctrine of "void". Also the Mahimites, like the christians, believed in one religion, one caste and one God.\textsuperscript{353} It is probably on account of the strong influences of both Brahmo and Christian faiths that "Mahima Dharma" acquired certain "acculturative" characteristics in course of time. It is because of such peculiar characteristics that Mahima Dharma was described differently by scholars working on the religion. For instance, according to N.N. Vasu, it is "Modern Buddhism", Chittaranjan Das regards it as an "offshoot of Oriya Vaishnavism" of the "Panchasakhas". The philosophy of "Void" prompts some scholars to consider it as the representation of "Sunyavaad"\textsuperscript{[354]} as advocated by the Brahmos. On the contrary, A. Eschman believed Mahima Dharma as an "autochthonous religion" based on indigenous Jagannath traditions.\textsuperscript{354} From all these descriptions it became quite clear that Mahima Dharma embodied within itself several cardinal principles of different religions which flourished in India (including Christianity).

\textsuperscript{353} For details see P.K. Misra, History of Orissa, op.cit., p.301.

As regards the foundations of the religion, it is narrated in the literatures of Mahima Dharma. They mention that Jogeswar Baba or Mukunda Das or Mahima Goswami was its founder. The early life of Mahima Goswamy, like many other religious saints of Orissa, however, was shrouded in mystery. But he seemed to have appeared for the first time publicly as "Dhulia Baba [the dust clad prophet] at Puri in 1826 to participate in a meeting of the Brahmanas at the "Mukti Mandap" of Lord Jagannath. It is reported that while commenting on the nature of the "Brahmanas", he severely criticized them as "unqualified Satchidananda". But prior to such public utterances, he maintained a rather low profile. For instance, he spoke very little and was found meditating always in a cave near Puri. He was, however, described by the members of his cult as the "incarnation" of God who came to the world to establish and protect the "Satya Sanatan Dharma". His followers portrayed him as one who was born out of "Sunya" or "Void" but not physically from a mother's womb. Further, he was described as a "Brahmin" himself, who took the shape of a man and emerged on the earth to protect the "Dharma". Also he was described as no human being but a pure incarnation of "Mahima" ["Radiance Glory"] of "Sunya Anadi."


356. For details see M.N. Das, Sidelights on History and Culture, op.cit., p.447.
Brahman who appeared in the Himalayas. Thus, several legends mystified the origins of Mahima Goswami.

The followers of Mahima Dharma are further described as the "Alekhas" or "Formless". They regard Mahima Goswami as the "incarnation" of "Alekha", who is formless but in special communion with the "Alekhas", the spiritually "omnipresent" as well as "omniscient". The "Alekhas" are further characterized as the "Kumbhipatias". Some of Mahimaite followers, however, did not accept Mahima Goswami as founding the "Alekha" cult, which was rather unfounded. There was clear evidence to suggest inter-connections between the "Mahima Dharma", The Alekhas" and the "Kumbhi Patias". In this regard the Census Report of Mayurbhanj stated:

"... The Kumbhipatias appear to have first attracted notice in 1874. The leader of this sect was one Mukunda Das who spent some time at Puri ... and between 1840 and 1850 established himself at Zoranda near Kapilas hill in the Dhenkanal state Mukunda himself was known as the Mahima Guru and his disciples Kumbhipatias ..." 359

At the same time it is quite strange that the Saint Poet of the Kumbhipatias namely, Bhima Bhoi made no mention concerning the name of his Guru, Mahima Swami. Also, the Utkal Dipika published an article in its column entitled, "Nutan Dharma Prachar" on 1 June 1867. But it did not provide the name of the founder of the Kumbhipatia cult. Further, in

358. For details see B.C.Majumdar, "Alekhism" in Souvenir, Bhima Bhoi Samadipitha, Khaliapali (Suvarnapur, Orissa, 1999), pp.10-15 and Baba Viswanath, Satya Mahima Dharma Itihis (Cuttack, 1935) in Oriya, pp.10-11.
its subsequent news items on 6 September 1873, 12 March 1881 and 26 March 1881, it did not mention the name of the founder of the cult.  

