

## Deconstructing Divine Diktat from Orthodoxy to Altruism: Mahima Cult – The Last Surviving Renegade Faith in India

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### Abstract

This paper explores religion, societal mores, shared practices, and emotional moorings in the postcolonial Indian community. The questions of power are also dealt with meticulously in culture, society, and the state from a comparative religious perspective. Exploration of the articulation of faith by the members of Indian society leads to critical analyses of notions of time and history and their myriad manifestations in literature. The intricate interactions and mutual imbrications between religion, social order, and power – especially in the functioning of religious institutions by the exponents of the spiritual domain – have been discussed in detail. A case study is undertaken on Mahima Dharma, medieval Orissa's last great religious revival, perhaps the most salient feature in India's religious history. Still a living religion with a very well-consolidated order, it has been grounded in its spiritual ventures by a heavy code of injunctions and bound in solidarity by its various modes of reckoning. In the 19th century, when there was the enveloping darkness all around because of the colonial rule with encircling gloom everywhere, and the social order was in disarray, a Kondh tribal poet, Bhima Bhoi, the prime interlocutor of the renegade faith, started a revolt from below to champion human rights and several socio-religious and cultural movements in Odisha and the adjoining areas. He used poetry as a tool - an alternative mode of communication - to proclaim his authority on religious affairs. While exploring the nuances of such a mode of transmission over the centuries, especially in divine matters, we will analyse how successfully Bhima Bhoi gravitated against the prevailing vitiating social order through his verses, which have timeless relevance, drawing sundry attention even today for their emotional appeal, lyrical value, and musical mode. Inevitably, Bhima's *Bhajans* and *Jananas* have remained household lores and become a medium capturing the depths of human experience, expressing the most profound emotions, and conveying our deepest thoughts and ideas on Divine Affairs. Such modes of communication essentially remained instrumental in lending a Deific Identity\* to Bhima and his Guru, Mahima Swami, the founder of the Mahima Cult.

**Keywords:** Mahima, Brahma, Deific Identity, Brahman, Subalternity, Referent Power

Communication is pivotal in all human activity in present times. All lifeforms on earth have communication systems through which they preserve, promote, propagate, and perpetuate their species and culture. It is a prime necessity, a natural and social stipulation, and a prerequisite for forming/shaping faith and ideologies. It originates from the Latin word 'communis', which means familiar, and 'communicate', which means to share, impart, or have something in common. In other words, it is an interaction process through signs and symbols inviting thoughts. The symbols can be gestural, pictorial, verbal, or any other form that operates in our mind to share something. In this respect, communication is the art of transmitting ideas and attitudes from one person to another, disseminating information from one place to another. The physical expression of communication is speech, the written word, and their extensions, such as film, telephone, television, internet, etc. Contrastingly, we come

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across a different form of communication, dictated by the Divine Command,\*\* which asserts that morality is ultimately based on the commands of God and that the morally right action is what God commands or requires. Though the precise content of these divine commands varies from religion to religion, all versions of the theory hold in common the claim that morality and moral obligations ultimately depend on God. Though the said theory faces the paradoxical Euthyphro dilemma,\*\* the possible connections between religion and ethics interest moral philosophers and theorists of religion. Nevertheless, it leads us to consider the role of religion in society and the nature of ethical deliberation. However, we need not go into details on Divine Command Theory (not possible within the limited space of a paper either) and, in the fitness of things, let us take the Divine Diktat in a generic sense as a communication from God or the Supreme Being.

