South India Journal of Social Sciences, December'24, Vol. 22 - No. 4
ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

TRAJECTORIES OF 'THE RELIGION OF THE PEOPLE': THE CASES OF SNDP AND MAHIMA DHARMA

Arun K Patnaik * **Anish V R** * *

INTRODUCTION:

The present paper is more about intellectual history rather than actual historical life. It primarily focuses on textual traditions and draws comparative insights in light of Gramsci's conceptual analysis of popular religion. The oral historiography and ethnomethodology may be separately adopted to determine its impact on a region's social and cultural life in modern India.The present paper tries to focus on the various activities of two popular religious sects from Kerala and Odisha: Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP)and Mahima Dharmaled by two towering lower caste intellectuals such as Narayana Guru (Kerala) and Bhima Bhoi (Odisha), both from the late 19th century colonial India.Both movements produced an alternative religio-social philosophy drawing and transcending the subaltern experience, which critiqued caste order practised forms of social equality within the respective sects but offered different liberation theologies. Despite their differential emphasis on social reform, theology and institution building, both movements complemented each other by creating a mass movement with a new 'liberation theology'.

Drawing upon Gramsci's notion of "the religion of the people", which is counter-hegemonic and believes in 'intellectual and moral reformation' of an unequal society, this paper argues that there are such intellectual tendencies that grow in organic connection with subaltern strata and articulates resistance to or creates alternative spaces in organised religion.Gramsci refers to all these tendencies as "the religion of the people" (or popular religion),which develops a parallel intellectual movement that runs counter to what he calls "the religion of the intellectual" or the official religion.

According to Gramsci, the popular religion may have the following tendencies.First, it is likely to be led by 'traditional' intellectuals with empathy for the masses or by 'organic' intellectuals who may rise from the ranks of the subalterns.Martin Luther was a traditional cleric who led the Protestant Reformation, whereas Jesus came from the lower class, leading a new religious reform.Second, it has a mass character, which may be militant/ violent/underground (for example, Martin Luther's underground movement or Davide

* Professor,Department of Political Science,University of Hyderabad, India
* * Assistant Professor,Department of Political Science,SARBTM Government College, Kerala, India

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

Lazzareti's insurrection) or peaceful/non-violent/grounded (Jesus's collective).Third, it actively resists orthodox theology, as in the case of Martin Luther or passively resists an official religion, as in the case of Jesus Christ.Mahatma Gandhi calls Jesus a Satyagrahi! Fourth, it ushers social and intellectual reforms by bringing God back to the people.Charles Taylor calls it a new "personal religion".Taylor further argues that personal religion is found in the Protestant movement in Europe and India's Bhakti movement.

Fifth, it may not simply demand spiritual equality through the education system but also material justice by focusing on subaltern cooperatives or unions. Lazzareti's movement formed peasant cooperatives in South Italy. Through his discussion of popular religion, Gramsci intends to demonstrate how a social transformation - both spiritual and material - is in the minds of the subaltern population in Europe, indicating thus a possibility of a secular mass mobilisation provided the secular forces learn from the popular religious currents and offer a new synthesis. Therefore, there are diversities in popular religion in Gramsci's account. Sixth, for Gramsci, common sense represents the masses' philosophy, including popular myths, legends, and superstitions. The religion of the people, however, involves elements of common sense but transcends religious common sense consistently. It reflects the subaltern conception of the world expressed in terms of religion more consistently. It may use discourses of the official religion but tries to subvert their legitimation drives and offers hopes for a more humane world. Gramsci proposes the spirit of humanism is imminent in the religion of the people. We may, however, add the idea of harmony with nature, which is visible in the religion of the people in Indian traditions. Let us examine Gramsci's ideas in India's history of popular religious currents.

In India, lower caste intellectuals led socio-religious movements demanding reforms within institutionalized religion and ushering changes in the conceptions of the world upheld by the popular elements.Reform within institutionalised dominant religion has remained a pressing concern for several social reformers of colonial India, particularly reformers from the lower castes, as they were at the receiving end of the religious persecution perpetuated by a dominant religion.Their counter to pre-existing power relations justified by an orthodox religion produced reformist (and also acertain degree of revivalism, intentionally or unintentionally) movements within the same religious sect with the idea of a personal god (for example, SNDP) or produced a different religious sect with the notion of impersonal god (for instance, Mahima Dharma).Many such radical religious reform movements that emerged among the subaltern castes of India drew on rich subaltern experiences of humiliation, marginalisation, and social suffering.

These movements re-defined existing common sense by drawing on the critical elements within the subaltern common sense and constituting a new critical common

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

sense or 'good sense'.Many of these movements have persistently used religion and its auxiliary modes such as folklore, myths, legends, poems/Bhajans, and new forms of worship as a mode of critique of the power hierarchies while also subsequently using it as 'new social imaginary' to conceptualise a radical and egalitarian subaltern.

The present paper compares two contrasting religious streams from among subaltern strata. It suggests that the counter-hegemony in religion is necessarily multi-layered and ambivalent, depending on the pre-existing historical conditions of two different regions in India.It may be stated here that both forms of 'the religion of people' originated in the late 19th century. Hegemonic currents of orthodox Hinduism and colonial modernity were seen as common enemies. In Section I, an attempt is made to examine the nature of SNDP's reform narrative. Section II deals with Mahima Dharma, founded by the mendicant Sanyasi (a Hindu Saint) Mahima Swamy and its chief advocate Bhima Bhoi, a born-blind Adivasi poet and a contemporary devotee of Mahima Swamy. Section III offers a plausible explanation of their similarities and differences while trying to counter orthodox Hinduism experienced differently in Kerala and Odisha.

Section I

Narayan Guru and the SNDP

It delineates the attempts by Sree Narayana Guru (1856-1928), a radical socio-religious reformer of 19th-century colonial Kerala, who attempted to re-define the existing conception of social vis-a-vis religion by challenging the prevalent Brahminical caste hierarchies while simultaneously disseminating a new conception of social as well as self through propounding a radical socio-religious philosophy.The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Movement (SNDP) reflects the adoption of subaltern classes to tensions produced by modernity vis-à-vis religion as a mode to imagine and constitute a new subaltern subjectivity.The paper argues for the need to focus on the relationship between religion and dissent to understand the subaltern social worldview or their common sense.

