

METAPHYSICAL STAND OF THE MAHIMA CULT

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Abstract

Even though Mahimā the cult is primarily a religious movement we can find a distinct metaphysical stand in the writings of the poet-philosopher, Bhima Bhoi, the initial exponent of the cult. It is quite important to note that there has been a strong influence of the monistic stand of the Upanisads and the sunya-centric metaphysical stand of the pancasakhaa philosophers of Odisha. In this context, the views of different reputed scholars are re-examined. The article spells out the specific metaphysical stand of the cult.

Keywords: *Niraakaara and nirguna Brahman, Mahima, Alekha, Sunya*

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Introduction

Brahman So far as the origin and development of this cult are concerned it owes its origin to Mahimaa Gosain and it is said that the task of preaching the cult was solely given to Bhima Bhoi, who happens to be the chief exponent of the cult. His poems were very reached with metaphysical thoughts out of which a distinct conception reality can be worked out. And in fact, many scholars have taken an attempt in this direction. But his disciple Avadhuta Bisvanatha Baba has contributed significantly regarding his metaphysical stand which is known as Visuddhaadvaita vada. But in this article, the view of poet-philosopher Bhima Bhoi will be taken into account.

Even though *Mahimaa* cult is primarily a religious movement we can find a distinct metaphysical stand in the writings of the poet-philosopher, Bhima Bhoi. It is because he has talked about the ultimate reality, the universe (*saAsra* in his terminology) and the world (*Jagat*). For him the three worlds (*lokas*) taken together constitute *SaAsaara*. The entire speculative metaphysics of Bhima Bhoi has been synthesized in this following couplet where he says that there is no one higher to *Mahim* in this universe who has pervaded in the three worlds. “*Mahimânka thâru Bida nâhin nâ saAsâre, mahimâhin âtajâta tini Jagat is.*¹

It is seen that the major aim of the cult was to refute the idol worship of Hinduism. But, though not directly but indirectly there does tacit acceptance of orthodox Upanishadic stands in various ways shows that since the cult came to existence much late it carries the impact of two major trends of the past, namely, Vedic and Buddhistic trends. One such example is the case of accepting the possibility of three worlds in Mahima cult was very much there in the Vedic trend which has been described as *svarga*, *Amartya* and *ptla* (heaven, world and under the ground) or the *devaloka*, *martyaloka* and *ptlook* where Gods, humans, demons live respectively.

Bhima Bhoi has categorically accepted and preached monism in respect of the ultimate reality even though various expressions are used by him for that single reality. The expressions, found to be used for the ultimate reality are ‘*Mahim*’, ‘*Purusa*’, ‘*Aleka*’, ‘*Suunya*’ and ‘*Brahma*’ etc.. Sometimes any two of the mentioned terms are also found to be used combined as, ‘*Sunya-Purusa*’, ‘*Sunya-Brahma*’, ‘*MahimAlexa*’, etc.. He has mentioned that the single reality is the *Brahman* which is eternal and has no parts. Do not split the *Brahman* because there is no second possibility. His words:

Brahma haiku kai marai ki sei save hotcha baai

*Akhanda brahmaku khandita Makara Hikaru Kahani dui.*²

Aleka, who is also conceived as the ‘*Mahim*’ is beyond comprehension. The name ‘*Aleka*’ or ‘*Mahim*’ has been attributed to the ultimate reality based on the nature of the ultimate reality. He considers that there is no language that can express reality. For this reason, the reality is named as *Alekha* (un-writable). The indescribability is due to the infinite nature of it. Because of this, not only the possibility of description is rejected also the scope of use of the language is restricted. *Se roopaku varnivaaku valuta kathina, Aksara a vase john a sphere vachana.*³ Non availability of the finite form (*nhin Roopa kaanti*) and as unheard (*afti*) also keeps it away from prayers and eulogies. He is not known (*agochara*) to anyone. The tongue cannot spell out it (*a late jihad*). That is why he bears the name *Mahimaa*.⁴ In the way it has been said earlier, in a similar way the *Brahman* has been conceived in most of the *Upanisads*. We can see there is a striking resemblance between the view of the following *Upanisads* and the view of Bhima Bhoi regarding *Brahman*. It has been described as formless, infinite, indescribable (*anirvacaniya*), not available to language and mind (*yatovacaniyante, aprpya manas sah*),⁵ etc. The *Katha*, *Kena*, and *Munduka Upanisads* have thought similarly in the following manner. In the *Katha Upanisad* it has been described as: Not by speech, not by mind, not by sight can he be apprehended. How can he be comprehended except by him who says, ‘He is’?⁶ He can be comprehended only by those who affirm that ‘He is’. “The self as the knowing subject can never become an object. It can be realized through *Yoga*. While He transcends the ordinary means of apprehension, He can be immediately experienced through *Yoga*, and for such apprehension faith in His existence is an indispensable condition.”⁷ In the *Kena Upanisad* it has been described as:

*Na tatra cakcur gacchati a vg gacchati no mana% Na vidmona Vijnmo yathaitad anuaicy*⁸

(There the eye goes not, speech goes not, nor the mind; we know not, we understand not how one can teach this.) It is such that to this visibility, audibility and conceivability are denied. So also it is not possible to grasp or know or explain. On the whole, it is beyond comprehension and deliberation. In a similar manner, it has been described in the *Mundaka Upanisad* that “He is not grasped by the eye nor even by speech nor by other sense-organs, nor by austerity nor by work.” (*nacakcuc g[hyate npi vc nnyair devai% tapas karmaG va*).⁹ Moreover this view resembles with the *Kathoupanisadic* stand that *Brahman* is soundless, colorless, tasteless, eternal, odorless, beginningless, and endless. Also, the view resembles with *Mndkya*

Upanisad where *Brahman* is described as unthinkable, ungraspable, and unnameable. The concept of *Dajjaln* of the *Chndogya Upanisad* also expresses similar thought that it is the essence of everything and it also that to which everything dissolves. Thus it is difficult to distinguish between the *Upanisadic* concept of '*NirguGa Brahman*' and the concept of '*Brahman*' of *Mahimcult*.

Bhima Bhoi also maintains that since *Brahman* is omnipresent, the formless *Brahman* is also available having forms. The world of objects is his creation. He cannot be isolated from the created objects. The impersonal *Brahman* also found to be personal being present in each and everything (*Sarva gate bije Hari*).¹⁰In the personal form it is known as *jiva Brahman*. Thus the expression *Brahman* above *Brahman* (*Brahman are Brahman*)¹¹ refers to the two forms of the *Brahman*, namely, *jiva Brahman* and *Brahman*. As *jiva Brahman*, it resides in everyone irrespective of good or wicked or demon-like beings.¹² Patnaik mentions the view of Mahima dharma that "The visible universe is the manifestation of the *Mahima* (glory) of *Parama Brahman*. All the things of the world are illuminated and made conscious due to the direction of the conscious Almighty

This above-mentioned view of Mahima cult is very much like the view found in the opening line of the *Iúâ Upanisad* that *Iúâ* is pervaded in the each and every object of this world (*Iúâ vâsyam idam sarvam yat Kim ca jagatyâm Jagat*). And there is also striking resemblance with the classic expression of the *Chândogya Upanisad*: *Sarva khalu am Brahma*.¹³

The higher *Brahman* or the *Brahman* is not affected by its transformation to the lower version in the form of *jivas* or particulars. Panigrahi puts it as "Therefore the witnessing self is not bound - that which is bound is the lower self, the doer and the enjoyer. In this sense, *Mahimâ Alekha* not only contains the individual and the universe within its own self but remains as the eternal witness.

piG

a brahmâG

*aku garbhagatare dharichha heSakala but are sâkiciparâye purichha*¹⁴

Brahman has been described as the witnessing self in *Upanisads* as well in the *Gita*. "Two birds, companions (who are) always united, cling to the self-same tree, of these two, the one eats the sweet fruit and the other looks on without eating,"¹⁵*Bhagavad Gita* (XIII- 22)says: 'The supreme spirit in the body is said to be the witness, the permitter, the supporter, the experiencer, the Great Lord and the Supreme Self'.¹⁶

Thus it is marked that there has been a great deal of resemblance between

the Upanishadic conception of reality and the Mahima concept of reality so far as the inexpressibility aspect of the ultimate reality and the creator-creation relationship are concerned. But there is also a remarkable difference between these two trends regarding another aspect of the same reality. That is, in Mahima cult reality has been treated as *Sunya* (void) whereas in the Upanisads reality has treated as *Poorna* (Whole).