## I

In the Indian tradition, the first word was 'Aum', the first sound ever made or heard. It is considered *Sabda Brahma*, the divine word - the first pointer of communication. *The Vedas* are called Shruti, which needs to be heard. It alludes to the oral tradition via which the Vedas were transmitted. They are traditionally called revelations received by sages, who shipped them to humanity. In Sanatana Dharma, the assumption is that knowledge exists in the world, and we get it if we seek it and are sensitive enough to receive it. The one who captures this knowledge is the *Rishi*. He is the one who sees and hears what others cannot. He prepares his body to listen to the vibrations of the cosmos through various *Sadhanas* (spiritual practices or disciplines) like *mantra*, *yantra*, *tantra*, and the practice of *Tapasya* (austerity). In Hindu rituals and prayers, *mantras* are often used to communicate with gods and invoke their power to achieve certain ends. *Mantras* are thus divine vehicles that carry the thoughts and prayers of devotees to heaven and help them establish communication with gods. Since *mantras* manifest on their own in the minds of pure devotees, they are also considered eternal and *apauruseya* (not human/ impersonal/ authorless) and only heard (*sruti*) as in the Vedas. However, it is observed that the Rishis receive the Divine Diktat and communicate it through inspired poetry to attract celestial fortune and win powerful patrons. Nevertheless, *Puranas* speak of conversations of divine beings being overheard by animals and humans.

For example, while discussing the secrets of yoga, Shiva and Shakti are overheard by a snake called Patanjali, a parrot named Shuka, a crow called Kakabushandi, and a fish that becomes Matsyandranath. So, the tantric tradition is transmitted through those who overheard the gods. Patanjali is linked with *Yogasutra*, Shuka with *Bhagavata Purana*, Kakabhusandi with *Ramayana*, and Matsyendranath with the Nath-Jogi traditions. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, we note Sanjaya's words to Dhritarashtra, where he overhears what Krishna tells Arjuna. A lot of symbolic significance is hidden in the narrative of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The scripture can be genuinely interpreted at various levels. The characters and ideas in it can be explained from manifold points of view.

In the scripture, apart from Lord Krishna, we encounter three personalities who participate in the divine discourse and receive knowledge. Symbolically, the three individuals represent the three methods by which man can receive divine wisdom from God. Arjuna represents the direct method. He is the direct recipient of the *Gita*. Arjuna, a blessed soul, saw God's physical and universal forms and conversed with Him. Sanjaya, who received it through intuition and extra-sensory perception, represents the second method. Although this method



is more common than the previous one, it happens only in the case of adepts who master their minds and bodies and perfect their spiritual practice. Through that perfection, they attain many supernatural abilities (*siddhis*), such as clairvoyance and telepathy. Sanjaya was a spiritual person who renounced the world and lived piously contemplating God.

Meanwhile, Dhritarashtra, the blind king, receives it through the word of Sanjaya. This is the most common method in which divine knowledge is obtained through verbal, oral, or written communication from another person or source. People only acquire much of their religious and spiritual wisdom through this method. For example, *Brahman* conveyed the Vedic knowledge to the seers, who, in turn, preserved the said knowledge so that others could know them and participate in God's work upon earth, as in the *Bhagavad Gita*, divine wisdom was transmitted to Dhritarashtra through Sanjaya. What is then the mode of communication with the Divine?

Prayer is, perhaps, one way people connect with the sacred realm to usher in overall well-being. The very idea of prayer involves relating to the divine or subject of worship (such as God, deities, spirits, ancestors, or other ideas). Most commonly, people petition the godly for blessings for themselves, their families, and their communities: for good health, wealth, and happiness, for security and peace; and for guidance in making appropriate life decisions. Prayer may also declare one's faith, ask for forgiveness, and express gratitude, all of which bring people into the good graces of the divine. In the good graces of the sacred, people feel safe, secure, and blessed. These ideas of divine communication from/to the Divine relate to common themes in religion and cultural traditions over the centuries.

Acts of prayer and belief practices vary widely by cultural mores and even by individual philosophies. Prayer may be private, or it may be communal. It may involve personal submission to one God and a reciprocal relationship with the divine, such as giving thanks, prayers, or offerings in exchange for blessings and protection; for some, it involves literal interaction with the sacred. While some prayers are silent, many are highly sensory, with incense and spices, chanting and song, music and movement, flame and water, and food and drink. The primary thing is that people go for prayer to connect and communicate, maybe in different ways, with the sacred realm.

Nevertheless, Hindu traditions emphasise that God is the cause of existence and permeates everything. At the same time, God is beyond and not limited by the world. *Brahman* is an abstract concept but is believed to become accessible in deities/idols (*murtis*). The seeker of *Ishvara Anugraha* (God's grace) has to do *sadhana* (practice) involving the body, mind, and spirit to attain God through *Bhakti* (devotion) and complete surrender.