The Colonial context and the demand for religious freedom

The demand for reform within the institutionalised religion, mainly Brahminical Hinduism, has remained an important theme since early Indian history (Pande 2005:291-299). However, it gained more significant momentum in the second half of the 19th century with the British colonial phase. The period was distinguished by the rise of numerous socio-religious reforms like the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam led by Narayana Guru from Kerala, Sathyashodhak Movement led by Mahatma Jyothiba Phule in Maharashtra and the Dravidian non-Brahmin movement led by E V Ramaswamy Naicker movement in Tamil Nadu and others which emerged from the subaltern castes groups. Many of these subaltern reform

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

movements were led by reformists from lower castes who were increasingly becoming critical of the existing caste hierarchies. Several factors contribute to this growing discontent. The oppressive caste practices of untouchability, un-seen, and widespread physical and spiritual humiliation acted as immediate reasons for the response. However, the most critical catalyst was the spread of colonial education, particularly modern science and history, alongside the influence of the contemporary press, which helped lower caste intellectuals to evolve a secular, disenchanted attitude towards caste practices. This new but burgeoning worldview demanded reforms within institutionalized religion, mainly Brahminical Hinduism, as it was regarded as the source of the most dominant of social evils, i.e. caste-based oppressions.

The present section attends to one such attempt made by Narayana Guru, a social reformer of 19th-century colonial Kerala, who used religion as a key to ground ideas of universalism and equality, engrained with idioms of religion, often blurring the dividing line between sacred and the secular. Narayana Guru's teachings and practices are examples of an approach, followed by many subaltern social reformers across colonial India, towards modernity whereby religion was considered not as a category which needed to be subtracted but as a category which must be reformed and retained as it was central for people to make sense of their life.

The teachings and practices of Narayana Guru, such as consecrating temples, establishing ashrams to train priests and ascetics, exhorting Ezhavas to establish educational institutions and industries, emphasizing the significance of 'organized communitarian efforts' to achieve progress, point to his sincere efforts to build a mass movements grounded in a liberation theology aimed towards realizing a caste-free society (Chandramohan, 2016: 8-9).

Narayana Guru and the colonial Kerala: A Historical picture

19th century Kerala society was characterised by a hierarchical caste social order governed within which all power was concentrated in the hands of the upper caste or the savarnas. The lower castes or avarnas were treated as impure and thus untouchables. The social position of each caste determined the possession and distribution of resources. The avarnas (lower caste)were not allowed to hold any land. They were forcefully bonded to the households of their savarna landlords and were supposed to provide forced, unpaid labour for their feudal masters.

This institutionalized structural violence, both economic and social, characterized the case for the existence of the practice of slavery within Travancore and other parts of colonial Kerala. The Pulayas, Parayas and Kuravas have been increasingly designated as

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

the slave caste (Gopalkrishnan, 2012: 274-296). They formed most of the tillers working in the field (Gopalakrishnan, 2012: 419-428).

Besides being subjected to physical torture, lower castes were ostracized from accessing any public spaces such as roads, wells, etc. They were treated as impure and denounced as being improper to be treated as humans and thus were denied even fundamental human rights. The extremity of the caste practices is evident from the fact that even the shadow of a lower caste individual was regarded as impure. Hence, they were not allowed to enter public roads or use public spaces such as ponds or wells as the very presence of lower caste could pollute the 'sanctity' of the 'public sphere'(Gopalakrishnan, 2012: 456-460). While the caste rules prevented the entry of lower caste into the public sphere, the upper castes also disseminated an elaborate system of customs and beliefs based on Dharma Shastras, which legitimized the caste hierarchy as an ideal system, arguing that every individual caste needed to perform their respective sanctioned roles as it was their duty as well as moral responsibility from which no individual could escape.

Thus, while the caste system, through its institutional control practices such as forced labour, untouchability, and unseeability, controlled and disciplined the lower castes, it simultaneously reinforced its ideological control by interpreting one's caste position as one's Karma and duty (Gopalakrishnan, 2012: 281-96). Many social reform movements that emerged in the second half of the 19th century, such as the one led by Narayana Guru, questioned these ideological contours of the existing society and offered scope for improving the lower caste's material and spiritual conditions.

Guru's lower caste background convinced him any social reform movement that aims to alter the prevailing conditions of the lower caste would have to simultaneously address the religious and material domains as they were intricately interlinked. Thus, reforming the social was possible only through reforming the institutionalised Hindu religion. Narayana Guru's reform project had some broad objectives. First, ascertain the importance of an ethical life at an individual and collective level; second, the relevance of the material world; and third, the constitution of an egalitarian society. All three must be understood in detail to understand Narayana Guru's philosophy comprehensively.

Narayana Guru: An Intellectual Biography

Narayana Guru (hereafter Guru) was born in 1856 into an Ezhava Family at Chempazhanthy, a place close to Trivandrum, the capital city of the princely state of Travancore. Guru received his early education in Tamil, Sanskrit and Malayalam. The philosophical streams within Sanskrit and Tamil significantly influenced Guru's earlier writings, among which the influence of Tamil Siddhars and Shaivite traditions is noteworthy.

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

These two traditions created a strong anti-Brahmanical lower caste spiritual philosophy based on principles of egalitarianism and equality across regions such as Tamil Nadu and Southern Travancore (Kumar, 2014: 372-374).

Narayana Guru's initiation into these radical theologies was initiated by Kummanpilli Raman Pillai, his Sanskrit teacher who himself had composed works such as Pattanathupillayar Pattu under the influence of Shaiva Siddhanta and Siddha thoughts (Kumar, 2014: 373). Narayana Guru's continued association with ThycaudAyya, his Yoga teacher and a disciple of AyyaVaikutanathar, a spiritual leader from Tirunelveli, radicalised his spiritual imagination to strive for a universal religion grounded on principles of dialogue and equality. Narayana Guru's exposure to philosophical traditions such as Advaita Vedanta, Shaiva Siddhanta and Tamil Siddhar tradition and his exchanges with ThycaudAyya and his peers such as Chattampi Swamikal shaped his thoughts. These encounters were particularly crucial in the evolution of a comprehensive philosophical perspective which addressed the relationship between the individual and the community and the realms of spiritual and material (Chandramohan, 2014: 40-48).

Guru's idea of religion

Narayana Guru envisaged a comprehensive idea of religion which underpinned all his activities, such as the installation of idols, the founding of new temples and ashrams, and his various religious works. The word used by Narayana Guru for religion is matham, which means 'opinion' or belief which is subjected to change. Religion as a belief of the sacred elaborated in terms of rites, practices, customs and philosophy was, in Guru's conception, a continuously evolving one. Thus, providing a bounded idea of religion such as Hinduism, Christianity, or Islam was impossible.