It may be mentioned that George A. Greeson provided a comprehensive and scholarly analysis concerning the growth of the "Alekha" cult in Orissa. From his analysis, however, it could be presumed that Mukunda Das was the founder of both the "Mahima Dharma" and the "Alekhanamis". Also, K. N. Sen in his article on "Medieval Mystics of North India and Minor Sects of Bengal and Orissa" in the Cultural Heritage of India observes the following concerning "Mahima Dharma":

"... The Mahima and Kumbhipatia panths were found in Orissa. The latter school founded by Mukunda Das does not believe in the efficacy of temple and images or in the superiority of the Brahmins ..."

Bhima Bhoi in his literary work, Nirveda Sadhana and various other sources, however, have provided the background of Mukunda Das alias Mahima Swami as well as his activities in Orissa. According to these sources, the Mahima Swami spent his childhood in the vicinity of Bolansingha (Boudh district) along with his intimate boyhood friend Jagannath Das. He began his career as a Sadhu by establishing his first Ashram at Bolansinga. Thereafter he spent about six years in Puri and another six years at Dhauligiri near Bhubaneswar, where he practised.

360. For details see Utkal Dipika, 1 June 1867, 6 September 1873, 12 March 1881 and 26 March 1881.


"penance" and did not consume any solid food. He managed to live only on water and milk after which he moved over to the Kapilas Hills of Dhenkanal in the year 1838. He established his Ashram on the southern side of the top of the hill amidst the exquisite "sylvan" beauty and the unprecedented quietude all around. After making a hectic inspection of different spots atop the hill, he decided to reside in a cave called "Kendupania". It is firmly believed by his followers that inside the cave he wore the bark of a "Kumbhi" (Yellow Cotton) tree to cover his nakedness and removed the "Kaupuni" (Small loin cloth) from his body. It is further described that one pious Savara Chief named Sadanand who lived in the nearby Deogan village watched the enlightenment of the Saint and thereafter, requested Mahima Swami to allow him to provide the fuel for the inextinguishable "Sacrificial Fire" (Anahuta Dhuni) and fruits for his consumption. Mahima Swami managed to survive with the diet as provided by Sadanand during next twelve years. While staying at the Kendupania Cave, Mahima Swami was joined by his boyhood friend Jagannath Das. He was given the new name of Govinda Baba. During this period Mahima Swami came into close contact with the ruling chief of Dhenkanal, Bhagirathi Brahamarabara Mohindra Bahadur, who very soon became his close discipline. Following this, the Guru willingly accepted the supply of milk food as provided by the ruler in an earthen pot for the next twelve years. In the process Mahima Swami lived in the Kapilas Hills for twentyfour years. After
this he made a long and hectic tour of Orissa beginning in 1862. He established several Mahima Dharma Ashrams along with his childhood friend Govind Baba at his own village as well as in the feudatory states of Tigria, Angul, Dhenkanal, Boudh, Rairakhol and Banki. 363

During his long tour of Orissa, Mahima Swami along with Govind Baba met Bhima Bhoi in his Kondh village of Kankanapada near Rairakhol. Both of them requested the poet to spread the "Satya Mahima Dharma" among the poor people of his area. In response, Bhima Bhoi pointed out rather politely that it was not possible on his part to perform such responsibilities as he was illiterate as well as blind. The two friends thereafter appointed two Pundits to join Bhima Bhoi as his disciple so that they could help the blind poet by writing down all that would come from his lips. In this manner the blind poet sung the "Lila of Alekh", which was recorded by his disciples. Thus, Bhima Bhoi became a saint as well as a famous poet due to the blessings of Mahima Swami. He in fact devoted himself sincerely to the cause of the Mahima religion. 364


364. For details see Baba Viswanath, op. cit., pp. 10-11.
During his tour of Orissa, Mahima Swami established a large number of Ashrams and "Alekh Anahata Dhuni" (inextinguishable fire) temples in the districts of Dhenkanal, Puri, Mayurbhanj. He also pioneered the setting up of Ashrams and "Dhuni" Mandirs at several places such as in Damana of Patia, Daruthenga of Khurda, Khuntuni in Athgarh and at Kamakshyanagar in Dhenkanal etc. The biggest of all Ashrams, however, was set up at Joranda in Dhenkanal district. For the promotion of his religious activities, the ruler of Dhenkanal assisted him considerably. In fact, along with the ruler, Mahima Swami organised a number of congregations, religious discussions and sacrifices in the districts of Dhenkanal and Puri. The biggest event, however, was the organization of a Mahima fair or "Mela" at Malbiharpur of Banki in 1864, where about fifty thousand huts were constructed for the temporary accommodation of "Alekh Dharma" devotees. 365