Incidentally, *Karma* theory holds that human beings are in the bondage of birth and death, and the kind of life that falls to one's lot (happiness, sorrow, etc) is decided by the actions done in one's earlier life. The individual enjoys those actions and the fruits thereof and can attain freedom only by renunciation in action. He cannot be liberated from bondage without the discriminating knowledge (between the real and unreal). This *Viveka* (discriminating knowledge) is like a sword that removes ignorance but is possible only by the grace of God.

The Grace of God, as devotees see it, is incomparable. In the philosophy of Sri Ramanuja, God is called Brahman, Narayana, Ishwara, Bhagavan, Purushottama, Vishnu, etc. His attributes, known as *Kalyana gunas*, are considered auspicious and countless. The qualities are

manifested in him with finite beings. Out of several characteristics, the following are essential – *jñāna* (knowledge), *bala* (omnipotence), *aishwarya* (lordship), *shakti* (creative power), *virya* (immutability), *tejas* (splendour), *gāmbhīrya* (inestimable grandeur), *audarya* (generosity) and *kārunya* (compassion). When a devotee has deep faith in God, he develops a devotional attitude that leads to *prapatti*, a complete surrender to God. To such devotees, *Ishwara Anugraha* (God's Grace) is believed to come automatically.

Unlike other religions, where spirituality is an external process, Buddhism and Jainism (often considered offshoots of Hinduism) believe in something that comes from within. Without any specific God or a group of deities (the Buddha is not considered a God; he was an Enlightened Being), the main focus of Buddhism is the attempt to free oneself from bonds of attachment, which one can accomplish through meditation and spiritual discipline, where one's life becomes a constant prayer. The "communication" needed to free oneself from attachment that causes suffering is not with an external being but with oneself. At best, the Buddha's path is the preliminary communication, which can be used as a primary starting point, but the path one takes is one's own. Therefore, the goal of a Buddhist is to purify one's heart and to let go of all desires. A person must abandon all sensual pleasures, all evil, all joy, and all sorrow by following religious principles and intense meditation. It is more of a self-discipline that is not the same as praying or focusing on a god. Through dedicated meditation, a person may reach *Nirvana* -- "the blowing out" of the flame of desire. Buddhism provides something true of most world religions: disciplines, values, and directives that a person may want to live by.

Similarly, Jain canons address everything to an ascetic. As nonviolence is the founding principle of Jainism, Jain scriptures teach how nonviolent communication takes place. Jain texts state the maxim of carefulness and control in/over speech, otherwise known as *bhaṣā samiti* and *vacana gupti*, respectively. There are five types of *samiti* and three types of *gupti*, and all these eight principles are known as supporting principles to five great vows: *Ahiṃsā* (Nonviolence), *Satya* (Truth), *Asteya* (Non-stealing), *Brahmacharya* (Chastity), *Aparigraha* (Non-possession). What is sought then is *Samyak Darshana* (Right Perception), *Samyak Jnana* (Right Knowledge), and *Samyak Charitra* (Right Conduct), the *Triratna* - three virtues together forming the path to *Moksha* (Spiritual Liberation).

## II

Though Zoroastrianism is closer to Vedic religion in varying degrees, it has a rich history of interaction with the Abrahamic faiths. Along with similar philosophical revolutions in South Asia, it was believed to be interconnected strings of reformation against a common Indo-Aryan thread. Inevitably, Zoroastrians believe that God created the spiritual entities and beings before manifesting their counterparts in the material plane, which consists of fire, water, air, earth, plants, animals, and humans, very much like the body of God. Thus, His spirit rules supreme and pervades the creation in various aspects and entities. The Guardian Spirits were created in the material plane as humans from the *primaeval* man, whose seed led to *Mashye and Mashyane*, the first man and first woman. Humanity's races descended from these two in due course of time. However, Zoroastrianism is based on the teachings of Zoroaster or Zarathushtra, the first prophet to whom God manifested Himself in a vision and revealed the secrets of creation and the religious instructions to be followed by people on earth to pursue the path of righteousness. The teachings of Zoroaster are available to us in



the *Zend Avesta*, the salient scripture of Zoroastrians. Followers of Ahura Mazda believe the birth of Zoroaster heralded the beginning of the current cycle of creation, which would last for 3,000 years. During this period, a prophet would appear on earth at the end of each millennium to preserve the teachings and guide humanity. The third prophet will be a future son of Zoroaster, whose name would be Shoshyant, who would herald Judgment Day and the eventual destruction of evil powers in the material world.