Guru explains the nature of Daivam (god) in his work Daivadasakam as a universal consciousness or Arivu. The world exists within this consciousness as its extension. This consciousness enables us to exist and experience worldly affairs. However, humans cannot comprehend this dimension and continue to believe the world is their creation. These writings of Guru reflect the Advaitic philosophical impulses, which believed in the existence of a universal, impersonal consciousness and salvation as a strenuous effort to realise the existence of such a consciousness. One sees the overtures for an impersonal god, an abstract sacred that presides as a grand creator overseeing all natural and human creations. This conception of Guru is closer to his philosophical investigations to formulate a unitive philosophy. However, Guru made radical departures from his predecessors as he realised that all human beings need sukham (well-being), which has worldly and spiritual dimensions. The worldly well-being is temporary compared to its spiritual counterpart. But, the world is

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

where the individual resides, so it is inevitable to avoid it as an illusion. However, engaging in worldly affairs may prevent individuals from comprehending life's true purpose; hence, they need categories to understand this sacred.

Abstract philosophical discourses must be presented in a more accessible manner. Thus, an impersonal sacred should be supplemented with specific forms (anthropomorphic personal forms) such as Shiva, Vishnu, Jesus or Allah for individuals to comprehend. This made Guru compose works such as Vinayakashtakam, Guhashtakam, and Vasudevashtakam, which addressed anthropomorphic Hindu deities such as Ganapathy, Karthikeya, and Vishnu. These compositions presented a bounded, personal idea of God consistent with the prevalent common sense of people.

These compositions, along with Guru's practice of establishing temples, are consistent with his attempts to transgress the binaries of personal/impersonal god and spiritual/material, rendering such binaries impractical in interpreting the everyday life of subalterns and, thus, in the very process, dismantling the idea of religion, as a homogeneous category. Guru urged the need to re-constitute religion as a category composed of opposing binaries, i.e., personal/impersonal god or religion, which simultaneously relates to worldly/spiritual realms. Undergirding this idea of religion was the thorough belief that religion is a core component of widespread common sense, particularly of subaltern populations. Religion acted as a psychological category, providing emotional, ethical, and supportive ground to individuals. It acted as a frame for societies to relate themselves to nature. Religious myths, legends, folklore, and popular customs together constitute the common sense of the masses. Common sense was the general common shared understanding, a language interspersed with determined notions through which people attributed meaning and sensed the world. The subaltern subjectivity in it is spiritual and worldly, drawing predominantly from religion.

Guru assumed that rejuvenating caste practices was possible only through evolving a new Matham (religion), which would simultaneously address the worldly and spiritual requirements of the subalterns such as Ezhavas, Pulayas, etc. However, the prevailing commonsense is contradictory. It harbours both progressive and regressive elements. It simultaneously has elements of prevailing social hegemony and fragments of resistance. Any liberation theology to liberate subalterns would have to critically engage with this common sense while aiming to transcend it.

Narayana Guru's idea of religion offered an attempt to draw from the progressive elements existing within the non-brahminical religious thoughts, such as Shaivaite/Siddhar traditions and the Advaitic traditions, which undermined the Brahminical hegemony. At the same time, there were retrogressive elements such as animal sacrifices, the offering of

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

alcohol, black magic, etc., which were an integral part of folk-subaltern religious common sense, which Narayana Guru rejected. Guru conceived a religion which would simultaneously satisfy the material and spiritual requirements of the people.

Thus, this new religion, or to borrow his phrase Matham, objectified a liberation theology which aimed to ensure the worldly well-being of the people through establishing institutions and practices grounded on the principle of equality and egalitarian treatment of individuals, whereby a humanistic religion was possible.

Guru disseminated this idea of a new manushyamatham (humanistic religion) through his compositions. Such a new religion constituted by the critical common sense of the subaltern masses would assist in forming a manushyasamudayam (human community). However, every such Samudayam shall be constituted along the historical specificities within which a society has existed. Guru preached the need for different institutions to institutionalize such a religion and actualize such a community. For example, temples were established as hubs to disseminate this new egalitarian idea of sacred, which everyone could access irrespective of their social position.

Temples were meant to act as channels to educate the general public in practices such as prayers and customs to evolve an egalitarian religious culture based on principles of universalism and equality. One famous example would be the consecration of a Shiva temple by Narayana Guru in 1888 at Aruvippuram, Kerala. Despite the temple being a structure widely used by Brahminical Hinduism, it had a profound symbolic influence within subaltern subjectivity. Guru appropriated and inverted the very idea of a temple. He argued that he had installed an Ezhava Shiva instead of a Brahmin Shiva. Drawing from the Advaitic tradition, Guru conceived all individuals as reflections of the same universal being, and there was no logic in dividing them based on caste. Guru proposed a universal religion in which any person could be a member irrespective of caste or religion.

Religion and subalternity: Narayana Guru's idea of Matham

The above section provided a historical sketch of Narayana Guru's teachings and his explication of a new religious philosophy aimed at uplifting subaltern castes of colonial Kerala. A critical aspect of Guru's teachings, unlike many of his contemporaries, was that Guru never doubted the centrality of religion to educate and mobilise subalterns and direct them towards reform. Guru was convinced of the need for a radical theology for the social upliftment of the subaltern social. Religion was an all-encompassing phenomenon in colonial Kerala; it informed and sanctioned every aspect of life. Guru contended that a religion-based reform was the apt cure for the caste-riddenMalayali samuham (Kerala society).

Guru's belief that people were religious in their thinking was the reason for proposing

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

a liberation theological pathway towards social upliftment for the subaltern castes such as Ezhavas and Pulayas. Social life, everyday practices, interaction, political understanding, and even economic occupations were legitimised through religion. Theology was a mass psychological pacifier used for centuries to influence and satisfy mass imaginations, desires and anxieties. People used god as a psychological other to address and, at times, transpose their everyday material requirements anxieties such as a good job, house, marriage, offspring, bad luck, etc. This vital role of religion was desirable to Guru, but it was brushed aside by many contemporary reformers as false consciousness (Desai,2007:65-66). By reforming religion, one can reform society. Simultaneously, one could re-construct a more egalitarian samudayam (community) through radical theology. This rationale informed Guru's search for a liberation theology.

Guru's approach resembles the Gramscian common sense perspective, where one must learn from the subalterns. Guru understood the relevance of religion, both at a spiritual and material plane, in subaltern life and realised how religion was used as an alternative mode to interpret every realm of life. Guru drew inspiration from this role of religion and envisioned a theology straddled between the two realms of material and spiritual. Guru was convinced that any liberation theology aimed only towards spiritual upliftment was incomplete. He believed that every theology should be liberatory in its content. Any movement which seeks to materialise liberation for subalterns needs to have a twin perspective. It must address the material world as well as the spiritual realm.

Besides the worldly/spiritual binary, such a liberation theology must also attempt to address the individual and the community. Guru's preoccupation with the theme of personal/ impersonal god is an effort in this direction. For Guru, devotion is not self-effacing if it involves continuously questioning one's belief. Individuals and communities cannot be separated. A liberation theology for subalterns may anticipate the integral relation between the two and address the requirements of both. Thus, Guru's famous works on Hindu deities addressed mass religious sentiments, while he composed extremely philosophical works that anticipated individual seekers.