Reality as *Sunya*

The most important feature of *Mahima* philosophy is its *sunya*-centric metaphysics. The cult admits a single ultimate Absolute and advocates absolute-monism. But for them, the ultimate principle or the supreme is *Sunya Purusa* or *Sunya Brahman*. The emphasis on the concept of *sunya* is attached conspicuously in these two of the books, namely, *Brahma-Nirupama Gita* and *Srutinisedha Gita*. In fact, the opening line of the former mentions that the almighty, *Rekha purusa* is itself void or the great void ('*sunya sunya mahaasunya alekha purusa*'). Similarly, in the latter one, it is mentioned that *Mahaasunya-Brahman* is beyond all desires, attachments, predications, etc.¹⁷ When the ultimate reality is treated to be infinite, indescribable, and un-writable it is also treated as non-categorical. The inadequacy of language and the non-categorical nature is expressed by the term '*Sunya*'. This *Sunya* is identified with *Mahima* and treated as the *Sunya Brahman* which is the beginning of everything and also the ultimate end. As *Sunya Brahman* it is beyond comprehension. In the *Brahm-Nirupama Gîtâ*, it has been said: He (the ultimate reality) is supposed to be the great void (*mahâsunya*) which should be conceived as qualityless (*nirguGa*). No one can know his real nature as his real essence is *Sunya*.

They are very much against idol worship. So they have not taken any attempt to find a symbolic form of God to be worshipped. In this respect the cult avoids one of the major features of theism, that is, idol worship. It is taken for granted that the ultimate principle cannot take any form and for that reason, God should not be traced either in heaven or in the earth (inside temples). God is *Alekha* (indescribable) and *Sunya* (void). In respect of the use of the concept of *Sunya* and *Alekha*, many scholars have marked the close similarity between the *bhajans* of Odia *panchasakhaa* and their contemporary writers and the *bhajans* of Bhima Bhoi. For example, the concept *sunya* has been significantly used in the *Sunya Samhitaa* of Achutananda Dasa.¹⁸ Further it can be pointed out that at least thirty years prior to Bhima Bhoi, one of the *pancasakhaa*, Jagannatha Dash has described the ultimate one to be *sunny* in the words which have been translated as *Omkara is Parama- Sunya*; all our activities are *sunya* too. The prayers and meditations are *sunya*. The forms and fancies are *sunya*. ... The celestial bodies like the sun and moon are nothing but

sunya. The empirical world along with the animate and inanimate beings is in *sunya*.¹⁹ So far as the uses of the term ‘Sunya-Brahman’ is concerned there has a great deal of resemblance in the writings of by Achyutananda and Bhima Bhoi. The former writes: *It has no shape, no color is invisible and without a name. This Brahman is called Sunya-Brahman.*²⁰ The later writes: *The invisible Brahman is one and unique, ... This is what is called sunya and mahaasunya, ...*²¹ *Beyond word he is and beyond thought, His body is sunya, ...*²²

*Nobody knows His exact name, as the essence of the higher Brahman is Sunya. (Brahma are Brahma sūnya rahichhi marmas, kehi a jāne tānka ninja nāmaku.*²³

Thus it can be pointed out that even though a distinct metaphysical stand can be worked out in respect of the Mahima cult but the influence of the Upanisadic metaphysics, as well as the panchasakha writers, cannot be denied. But it is seen that a group of scholars including Patnaik emphasize on the view that ‘Mahima philosophy is a continuation of the medieval philosophical tradition of Odisha.’²⁴

References

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- 4 *Stutichintamani, 6*
- 5 *Taittiriya Upanisad 11, 4, 1*
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