Similarly, communication is closely related to the life and mission of the Church. *The Bible* is a candid document that conveys God's love, judgment, and mercy to His people. The concepts, such as logos - the Word, prophecy, incarnation, revelation, the gospel, etc. are communications. Holy Communion, liturgy, prayer, and icon painting are physical expressions of such communication. In the *Old Testament*, the phrase 'Word of Yahweh' is the most significant and predominant expression of the divine message. The Exodus event and the covenant symbolise God's revelation in the history of humanity. The book of Genesis opens by saying that God uttered the first word amid darkness and chaos: 'Let there be light, and there was light.' (Gen1,3)

Eventually, Yahweh, the Lord God, reveals himself in and through the actions and mission of the prophets. The words of the prophets were preserved first orally, and then they were written. This oral and written communication was the source of change and the inspiration for liberation. The hand of God was thus manifested. God's voice was heard, and He made his ways known to the prophets, especially to Moses and the people of Israel. In this respect, *The Bible*, the written Word of God, is a medium for God's communication. The fact and process of revelation seem to have two different levels: God's communication with man and man's communication with God, otherwise known as revelation. In this context, *The Bible* itself testifies that it is the Word of God. It is wrapped with the statements: this is the Word of God and thus says the Lord. The expression thus says the Lord is God's communication through the life and testimony of the Prophets. God's self-communication happens only through God's intervention. It is a record of the divinely revealed communication from God. Like the Prophets, the Apostles, under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, communicated the message of salvation and liberation to the people through the aforesaid privileged entities. God speaks through vision and dreams (Num 12,6). According to *The Bible*, He says mouth to mouth (Num 12,8). Therefore, the Spoken Word or God's Voice is considered divine communication.

In the *New Testament*, Jesus Christ is the medium and message of God's communication. The essence of incarnation (manifesting God's love in action) is to convey God's love towards humanity. In the incarnation, Jesus Christ is the son of God, who reveals the Father. In the strict sense, Jesus Christ, the word becoming Flesh, is a communication act and event of God's ceaseless love. Incidentally, the Prophets themselves are the messengers of God and are understood as the medium for communication. From such understanding, God's divine communication proceeds from the Divine initiation. Hence, *The Bible* is a written document of God's self-communication and a man's response to God's self-initiation.

In Islam, Allah (the almighty God, infinitely superior to and transcendent from humanity) communicates with man through the *Qur'an*. Being the creator of the universe and the source of all good and all evil, Allah conveys to man commands, proscriptions, guidance, and an explanation of a great transcendent truth. Islam emphasises the importance of effective

communication to promote better understanding and more assertive practices, as narrated by *Hadith*, which covers the narration of Muhammad's sayings, doings, or approvals (*Taqrir*). Communicating with Allah was considered logical, plausible, and natural. Allah is a Personality (*Huma*) - not a mere abstract conception of philosophy - with a Nature of His so sublime that it is far beyond our limited comprehension. He exists in such a way that He is the Ever-Living and Self-Sustaining. He created and sustained the world; He sent prophets to mend people's habits and create suitable communication patterns with their Creator and Master.

### III

Eventually, in the Abrahamic religion, God communicates with humanity through messengers: Judaism informs us how God spoke to Moses, Christianity apprises us about God speaking to Jesus, and Islam instructs us how God speaks to many prophets from Adam onwards to the final Prophet Muhammad. Messengers hear God's voice, and mortals listen to the voice of messengers. Contrastingly, in Hinduism, gods never directly speak to messengers. There are no messengers. Gods and goddesses share their wisdom, which is overheard by sages who transmit to humanity. Thus, insight is overheard in Hinduism; it is an option, not an injunction. Therefore, in Hinduism, overhearing is a choice. Listening to God's message is not. Hinduism is thus seen as voluntary, and Abrahamism is obligatory. Hinduism believes you have many lives, so you will overhear and be wise at the appropriate time. Abrahamism believes there is only one life to hear God's message, leading to a sense of urgency.