Guru believed that binaries such as material vs spiritual or individual vs community could not be separated. For instance, Guru, in his writings, proposed that every act done by an individual for one's welfare must also consider the welfare of the other. To actualize this organic wholeness, Narayana Guru established temples, organized prayer meetings and later organizations such as SNDP to disseminate his new theology as a glue to hold people together to create a new Samudayam(community); temples and devotional gatherings became sites to converge, interact and generate a sense of brotherhood based on principles

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

of equality. Thus, in due course, a discourse on devotion mutated into a discourse of dissent.

Section II

Mahima Dharma, Mahima Swamy and Bhima Bhoi

Though Bhima Bhoi (1849-1895) was not the founder of the Mahima Dharma, he was solely responsible for codifying its practices through devotional poems like Bhajans (literally sharing), Jananas (a particular Chhand-based poem) and Srutis (Divine revelations). He is known as the best philosophical and literary exponent of religious egalitarianism of Mahima Dharma and a contemporary follower of Mahima Swamy, the mendicant Sanyasi who later settled down in Joranda, a village in the then feudatory state of Dhenkanal in Odisha. In the present section, we shall primarily focus on Mahima Swamy, his doctrines and activities and Bhima Bhoi's contributions to Mahima Dharma as his Bhajans were approved by the Swamy himself for devotees in and around his Ashram in Joranda and were disseminated across Odisha only after these were approved. So, to a great extent, his devotional poems could be safely seen as original and authentic expressions of Mahima Dharma.

Mahima Swamy (born -; died: 1876), a mendicant Sanyasi, is the founder of Mahima Dharma. His family name was Mukunda Das, and he came from a Brahmin family in the Boudh district. He was a priest in the Balasingha Matha (learning centre) in Boudh before he left for the Himalayas, where he was believed to have spent decades. After leaving the Himalayas, he travelled around different regions of India before he landed in Puri as Dhulia Babaji (Sanyasi smeared with ashes) in 1826.

During his stay in Kapilas Hill since 1838, the Swamy settled down near a Siva temple and became a devout worshipper of Siva. He cleared the jungle and created gardens, looking after the food offerings of the idol. It was a tactical move to gain the sympathy of the King. As he took care of pilgrims and the ailing people around the villages of Kapilas Hill, he soon became a popular Swamy. After gaining widespread support, he became confident inopenly advocating his belief in Nirguna Brahman. He publicly stated that idol worshipping by the Hindus was a useless and perishable act. Idols were objects of stone and wood only. He set up his Ashram (monastery) in Joranda, near Kapilas hill, now a famous centre of Mahima Dharma. While preaching his new Dharma, till the end of life the, Swamy passed away in 1876 in Joranda, where a vast Samadhi (tomb) temple known as Joranda Mahima Gadi (seat) is presently located.

After he left Kapilas Hill before he moved to Joranda, Mukunda Das returned to Puri, stayed near the Loknath (Siva) temple and went to the village Daruthenga near Khurda, where he set up an Ashram and began to propagate the new doctrine. It soon attracted the

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

lower castes and some upper caste devotees who started to address him as Mahima Gosain (priest). Here he acquired a new name. His doctrine, too, got a new name: Mahima Dharma.

God reaches out to the subalterns

It is now necessary to examine the activities of Mahima Swamy and the tenets of his new religious philosophy. Much like Buddhism, the people's suffering became the focal point of Mahima Swamy. By helping the ailing and weak, he advocated a sense of relief through his message of direct contact with the Nirguna Brahman (formless Supreme spirit). For his followers, God's messages are more important than God's transfixed forms. Unlike the Vaishnava tradition in Bengal, where God is a lover or a friend, one key message of this doctrine is that God punishes the wicked, is a destroyer of evil and is kind and merciful to the needy and the poor. There is no need to worship the idols of God in several temples across Odisha to understand God's messages. There is no need to visit the temples to get to know God. God is no longer a resident deity in Odisha's Siva or Jagannath temples. Inside these temples, the King-Brahmin nexus and its associates have reduced God to a stone or a wood. Due to their evil and oppressive practices, which deny equal access to God for all devotees, God deserted the temples and appeared in the form of Mahima. God is a mendicant, not a passive idol. He is a traveller to each household. He is the Bhikkhu who shares food with all people. Now, in his doctrine, a pro-active God is visible.

Instead of waiting for pilgrims and pilgrimage to happen around temple rituals, which Mahima Dharma denounces, God reaches out to everybody in distress just as Lord Krishna reaches out to a disrobed Draupadi (a fable from Mahabharat) or sends Sudarshan Chakra to save the elephant grabbed by the crocodile in a lake where the elephant went for drinking water. So recounts Bhima Bhoi in his famous text Sruti Chintamani (Divine Sayings/ Revelations), which Mahima Swamy oversaw. The Nirguna Brahmana reaches out to the suffering of ordinary people. In other words, fascinating parallels are happening here. The oppressive nexus of Raja-Brahmin and their associates is compared with the killer crocodile and the sadist Kaurava. Ordinary people are now seen as sufferers, like Draupadi, who is searching for her clothes, or the elephant-in-distress, who is searching for water/life. God is a formless Supreme Being. Everybody can access it. God reaches out to them in their suffering.

Mahima Swamy's disregard for idol worship attracted lower castes and Adivasis in large numbers who thought that the Lord Jagannath was taken away from them and forcibly kept inside temples in Puri and around. Moreover, these subaltern strata were denied access to the Lord's abode in Puri. When distressed, they were not in any position to visit

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

the Puri temple. Their pilgrimage would not give any hope. In such a scenario of power relations and denials of a visit to God, Mahima Dharma's call to denounce the idols in temples and pilgrimage to religious centres opened new hopes for lower castes and Adivasis to comprehend God's messages outside His abodes. Mahima Dharma advocates for no new pilgrim centres, idols, or temples. Instead, initially, the Swamy advocated that Sanyasis of the Mahima Dharma must reach out to people in distress. Swamy himself was a mendicant. Any Sanyasi (ascetic) follower of the doctrine must not stay in one place/village for more than two days. He is always on the run, carrying new messages of the new dharma to the rural masses. As a result, during his lifetime, the Swamy could muster the support of 30,000 people, mainly from the peasant (Chasa) castes and Adivasis and a few prominent devotees from among upper castes.