Under the inspiration of Mahima Swami, the ruler of Dhenkanal also performed a commendable job during the Great Famine of 1866. He was extremely generous and benevolent in matters of providing relief to the famine affected people along with the Mahimaite followers of Dhenkanal. His boundless charity

for the starving population recognition earned for the ruler with the title of Maharaja from British hands later on.366

The march of Mahima Dharma, however, received a great setback with the death of Govind Baba at Daruthenga in 1867. The entire responsibility of leading the movement thereafter devolved upon Mahima Swami, who emphasised on the practice of truth, non-violence, tranquility, purity of conduct, deep compassion and forgiveness. But to his utter dismay, he discovered during the Famine that some evil practices were followed in some Hindu Monasteries (Maths) of Orissa. For instance, the food grains preserved at these monasteries were not utilized properly for the famine-stricken people. In fact, the situation began to deteriorate further in the years 1867 and 1868. Such an ugly scenario very soon prompted one teacher of Cuttack town, Kedarnath Dutta, to write a book attacking such evil practices at some "(Maths) in Orissa. Such developments also provoked Mahima Swami to make a scathing attack on the "Maths" which, however, aroused severe reactions from the priests, Brahmans and the privileged classes in Orissa.367

366. For details see Utkal Dipika, 9 January 1867.
367. For details see Ibid, 21 March 1868 and Baba Mahindra, op.cit., p. 29. See also S.N. Chinara, "The Impact of the Alekha Cult on the Kissan Society" in Cultural Heritage of Orissa (Bhubaneswar, 1984), vol. I, pp. 89-93.
Mahima Swami was further distressed to watch the ugly activities on the part of missionaries. For instance, they cleverly exploited the famine situation by supplying food and shelter to the destitutes at first and then converting the low caste and out caste Hindus to Christianity. To counteract against this, he personally supervised the programme of food supplies to the famine victims in Orissa. Also, he organised a "Balyalila" (Children Sports) on a grand scale at Boulpur in 1868. Such activities were undertaken undoubtedly, with religious purposes, to counter the missionary activities as mentioned above. In fact, he devised an intelligent system of "Balyalila" (Children Sports), under which he made provisions for the supply of food and nourishment to the children in the guise of Mahima "Prasads". In the process he was able to arrest religious conversion efforts by the missionaries to some extent. Further, by his charitable and devotional rites, he was able to arouse the religious consciousness of the destitute children to become friendly to the Mahimite ideology in the long run. As for the Raja of Dhenkanal, he supported the "Balyalila" activities enthusiastically by providing adequate financial support for such projects. In the process "Mahima Dharma" became quite popular in Orissa by 1873.  

---

368. For details see Baba Mahindra, op.cit., p.29.
Following these visits, Mahima Swami returned back to settle down at Dhenkanal. He established his Ashram at Joranda, the principal seat of Mahima Dharma in Orissa. Thereafter he confined his activities at Joranda by inviting religious men to join with him in intellectual discourses and debates. It was also during this period that the editor of Utkal Dipika, Gourishankar Ray conducted a personal interview with him at Joranda. But a sad period in Mahimite history commenced in 1873, when some of his Mahimite followers entered the Madhupur area for religious propagation, but were driven out of the area by its ruler as they were considered as "anti-Hindus". Two months later, after his followers successfully converted a good number of Brahmins, Karanas and Radhis to their faith at Jajpur, the Brahmins residing in the town decided in their community meeting that any one embracing the Mahimite cult would be declared an out-caste. Further, such converts were warned that no one would maintain any social relationship with them.\textsuperscript{369}

The year 1873 witnessed another sad event in the History of Mahima Dharma. For instance, a "Kumbhipatia" after becoming mad, tried to commit suicide unsuccessfully and was transported for life imprisonment. Another follower, Narasingh Das, admitted his criminal offence and was sent to prison. Following this, the Mahimaites earned a bad reputation. They were further looked down upon as anti-Hindus, as they did