While it may seem like communication is easier than ever with all the technology available, quantity is no substitute for quality when receiving/expressing thoughts clearly and crisply, articulating opinions, communicating coherent instructions, and motivating others through powerful speech. In this context, we observe that most Divine Communication conveys emotion through poetry; the receivers interpret and derive meaning through the strength and subtlety of their loyalty. The words are poured into a stream of particular consciousness and style that bespeak higher feelings and sublime dimensions - emotions, ideas, attitudes, and values. As with any form of art, poetic creation is a reflection and projection of the processes operating within, thus transforming the content into more than just a means of communication. Historically, poetry was part of oral tradition and was shared through recitation at social gatherings. While face-to-face discussion can never be discouraged, poetry as a tool provides platforms, especially in deific matters, for acceptance beyond society, sometimes in real-time. We can now explore how Bhima Bhoi's poetic renderings created the milieu's emotional and social experience, thus making the Mahima Cult a famous religious outfit in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Odisha and adjoining provinces.

### IV

Bhima Bhoi (1850–1895) was a 19th-century saint-poet, philosopher, and theologian from the Kondh (aboriginal tribe) community of the erstwhile princely State of Sonapur, Odisha, India. He became the voice of protest against religious bigotry, social injustice, and caste discrimination. His faith in "Mahima Dharma" (a cult founded by his Guru and mentor, Mahima Swami) led to his belief in one God, society, and religion. "Go and search the three worlds,/ You will find only one man and one caste,/The Almighty has made,/This world with a single caste," asserts Bhima in his magnum opus *Stuti Chintamani*. In Bhima's works, especially in *Bhajans* and *Jaṇāṇas*, we discover the notions of time and history, the subaltern





voice searching for referent power, a deific identity precisely, with concomitant manifestations in quotidian arenas of society, polity, and religion.

The Mahima Cult was a drive similar to India's 'Brahmo Movement' of the 19th-century Religious Reform initiative. Thus, the Satya Mahima philosophy subscribed to pure non-dualism because of its claim that the world is created by the grace of the *Brahman* who is *Alekha* (the attribute less), the *Anām* (the nameless), the *Anādi* (One without beginning), the *Aryakta* (the unmanifested), and *Niranjana* (the non-attached). In its appraisal, the world of names and forms is due to ignorance and, therefore, need not be taken seriously. Even though the creation of many things and beings appears natural, the source is the Ultimate Reality, like the one in Sunya philosophy, which believes in the non-dual, formless, shapeless power.

*satya dharma dhara satya karma kara satye kara guru seva I*

*prasanna boiba alekha debata nischaya mukati deba II*

*satyare snahana satyare marjan satyare kara bhojana I*

*sāmwika karmare se alekha dian nischaya heba Prasanna II*

*satyare soiba satyare basiba satye kara phanda brutti I*

*mahima bhajiba lokamane jete kara ebi dharma kirti II*

*satyare kahiba satyare rahithiba satyare jiba asiba I*

*satya karmare jete kiratimana jute jute rahithiba II \*\*\*\**

(*Stuti Chintamani*, 82. 4-7)

[Adhere to true religion, do rightful deeds, and render faithful service to Guru. God Alekha will be happy and will undoubtedly save you. Be truth-ordained while bathing, cleaning, and taking food; the said *Alekha* will be gracious. Let truth prevail in sleeping, sitting, and doing professional work; the more you pray Mahima, the more you will earn pious fame. Let truth prevail in speaking, coming, going, and staying in any mode; all your glorious actions within the precincts of truth will remain forever.]