In Bhima Bhoi's depiction of Guru Mahima, Lord Jagannath, after deserting the abode in Puri, reappears as a follower of Mahima Dharma. This idea is fascinating. Due to the suffering of the masses, even the Lord is not happy about staying as an Idol in Srikhetra. The act of desertion of His Idol by the Lord is symbolically very significant. Now, the Lord, under the impact of Mahima Dharma, has metamorphosed as a mendicant in search of humanity to provide them with a ray of hope in times of suffering and human misery. That is indeed the main task of all Mahima Sanyasis. This popular religion invokes such millennial hopes for the end of human suffering. In the Mahima narrative, Lord Jagannath's desertion of the Idol in Puri to join as a follower of Mahima Swamy is not merely a show of legitimation of a new Dharma but also an act of millennial hope for a better humanity. A popular religion may emulate the symbols of a dominant religion to gain new legitimation. However, the former may also aim to subvert the latter by hoping for a better society, which is expected to elevate the present suffering of marginal groups. So Mahima Dharma's advocacy of the formless Supreme Being accessible to all through Bhakti (devotion) provides the lower strata with hope for elevation from social suffering.

The concept of Sunyata

The Mahima Dharma worships fire in a Sunyata (void) Mandir (temple) in Joranda. Mahima Swamy rejected the house for God. He appreciated monotheism as the essence of new philosophy. Mahima Swamy viewed fire as a purifier symbol. Fire is thus sacred. This appropriates a dominant symbol from mainstream Hinduism, which views fire in Yagna as sacred. Dash argues that to subvert the idol-worshipping Hinduism and its discriminatory practices, the Mahima Gosain adopted a few sacred symbols of Brahminical Hinduism: fire, cow, the offering of 'pranama' by prostrating on the ground facing the sun at sunrise and sunset and fasting in the night (Das, 2008: 69-71). These are adopted from mainstream

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

Hinduism to popularise his core beliefs in Sunya. Yet, it may be argued that all these practices are part of a 'naturalistic religion' except the symbol of a sacred cow, which is incidentally part of Buddhism readopted by Brahminical Hinduism. Both naturalistic religions followed by Odisha's tribes and the Buddhist legacy of cow protection are appropriated by mainstream Hinduism. So, by evoking worship rituals as part of naturalism, Buddhism and Brahminical Hinduism, Mahima Swamy created conditions of popularity and legitimation of his Dharma.

Fire creates a void. It purifies spaces. Worshipping fire is like worshipping Sunya. Offerings made at the altar of fire are offerings made to God. Fire, in a way, represents a means to access Sunya. Sunya also implies emptying the space meant for the idols in wood. The Lord Jagannath idol is made of wood. Sunya is thus a compelling force invoked by Mahima Swamy while replacing the wooden idols of the famous Puri temple. Worshipping Sunya means worshipping the space left void by a sacred fire. A potent symbol of an impersonal God, Nirguna Brahman, was created. The holy fire, the medium, conveys messages of Sunya or an impersonal God.

Deo argues that the devotees of Mahima Dharma worship Alekh Param Brahma. Alekh means the one beyond description. Param means all-powerful. Brahma means Supreme spirit. Deo suggests that Alekh or Sunya is their god (Deo, 2015: 80). On the contrary, Sunya or Alekha is an impersonal god, imageless or idol-less. Sunya is Alekh or indescribable. It is everywhere in all human bodies. It is meant for all, irrespective of caste, creed and sexual division. This idea is a mighty blow to a highly caste-ridden male-dominated society glorified by the nexus of Rajas and Brahmins and legitimised by idol-worshipping communities where spaces are transfixed. The idea of a personal god involves transfixed space. The notion of an impersonal god on the other involves a variable space. In this tradition, God belongs to all or everywhere and is not permanently transfixed in a particular space. The idea of God as Sunya is very impersonal and mobile and is not fixed in a specific location segregated by pure and impure spaces of caste society. Sunya is Nirguna Brahman and does not embody a particular form in a specific area. Thus, historically, God in Mahima Dharma is an impersonal, indescribable and formless God. As Alekh travels everywhere, no pilgrimage is necessary. Alekha is available at the doorstep of every family member. God has no particular sacred space for devotees to pay a visit.

However, several scholars offer a confused interpretation of impersonal/personal gods due to certain persistent ambiguities in Mahima Dharma, as expounded by Mahima Swamy. The ambiguities arise in its duality towards another pair: Nirguna/SagunaBrahman. Mahima Dharma's Alekh Param Brahma (=God) is both Niruguna and Saguna. Bhima Bhoi's depiction

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

of Mahima Swamy as the final Avatar of God (Kalki) to end human suffering and establish Satya Dharma is a viewpoint. In Saguna Brahman, God has many Avatars or forms. The idol or image form of God is an aspect of the Saguna viewpoint, but all those who believe in the Saguna viewpoint do not necessarily subscribe to an Idol or image of God. However, all those who believe in the incarnation of God in an idol or image manifestation do not necessarily have faith in Saguna Brahman. For example, the Hinduism of Vivekananda or Gandhi, who, following Gramsci, may advocate a 'non-official religion of intellectual'. Gandhi does not believe in idol worshipping Hinduism but believes in Lord Ram or Krishna as an incarnation of God. These incarnations of God are in God's messages, not in the idols or images. Knowing God's messages through devotion is more important than worshipping idols and images of God through elaborate rituals mediated by priestly castes. Though Mahima followers believe in God as Nirguna Brahman, they also think of Saguna Brahman in the Gandhian sense. Mahima Swamy is the last incarnation of God in Kali Yuga. In a sense, Mahima Panthis follows a tradition of Advaita philosophy, which claims that Saguna Brahman is not separable from Nirguna Brahman, but that priority is accorded to Nirguna Brahman. This is indeed Mahima Dharma's non-dualistic religious philosophy. But it may be argued that the idea of God/Alekh/Sunya Brahma remains integral to impersonal God rather than personal God. As Deo (2015: 78) argues, "There is no need for a priest, idol worship, pilgrimage and external rights. Only throughnirguna bhakti could one transcend karma and attain sunyabrahma. In this way, they negated the authority of Veda and particularly that of the Brahman (Brahmin, insertion mine) and the jati system" (Deo, 2015: 78). Saguna Brahman is inseparable from Mahima's Nirguna Brahman.

While Mahima Swamy's religious philosophy emphasised Sunyata, which gave a body blow to orthodox Hinduism, his social approach professed certain egalitarian practices. He tried to spread tenets of Mahima Dharma by establishing Tungis (a small house meant to disseminate Bhagavata Purana) and Ashrams in several districts of Odisha. He founded Satsang (Sat=Truth + Sang=company), Gosthi (community), inter-caste dining, eating cooked food together in the open, confessionary practices and so on among his followers. After each Satsang meeting, a communal feast followed. Sometimes, the feast preceded the Satsang meeting. Satsang and Bhagat Tungi,popularised by the Panchsakhas (five poet-friends) of the 16th century, were formatted and made available to Mahima Swamy in the 'devotional dissent' tradition. Both Panchasakhas and Mahima Swamy created and shared dissenting spaces. Both shared devotion as a medium to reach out to God. Both argued that God resides in the hearts of millions. Both believed in the mendicant God reaching out to the masses. Thus, both became popular with the lower castes, who were denied equal religious access.