\textsuperscript{369} For details see Utkal Dipika, 6 September 1873. See also S.N.Chinara, Op.cit., pp.89-93.
not accept the traditional caste system in the society. Also, they became quite unpopular among high caste Hindus as the Mahimites would not accept any food from their houses, but would take food from the houses of untouchables. As regards the feudatory chiefs, they supported the prejudices as entertained by high caste Hindus against the Mahimites and started torturing them. As for Mahima Swami, he responded to these developments by advising his followers to maintain restraint as well as to observe toleration. He asked his followers to ignore these provocations and to remain steadfastly loyal to the faith. 370

There was further confusion in the Mahimite ranks in 1874 when a great religious congregation was organised at Jacka in Dhenkanal state. At this convention severe disagreements developed among the Mahimite saints over the code of conduct and on the issue of appropriate cloth for the "Kaupini". Infact, some orthodox Brahmins who embraced the religion recently, secretly masterminded such a confusion within the group. Following such differences, Mahima Swami announced that he would no longer bestow to any his disciples "Kumbhipata". 371 Such an announcement, aroused bitter feelings among his followers, who resorted to mutual fights against one another resulting in bloodshed. This prompted the Commissioner

370. For details see Biswanath Baba, op.cit., pp.10-11.
371. Baba Raj Kishore, Mahima Dharmara Samkhipta Itihas (Cuttack, 1941) in Oriya, pp.2-3.
of Orissa to conduct an enquiry into the matter by the mischievous Assistant Superintendent of Police namely, H.K. Das. Infact, Das reached the disturbance spot with a force, but, did not find Mahima Swami over there as the latter left for Keonjhar in a hurry. Thereafter Mahima Swami organised another fair in the year 1875 at Jacka in Dhenkanal, where a large number of his followers assembled. They presented to him various kinds of valuables and precious kinds of cloth, which after exhibition were offered by Mahima Swami to the ruler of Dhenkanal. The ruler, however, declined to accept such presents and on his refusal, they were consigned to be burnt in the "Sacred Fire" (Dhuni). In the meanwhile, the ruler of Dhenkanal offered the village of Atinda to Mahima Swami for the maintenance of Joranda monastery. But the latter refused to accept the offer on the ground that such economic possessions on the part of Joranda Ashram would not ensure a healthy life for the Mahima Dharma. Thus, towards the end of his religious career he became highly disenchanted with his life due to bitter dissensions within his followers as well as due to highly hostile stance as adopted by the high Caste Hindus. With such bitter frustration and anguish he met his death on 6 March 1876.372

372. For details see Baba Viswanath, op.cit., pp.220-221 and Mahindra Baba, op.cit., pp.48-49.
It was quite evident that the attitude of the British government was also equally hostile to Mahima Swami and his followers. For instance, after his death, the houses left by the Guru at Malabiharpur and Dhenkanal were sold by them as "unclaimed and deserted property". Also, on a complaint lodged by some mischievous elements regarding Mahimite activities, the Political Agent at Sambalpur deputed the notorious Assistant Superintendent Police, H.K. Das to move over to Joranda for stern action following the death of Mahima Swami in 1876. Infact, Das ordered his disciples to vacate the religious place and following their refusal, he arrested many of them and subjected them to severe punishment and humiliation. Das further warned his followers neither to cover the unearthed burial ground nor to construct any memorial or tombstone for the deceased saint at Joranda. On their firm refusal to obey such orders, a large number of his followers were arrested and sent to Angul. The ruler of Dhenkanal was also advised not to allow any "pucca" construction to be raised in memory of the saint at Joranda. Thus, Mahima Swami was unfortunately subjected to a most humiliating treatment even after his death at the British hands.

As regards the followers of Mahima Cult, they were divided into two groups namely, "Para" and "Apara". They wear saffron loin cloth and hold an umbrella. Some of them carry

373. For details see Baba Raj Kishore, op.cit., p.4 and Baba Viswanath, op.cit., p.223.
long hair and beard. They believe in the worship of "Alekh Param Brahma, which is termed as "Vishadvaita-Brahmavada", "Param Brahma" or "Alekh", formless, limitless, omnipresent and omniscient and all pervading. He was equated with "Sunya" or "Void". "Brahma" was the cause of world's creation and "Mahima" meant wonder or greatness. It was due to Brahma's greatness that the world evolved, preserved and could be destroyed. There was no trace of "Maya" in Mahima Cult. Much of the Mahima philosophy was derived from the Upanishads, which, however, was not acknowledged by the Mahimites. They believed that the philosophy was based on simplicity, austerity, purity of life with total dedication to the thoughts, speeches and actions of Mahima Goswami. Some scholars, however, believed that much of the Mahima philosophy was based on the Upanishads and that it was a new form of Hinduism, which sought to reform the religion from within by discarding meaningless, ritualism, priesthood and casteism.