In this context, we are reminded of Ishita Banerjee Dube's statement, which goes thus:

A focus on how a scattered religious formation was crystalised into an institutionalised sect reveals the inherently historical nature of religion, its key attributes as a process, and its linkages with power. ... The innate separation of religion from power/politics premised on the universal definition of these categories masks the genealogies of their construction and confers on religion an unchanging essence. (Banerjee-Dube 12)

The above-stated 'unchanging essence' affirms "the configuration of religion as a universal, a priori category in the modern West" (Asad 27-54) and is equally relevant in the light of Mahima's sustainable grounding and rapid expansion. Though its reckoning closely parallels the Buddhist concept of emptiness and the Hindu notion of *Param Brahma*/ *Ishwar Purusa*/ *Sunya Brahma*, the cult thrived mostly on oral history without textual authority, as in other traditions. It rolled out mostly through Bhima Bhoi's *Bhajans* and *Janānas*, the intermedial

forms between the folk and written traditions. As popular forms through which feelings of the common mass are expressed, they also communicate voluntary acceptance and surrender before the Almighty. In particular, a *Janāṇa* articulates deep religious feelings, whereas a *Bhajan* is a vehicle carrying the social message in the veneer of a prayer. Popular grievances get transferred through the *Bhajans*, though they are also addressed to the Divine. Reciting *Bhajans* during evening hours in large gatherings with the help of a folk instrument called *khanjani* (local version of castanet) is a common practice among the rural folks in eastern India. This amorphous congregation exudes bonhomie and camaraderie of the highest order, hardly be found in the otherwise superficial world of the contemporary elite. Bhima Bhoi, the sect's prime panellist, understood this folk tradition's depth and strength. He composed *Bhajans* in a countryside dialect. Folk idiom and colloquial words made his language earthy, vibrating with intense emotion, ranging from insistent supplication to righteous anger and from abject surrender to indignant moral assertion. His *Bhajans* became an instrument to attract, unite, and mobilise the commoner, thus making Bhima - a source of 'Referent Power' - who mesmerised and inspired everyone through an outburst of lyric energy. Groomed in a primitive, animistic Kondh community, he challenged the deceptive ritualistic practices of idolatrous Hinduism. He plunged deep and straight into Vedantic abstraction and Buddhistic self-culture and radically reoriented the Dharma.

Bhima's poetic utterances made the Mahima cult's dry and dreary philosophical ideas and concepts find their way to the hearts of millions in Orissa and adjoining eastern States of India through an outburst of lyric energy. Folk idiom and colloquial words make his language earthy, vibrating with intense emotion, ranging from insistent supplication to righteous anger and from abject surrender to indignant moral assertion. It is possible to assert that, but for Bhima, Mahima Dharma would have at most remained a mere obscure philosophical cult with esoteric ideas about the void, the shapeless and timeless universal entity. Recorded mainly by scribes, Bhima's creative urge transcends the mundane by aligning himself with the formless *Brahman*.

*Anākāra Alekha purusa qai-Anāma arūpa brahma tābhākṛti kabi I*

...

*Shunya māhāshunya tābhākṛti kabi- Tānka uparaku āu bāda kehi nābhin I*

...

*Se rūpaku varnivāku bahuta kṛthina, Akshara na vase jahin nāspure vacana I*

(*Brahmanirūpaṇa Gītā*, III,10,30,54)

[He is a formless, indescribable Person who is also treated as a nameless and shapeless Brahman. He is called Shunya and Maha Shunya; none else is higher than Him. However, the inadequacy of words and language makes it challenging to describe Him. [Free translation by the author]

*Babhuchi abanā bāṭ dīnā nishī eka hoi*

*Ke pāṭhha ādya anta chinhi rakhiacha kāhin I*





*Mahāshunya shunya bāta arūpe abarṇe bheta*  
*Pinḍa brahmāṇḍare bbedi dhari na pāṛile kebi I*  
*Nāhin chetaṭ betu dwāre na thāi mana bhitare*  
*Kāyā Chhāyā māyā thāre kabhi kichhi na lāgai I*  
*Kāmanā Kālpanā dwāre na mishe beja pāṇchare*  
*Tāṅku ke Kariba thāba jāra nāhin hāi chhāi I*

(*Bhajana Mālā*, 14)

[Thus blows the celestial wind, making one day and night. Who can ascertain the genesis or the cessation? Where can one locate Him? His ways are the perennial void; He is the formless, indescribable. Nobody can trace Him in the body or mind along with the universe. There is no cognisance of any reminiscence nor in mind's territory. It is not in the frame, the image, or even in fancy; nothing is palpable. It is not in five elements, not in longing, nor even in impulse.]