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

Mahima Swamy naturally relied on pre-existing forms of Satsang and Tungi to spread a similar message among lower castes in the 19th century. His method of confession was very interesting. Confession pertains to discussing the breach of rules in the previous year during the travels of Sanyasis or in performing the householder's rules. It is a public confession made before everybody. In Mahima Dharma, both the ascetic and householder followers must confess in a group. It is not a private repentance. It resembles the Buddhist tradition of confession, in which ascetics confess before the Buddha. According to the nature of confession, a devotee is punished by a collective body. In the case of a significant breach, a devotee is expelled from the Mahima Dharma. Tungis and Ashrams built by the Swamy provided shelter to the mendicant Sanyasis. The local Satsang meetings, Bhajans (devotional songs), communal feasts, etc., were also organised here.

Mahima Swamy initiated two kinds of a devotee: Sanyasi (ascetic) and the householder. He also initiated two orders of Sanyasis: Kaupinidharis (lion-cloth bearers) and Balkadharis (tree bark bearers). In his estimate, each group was based on needs and contingencies. No group was considered relatively superior to the other. As Deo (2015: 69) argues, "There was tension between the two orders of Sanyasis during the lifetime of Mahima Swamy. However, it had never reached the level of an open conflict."

Similarly, the Swamy initiated a reform measure in the Hindu marriage system by proposing that the bride and bridegroom be married by exchanging garlands and invoking the name of the new God, Mahima Alekha. He asked men not to have illicit affairs or steal the property of others and to lead an honest and sincere life. However, he discouraged his followers from killing domestic animals and eating their meat at the feast. Scholars disagree that he discouraged his followers from killing and eating wild animals. Some scholars opine that this habit of eating meat by Mahima followers developed after the demise of Mahima Swamy. Some others dispute this contention. Pati suggests that Mahima Swamy could not have prevented all his followers from eating the meat of wild animals, as most of them came from the meat-eating lower social strata. So, he might not have banned the meat-eating practices among his followers. As a result, meat-eating continues to be prevalent among his lower caste and tribal followers even today (Pati, 2010, 2012).

Local elites and their response:

Mahima Gosain openly blamed the Firangi (Foreign) rule and the Raja-Brahmin nexus for all miseries suffered by the lower castes and tribes. He believed that these people accumulated wealth by exploiting the religious faith of ordinary people. Yet, some kings supported Mahima Swamy's propagation of a new spiritual philosophy. Due to the assistance received from the kings, the Swamy could set up Ashrams (monasteries) with Brahmagni

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

(holy fire) in several villages in Odisha. The kings wanted to appropriate the new religious philosophy followed by lower castes and tribes in different regions to gain greater legitimation in the eyes of Mahima followers from among the lower strata. As G C Dash (2008: 71) argues, "By helping Mahima Gosain, they desired to increase their popularity among his followers and keep the attention of the subjects away from the hardship they imposed on them. The Brahmans, of course, did not like the royal patronage of Mahima Dharma and thoroughly opposed it."

The opposition by Brahminical forces to the rising popularity of Mahima Swamy is evident in certain narratives recalled by Mahimites. Several stories from Mahima Swamy's life are remembered by the Mahima Panthis today. G C Dash (2008) recounts the following two stories. In Malabiharpur near Banki (Cuttack Dist.), a significant plot was launched by opponents of Mahima Swamy so that a large number of his followers, numbering about 10,000, tried to kill each other when the communal feast was going on. A deliberate confusion was created by shouts like "behead, behead" (HANA HANA) being mixed up with devotees crying for "bring, bring" (ANA, ANA) cooked food. Many had gone to the gathering with arms intending to harm devotees. Out of fear and rage, the crowd started attacking each other, and many got killed. The plot hatched by local elites was meant to arrest the popularity of Mahima Swamy.

Similarly, in 1873, some opponents submitted petitions before T E Ravenshaw, the then Commissioner of Odisha, complaining that the Swamy seduced many women from upper caste families and forced them to be 'nuns' of his new Dharma. The Assistant SP was sent to arrest the Swamy, who quickly moved to Keonjhar to evade his arrest. At the same time, the upper caste writers abused him in the Utkal Deepika as an 'ignorant and uncivilised person'. In another incident in the Sukinda area, the Brahmins were frightened by several people of their caste joining the Mahima movement. In 1873, they convinced the king of Haripur to order Swamy and his followers to leave the kingdom.

Bhima Bhoi: The Organic Intellectual of Mahima Dharma

Bhima Bhoi is the Mahima movement's product and its foremost intellectual exponent. Following Gramsci, he may be called the organic intellectual of Mahima Dharma. Bhoi was a tribal (Kandha or Khond) follower of Mahima Swamy and was visually challenged from birth. He depended on the five writers sent by the Swamy from Joranda, and these writers inscribed his Bhajans, Jananas and Srutis on the palm leaves and showed them to the Swamy. After his approval or corrections, these writings or Bhajans were initially performed in Joranda and disseminated among devotees from other regions of Odisha. Following Gramsci, Mahima Swamy could be called a traditional intellectual who broke his upper

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

caste ranks and evolved his religious philosophy in organic association with lower strata in Odisha, representing their hopes and aspirations for a better society. Bhima Bhoi followed his Guru Mahima's spiritual philosophy and became an intellectual spokesperson of the new Dharma. As the Guru lived in the oral tradition and developed a new Dharma, codifying its tenets and practices of rituals was left to the organic intellectual Bhima Bhoi. Bhima Bhoi was the follower and one of the first-generation leaders of the new Dharma who lived and became a famous devotional poet and exponent of Mahima Swamy's Dharma. Born in an impoverished family and abandoned by his mother in early childhood, it is widely believed that the 'orphan child', as Bhoi calls himself, was picked up by the Swamy and under his tutelage, Bhoi became a legendary poet and a household name in Odisha today. Bhoi married a Brahmin woman, Annapurna, who emerged as a significant votary of the monastery after Bhoi died in 1895. He was a good singer and player of the Khonjoni (percussion musical instrument popular in Odisha and Bengal). His singing of Bhajans and playing Khonjoni daily attracted many devotees from the lower castes and tribes to his Ashram. Some decided to remain there. Unlike his Guru, a Sanyasi (ascetic), Bhoi was a householder. Under the instructions of his Guru, he set up an Ashram in the village of Khaliapali in Bolangir district. He never visited Joranda, which is and still is the centre of Mahima Dharma. As stated above, the tenets of Mahima Dharma are from Bhoi's well-known Sruti Chintamani (Divine wishes/revelations).