It may be observed that the Mahima philosophy was not totally incompatible with the teachings of Vedas, Upanishads and Hinduism. There were several major ideological differences between them. For instance, while Mahimaism showed respect to the authenticies of the Old Hindu scriptures, yet it made serious attempt to reform the traditional thoughts of Hinduism. For instance, the Hindu concepts of casteism and idolatry were the chief targets of attack by the Mahimites. But, they did not believe in the Hindu system of idol worship. This was
clearly evident when a group of Mahimites stormed the gateway of the Jagannath Temple in 1871 and made attempts to destroy the idol. In the eventual skirmish that followed with the Pandas, some of the Mahima Sanyasins were killed.\footnote{374} Thus, while it was a wrong hypothesis to regard Mahima Dharma as a complement to Jagannath worship, as maintained by A. Eschman, "in her article on Jagannath cult still it would be quite appropriate to regard the Mahima Dharma as a reform movement beyond the regional traditions of Lord Jagannath but within the Hindu Dharma Movement.\footnote{375} Thus, it was construed as a reform movement embracing Vedantic ideas for modern Orissa.

To conclude the story, it may be mentioned that following the death of its founding father, the blind poet Bhima Bhoi became the "greatest exponent" and "foremost missionary" of Mahima Cult. In fact, the illiterate, poor and blind Kondh poet became an "uncompromising socio-religious iconoclast". In fact, through the preachings of Mahima Dharma he generated a profound influence on large masses of people in Orissa.\footnote{376} It may be observed further that as Sankaracharya defended India against degenerate Buddhism and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda against the invasions of Christianity, Bhima Bhoi

\footnote{374. N.N. Vasu, \textit{op. cit.}, p.161.}
\footnote{376. H.C. Das, \textit{Mahima Dharma Darshan} (Koraput, 1972) in Oriya, p.42.
successfully checked the spread of Vaishnavism on the one hand and Christianity on the other hand through his preachings of Mahima Dharma. In the process, Mahimaism became the most revolutionary of all religions that was propagated in Orissa during the nineteenth century. Further, as described by Eschman, the devotees of Mahima Cult mostly hailed from the rural masses of Orissa. They were agriculturists by profession, who responded energetically to the ideology of the Mahima Cult as disseminated through its Sanyasis. In course of time, however, the movement spread far and wide to areas outside Orissa and especially in the direction towards the tribal regions of Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Bengal and Bihar.

As regards the impact of the movement, the Mahima Cult acted as a powerful force to counteract, on the one hand the evangelical activities of the Christian Missionaries and on the other, the spread of Brahmo movement in Orissa. It may be observed that in response to the challenges of the Missionaries, the enlightened middle classes in Bengal and Orissa took shelter under the Brahmo umbrella. But the orthodox section in the Hindu community and the common people felt that they would have nothing to do with the Brahmo movement. In fact,

378. For details see A.Eschman, "Spread, Organisation and Cult of Mahima Dharma" in Daityari Panda, ed. Mahima Dharma and Darshan (Koraput, 1972), pp.173-175.
the ordinary Hindu always longed for the revitalization of the traditional Indian society with a new religious fervour. Thus, the emergence of Ramkrishna-Vivekananda movement in Bengal and the Mahima Dharma in Orissa fulfilled such a religious need. Secondly, the Mahima Dharma, through its socio-religious activities, aroused a new hope in the minds of Oriya people who aspired for attaining salvation in their traditional system. They would not want either elaborate ritualism or the predominance of priests. Thirdly, it was a most revolutionary movement in the context of the Caste-ridden society of Orissa and that its principal mission was to liberate the down-trodden men and women from the bondage of superstitious beliefs and traditions, ritualistic idolatry and the predominance of priests.

***