*Pāda pāṇi nāhin tāṅku dhariba kie*  
*Emanta brahma Swarūpa dekhā na jāe I*  
*Nāhin tāṅka pēta aṇṭā phitāi kahuchi gotā*  
*Nara deha bahi tāṅku kālībā nobe,*  
*Tāṅka pari shānti pane tribhubane nāhin jāne*  
*Nindā stuti hānilābha sakṣaḥ sahe,*  
 ...  
*Nāhin tāṅka bārṇa chinha asbesa rūparu bhinna*  
*Sakṣaḥ dharma bidhāna karanti nyāe*  
*Asibā jibā heuchi kari sarba karāuchi*  
*Niskāma jogare nija nāmaku thue I*

(*Bhajana Mālā*, 20)

[Such is the Brahma, which is nowhere seen; he has no hands or feet. Who will catch hold of Him? I speak straight without travesty. He has no midriff or tummy, and It is impossible to assess Him. He is persistent with utmost harmony; He is the transcendent glory. There is no one like Him in heaven, earth, and nether. Everything He bears in one go, be it blame or praise, profit or loss. ... He has no shape or sign, differs from the boundless forms. He serves the fairness of the cosmic law. He comes and goes and makes things happen. He puts His name beyond all karmic desire]

*Sthābaru jangam kṣṇaru patanga chāhin dele anusari I*

*Sakāla ghaṭare puri samānare nohe sānabaḍa kari II*

*Bhābaku nikāta abhābe abhēta bhaktabhābe parā basha I*

*E mora guhāri na shuṇa ki kari dhariachha keun rosa II*

(*Stuti Chintāmaṇi* 15. 1, 2)

[Looking inquisitively at the animate and the inanimate, from the pest to the fowl, You are found heaving equally everywhere, in each body, not in surplus nor scarce. You are closer to genuine feeling and remote for one without it. You yield to devotion. It is my appeal, why don't you heed, what rage have you embraced?]

However, though *Brahman* (the Alekh, the 'Param Guru', in the Mahima hierarchy) is the supreme, the 'Guru' comes next to Him and deserves unquestionable allegiance. The vision of the Guru, as the living manifestation of the Alekh, is one of an omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent authority who commands compliance, not the grace of a benevolent co-traveller in this 'vale of tears.' There is the element of awe and fear in it, and therefore, occasions the prayer for mercy. There is no ecstasy or exhilaration, as found in Bhakti and Vaishnavism. What is solicited thus is to escape from the pessimism and despair of the gloom because of *Kali Yuga*, the era of evil, which can only be outwitted by the grace of the Guru, the Divine Grace. Bhima owes his vision and his dalliance with the Muse to the Guru:

*Janama kaḷaru murkha mun boithili*

*Sōla barasake kabi mun krutya kali II*

*Veda shāstra boli kichi mun jāne nābin*

*Guru brudapadme basi je dele kabi II*

*Jetebeḷe guru kabi je dyanti bheda*

*Teṇu se jodai kabi je kruta pada II*

*Guru na kabile mote je na āsai*

*Srīguru byatike anya je ānjā nābin II*

(*Adi-Anta Gītā*, Ch 8)

[I was ignorant from my birth and got the poetic power at the age of sixteen. I don't know the *Vedas* nor the scriptures; the Guru sat on my heart's lotus feet and dictated. When the Gyru communicates the secret, the poet in me connects the ideas. If Guru does not, I have nothing to say; there is nothing without Guru's command.]

Such was the premise, the direct communion with the Guru, that Bhima insisted upon and influenced the illiterate and gullible followers. Bhima, perhaps, took advantage of it and achieved the deific status – the position of a demi-god precisely. He justified whatever lapses he had as being taken with the Guru's consent. We may cite a stanza from his magnum opus, *Stuti Chintāmaṇi*.