Bhoi and millennial dreams of the wretched of the earth

Gramsci argues that the fatalism of subalterns cannot be confused with that of middle and upper classes. While subalterns may feel sorrow and pain in not overcoming their wretched conditions, they do not accept it as their 'inevitable life'. Unlike the upper classes, they tend to entertain millennial hopes for a better life. When religion is entangled with common sense, subalterns may trust and surrender to God to elevate their sufferings. Following Gramsci, it may be argued that fatalism has ambivalent meanings in a subaltern common sense. In Bhoi, similar strains of thought are found. In Bhoi's writings, common sense and religion are interlocked. However, it must be admitted that for Gramsci, common sense and religion are not necessarily interlocked in all situations of subaltern life.

Beltz argues, "Bhima Bhoi'sapocalyptic narratives are not impersonal" (Beltz, 2008: 89). Bhima Bhoi draws on the 'Malika literary genre' from the Panchasakha tradition in the 16th century Odisha. Ishita Banerjee-Dube (2012: 82-83) argues that, unlike the Goudiya Vaishnava tradition from Bengal, where God appears as lover and friend (Sakha), in the Odia Vaishnavite literature, the Malika offers the notion of a Supreme God who is the destroyer of evils (Banerjee-Dube, 2012: 82-83). The violent death of present-day evil and

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

the 'resurrection' of good/truth brought by God in future are common themes. In this narrative, ordinary people are asked to shun sinful paths and follow a particular religious tradition (which is claimed to be a truthful path) so that they survive violent death being brought by God in future. God appears to be descending in future to cleanse the world of sinful characters. Bhima Bhoi's texts like Sruti Chintamani, Nirveda Sadhana, Bhajanamala, and 'futurology' narratives dealing with Lord Kalki are visible. In Hindu cosmic time, the Kali Yuga is the last of the four eras of human civilisation, after which it reverts to the Satya Yuga in a cyclical form. The other two eras are Tretaya and Dwapara. God will assume Kalki's Avatar, eradicate all evils and establish a life of truth (Satya) and prosperity for all. The Kali Yuga is the era of sin, misery, conceits, betrayal, corruption, disease, floods, cyclones, hunger, and poverty. Lord Vishnu will be incarnated in Kalki Avatar to destroy sinful life, which is the cause of humanity's misery in the present world. Bishnu Mohapatra (2000) cites from Bhoi's writings: "The mlecchas, the villains, the irreligious, and those who are cooked will lose their heads. They will be cut off and roll on the ground" (Mohapatra Qtd Beltz, 2012: 88). Kali Yuga ends with mass-scale killing and destruction of evil forces. Thereafter Satya Dharma is reintroduced. It is time for Truth and Happiness to return to humanity. Bhima Bhoi sees his suffering as the suffering of humankind but carefully avoids subordinating humanity. On the contrary, he evokes an awe-inspiring notion of self-sacrifice for a noble cause of human liberation, which inspired many Odia freedom fighters in the 20th century. He suggests lyrically in Sruti Chintamani, "Let Boundless is the anguish and misery of the living who can see it and tolerate; Let my life be condemned to Hell; But let the world be liberated." For him, the concern for human liberation is higher than self-redemption. Beltz claims, "Bhoi's personal suffering is his literary motif" (Beltz, 2008: 89).While it is true that Bhoi prays for self-redemption, we partially disagree with Beltz and claim that for Bhoi, the end of social suffering remains a priority over that of personal suffering.Thus, the liberation of humanity from social/spiritual suffering remains his literary motif.

Conclusion

The Mahima Dharma and SNDP were essentially religious expressions of the lower caste/tribals opposing the dominant Brahminical Hinduism.However, both propose two distinct approaches towards addressing the prevailing hierarchical caste order.The Mahima Dharma advocates an immanent 'spiritual' change, demanding devotees strive towards social equality instead of material wellbeing.The Mahima Dharma invokes an apocalyptic image of a truthful society in future where the prevailing caste order would be destroyed by what Bhima Bhoi calls 'Satya-Dharma'.Therefore, Mahima Swamy wanted to sustain a religious movement through subaltern forces rather than create alternative institutions, including religious institutions, to create a new order.He refused to provide alternative

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

institutions for the formation of a truthful society.Thus,the Mahima Dharma represents a metaphysical approach to material/social redemption.Pre-existing institutions like Tungis and Ashrams created since the time of Panchsakhas were used as vehicles to spread new religious beliefs based on equal respect and access to dharma irrespective of gender, caste and ethnic cleavages.However, the SNDP movement aims to institutionalise a comprehensive, judicious social order by disseminating a humanistic religion, which ensures material and spiritual welfare by establishing alternative institutions such as temples, education institutions, and industries.In contrast with the Mahima movement, the SNDP movement somewhat understated the role of women in constituting an egalitarian religious order.

The regional social history of the Mahima Dharma and SNDP movements has to be kept in mind while explaining their differences in counter-hegemonic narratives.Mahima Dharma was influenced by the elements of 'good sense' in anti-caste legacies inherited from Buddhism and Odisha's Bhakti tradition, such as Panchasakhas. While challenging the idol-worshipping Hinduism with an alternative idea of an impersonal god, it developed a tendency towards a 'historic bloc'striking alliance between tribes, lower castes and women.On the other hand, the SNDP drew different elements of 'good sense' from the 'intellectual' tradition of Advaita and the 'popular' tradition of Siddhar-Shaivaite, replacing old common sense with a new one through a negation of the backward elements in subaltern common sense such as demon worship, alcoholism, low esteem due to illiteracy and economic insecurity.While Guru advocated a Saguna tradition, Mahima followers vouched for a Nirguna tradition of liberation theology. By intervening in the material life of subalterns in areas such as education and economic production, the SNDP encouraged Ezhavas to embrace egalitarian social practices and acquire education, etc. Thus, it may be argued that the 'religion of people' in the case of the SNDP relied on idol-worshipping common sense; the Mahima followers synthesised the Saguna with Nirguna traditions but revived a naturalist religious symbol and worshipped fire. The worship of fire is also common sense among Hindus. Both invoked two kinds of religious common sense of Hindu society to critique caste-based theologies. A new liberation theology was advocated following two distinct paths. However, both tended towards a 'historical bloc' of diverse subalterns for a caste-free theology.Its programmatic actions might have impactedthe social imaginary and social life of the popular elements in a new way, an issue beyond the scope of the present paper.There are thus different trajectories of the 'religion of the people'.

(The authors thank Father Spencer Jeice for the helpful feedback.)