*Janam bhūmiru kaḍbiāni mate baisnaba dīkshā dele I*



*Sadhupane thāi gruhī mun boili karatā etaka kale II*  
*Mubin kī bichārithili mo manare karibi bhārijā putra I*  
*Guru sebaṅkari niskāmare thili pāi brahmajnaṇa mantra II*

(*Stuti Chintāmaṇi* 64, 2-3)

[He pulled me out of my birthplace and canonised me. I became a householder while being an ascetic under His tutelage. Had I ever thought I would have a wife and son? Being overwhelmed by the knowledge of the *Brahman*, I was serving the Guru without any worldly longing.]

## V

Once a 'Referent Leader' (with the power that stems from the ability to inspire and influence), Bhima emerged as a 'Positional Leader' wielding power to induce the zest for life through the 'creation of knowledge' (Foucault's phrase) and construction of discourse while encouraging a productive network running through the Mahima Cult. Therefore, the assertive affirmation. Bhima never sought solace for himself or his followers. He was never sectarian. His appeal was for the whole universe, for all the animals, trees, and creatures. Here are a couple of examples:

*prānīnka kṣana bheduachi mana jīvanaku mora bādhe I*  
*bhima arakshita kari daṇḍabata kāraṇa māguchi pāde II*

(*Stuti Chintāmaṇi*, 26. 20)

[Misery of human beings deeply affects my mind and brings pain. Bhima, the orphan, salutes at the lotus feet and seeks an answer.]

*prānīnka ārata dubkha apramita dekhu dekhu kebā sabu I*  
*mo jīvana pachhe narke paḍithaṇ jagata uddhāra heu II*

(*Stuti Chintāmaṇi*, 27. 7)

[Who can endure the cry of immense sorrow human beings undergo before their eyes? Let the world be saved, at the cost of my life being consigned to hell.]

The above-said couplet, which pleads for the world's redemption, even at the cost of his salvation, has been turned into the leitmotif of the Oriya language in the Indian Sahitya Akademi's list of languages. But his standing as a devotee and a visionary poet has perhaps subdued his position as the indigenous radical intellectual. The attainment of the deific status inevitably helped Bhima to have a sizable following, and he successfully vouched for a world ruled by love, justice, and goodness, communicating veritably in counter-hegemonic texts that he received from the Supreme Lord through his Guru.

*Bhābi bhābi bharasā mun karichi babuta*

*Bhābe bharā ushwāsibe alekha abadhūta*

*Bhima arakshita kahe*

*Bhāsā prabandhe nāmaku kariachi laye I*

(*Chautisā-Madhuchakra* 1. 24)

[After much thinking, I am confident that the pious Alekha, the one filled with sentiments, will make things delicate and bring solace. Thus says helpless Bhima, while expressing in language, his mind is fully absorbed in the 'Nama' (Verbal Representation of the Supreme).]

## Notes

\* Deific Identity means creating an identity by making someone or something into a god or exalting to the position of a God. If worshipped, they are considered a god or regarded with great respect.

\*\* Divine Command Theory says that God has given humans commandments to obey. Incidentally, it is morally right for humans to follow God's commandments, and it is morally wrong to disobey. Theists often accept the divine command theory, as they believe in the existence of God. The significant feature of the Divine Command Theory, thus, asserts that people follow certain morals and guidelines, as they consider Gods responsible for making these rules. Therefore, by following the laws of God, they believe they will be brought closer to God.

\*\*\* The Euthyphro dilemma was proposed in Plato's dialogue between Socrates and Euthyphro. It posits whether an action is good because God commands it or that God commands an action because it is good. If the first is chosen, it would imply that whatever God commands must be good: even if he commanded someone to inflict suffering, it must be moral. If the latter is chosen, morality no longer depends on God, defeating the divine command theory. Additionally, if God is subject to an external law, he is not sovereign or omnipotent, which would challenge the orthodox conception of God. Proponents of the Euthyphro dilemma might claim that divine command theory is wrong because either answer challenges the ability of God to give moral laws.[ Austin 21 August 2006]

\*\*\*\*The Oriya poetry lines here and the subsequent lines are taken from *Bhima Bhoi Granthabali* (2013). (Ed.) Uddhab Charan Nayak, Cuttack: Granthamandir. The poetry lines are rendered in prose by the author, keeping the spirit intact.

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