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

1. For pre-colonial currents of popular religion, see Rekha Pande (2005:285-299).
2. Caste system in the name of tradition perpetrated a power hierarchy through which people were divided into water-tight compartments. The lower caste are the subalterns (with subaltern meaning subordinate), in Indian social scenario along with others such as women, transgender, tribal groups to denote their subordinate position. In this context, in some place the terms lower caste and subaltern have been used interchangeably. For details, see Surinder S Jodhka(2012: pp.x-xiii).
3. Movements such as Brahma Samaj, Prarthana Samaj compared to subaltern movements such as SNDP or Sathyashodhak Samaj, were predominantly dominated by westernized middle class, upper caste males. They were more oriented towards liberal reforms demanding various civil reforms such as abolition of social rites such as sati, child marriage; demands to legalize widow re-marriage, promote women's education etc., rather than advocating radical shifts such as land reforms or a new egalitarian theology. Thus, many of these movements remained urban, middle class centric and limited in their appeal.
4. The Ezhavas were the most numerous and ritually superior among the untouchable castes within colonial Kerala's caste hierarchy. Their primary occupation was agriculture, toddy tapping, coir manufacturing etc. They were also employed as soldiers. They could be categorized as an intermediate caste occupying a middle position within the caste order.
5. For how mobility of every individual and group was determined by one's Jati, see Jodhka (2012: 6-15).
6. Historians have ascertained the existence of the institution of slavery in the context of colonial Kerala. Sanal Mohan uses the category of slave caste to categorize all caste groups such as Pulayas, Parayas, and Kuravas who were subjected to forced labour, social marginalization and were categorized as untouchables. They were unfree agrarian labour whose labour was controlled through the caste rules. They were attached to a landlord and could be sold and bought just like animals. This has made scholars to point to the existence of agrestic slavery as an institution within colonial Kerala.
7. The SNDP's reform had twin agendas- one was to reform the existing Brahminical Hindu social practices and evolve an egalitarian community, second was to secure basic civil rights such as reservation in government jobs, access to public services, political representation etc.
8. 'Arivu' is the Malayalam word denoting knowledge. See, GBalakrishnan Nair (2003:115-118).
9. Thus, popular religion is the 'language' through which subalterns express their views, dissent and even rebellion. See, Gramsci (1996:323).
10. Narayana Guru at one instance wrote that a temple is a space where he would wish individuals to assemble as brothers, as fellows irrespective of their caste. See, GBalakrishnan Nair, Op. Cit., pp. 791-800.
11. Guru rejected popular religious practices such as Madan (demon) and Marutha (totem) worship widely prevalent among the subaltern social groups. However, unlike many other reformers Guru realized the centrality of religion as a psychological and social medium for people to seek comfort. This perspective made Guru to avoid rejecting religion altogether, though he sought to establish a reformed religion free of discriminatory practices. Scientific reasoning or even conversion was still not an option in a society with no access to basic education. Narayana Guru efforts were to transform religion into a pedagogy with liberatory potential.
12. 'The official religion of the intellectual' is an expression used by Gramsci. See John Fulton (1987: 205). Gramsci argues that the intellectual/ organised religion is usually official/hegemonic. However, it may be inferred by his position that there could be non-official religion of the intellectual. While talking about different trends in Catholic Action, he suggests clearly such possibilities within organized religion: Integralist, Jesuit and Modernist representing the right, centre and left-wing tendencies within an organized religion. See Gramsci,Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks (1995: 41-42, 195-208). Also, see Fulton (1987: 211-213). .
13. Bhima Bhoi, 'Sruti Chintamani', in Bhima Boi Granthabali, ed. by Karunakar Sahoo (Cuttack: Dharmagrantha Store, 2000), 27thChapter, p. 53.

References

1. Banerjee-Dube, Ishita. (2012),Religion, Law and Power: Tales of Time in Eastern India, 1860-2000,Anthem Press, Delhi.
2. Bahinipati, P. (2009), The Mahima Dharma: Interpreting history, trends and tradition,Gyanayuga Publication, Bhubaneswar.
3. Beltz, Johannes. (2018), Apocalyptic Predictions, Prophecies, and a New Beginning: Mahima Dharma and the Arrival of the Satya Yuga,in Ishita Banerjee-Dube and Johannes Beltz(eds.),Popular Religion and Ascetic Practices: New Studies on Mahima Dharma, Manohar, Delhi, pp. 79-102.
4. Bhoi, Bhima. (2000),Granthabali (Karunakar Sahoo, Ed.). Dharmagrantha Store, Cuttack.

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

5. Chandramohan, P. (2016), Developmental Modernity in Kerala: Narayana Guru, SNDP Yogam and Social Reform, Tulika Books, New Delhi.
6. Dash, G. C. (2008),Mahima Gosain: Compiling a Hagiography, in Ishita Banerjee-Dube and Johannes Beltz(eds.),Popular Religion and Ascetic Practices: New Studies on Mahima Dharma, Manohar, Delhi, pp. 61-78.
7. Deo, Fanindam. (2015),Socio-Religious Movements and Cultural Networks in Indian Civilisation: Mahima Dharma, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla.
8. Desai, Manali. (2007), State Formation and Radical Democracy in India, Routledge, Oxon.
9. Eschmann, Anncharlott. (2008) Mahima Dharma and Tradition,inIshita Banerjee-Dube and Johannes Beltz(eds.),Popular Religion and Ascetic Practices: New Studies on Mahima Dharma, Manohar, Delhi, pp. 31-42.
10. Fulton, John. (1987), Religion and Politics in Gramsci: An Introduction, Sociological Analysis, 48:3 (1987), pp. 197-216.
11. Gopalakrishnan, P. K. (2012), A Cultural History of Kerala, The State Institute of Languages, Trivandrum.
12. Gramsci, Antonio. (1995), Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks(Derek Boothman, Edit. And Trans.). Lawrence and Wishart, London.
13. Gramsci, Antonio. (1996),Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, (Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, Eds. And Trans.). Orient Blackswan,Hyderabad.
14. Jodhka, Surinder S. (2012), Oxford India Short Introductions: Caste, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
15. Kumar, Udaya. (2014), Sree Narayana Guru's Idioms of the Spiritual and the Worldly, in Vijaya Ramaswamy (ed.), Devotion and Dissent in Indian History,Foundation Books, New Delhi, pp. 370-380.
16. Nair, G.Balakrishnan. (2003),Sree Narayana Guru Sampoornakrithikal, The State Institute of Languages,Trivandrum.
17. Pande, Rekha. (2005), Religious Movements in Medieval India: Bhakti Creation of Alternative Spaces, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi.
18. Pati, Biswamoy. (2012), Legitimacy, Power and Subversion: Colonial Orissa, c.1800-1940. Historyand Sociology of South Asia, 6 (1), January, pp. 1-21.
19. Pati, Biswamoy. (2010),Religion and Social 'Subversion': Re-examining Colonial Orissa, Economic and Political Weekly, 45 (25), June 19, pp. 43-52.