



e-ISSN:2582 - 7219



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH IN SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY

Volume 4, Issue 9, September 2021



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 5.928



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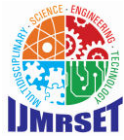
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Songs of MAWJI: Rediscovering Tribal Ethos

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ABSTRACT: Mawji was born in a Brahman family of Sabla village of Dungarpur district in the year 1714 that would be around more than 300 years back. India remained enslaved for around 700 years by Mughals and Britishers. During the Mughal period, the cruel Mughal aggressors, forcibly converted the poor people of India into Islam. And when the Mughal empire lost its hold, Britishers came and became the rulers here and with them came the Christian missionaries, who indulged in the practice of conversion in a big way, and obviously the soft target was the indigenous section of society like tribes and dalits.

The period, from 12th century to 18th century, was a period of struggle for Indians and great warriors Like chatrapati Shiwaji, Guru Govind Singh, Chatrasal, Maharana Pratap, Rani Laxmi Bai, Taty Tope, Kunwar Singh, gave a very tough fight and posed a huge challenge to these foreign invaders. During this period from 12th to 18th century, the saint poets like shri Ramanuja Charya, Tulsidas, Sant Kabeer, Sant Raidas, Guru Nanak, Meera Bai, Goswami Vallabhacharya, Sant eknath, Sant Tukaram, Samarth Ramdas etc., through their religious poetry and compositions provided great moral strength and support to the common people. Great saint Mawji Maharaj of this region spread the light of religious awakening in wagad, Madhya Pradesh and Gujrat region. The Islamists aggressors converted poor people to Islam through fear because their slogan was either convert to Islam or be ready to die. And Christian missionaries used social service as a tool to lure and convert the poor tribes and dalits to Christianity. But because of this Vaishnav Bhakt movement, Movement by Mawji and his followers, these efforts of conversion in the tribal area, did not succeed to a large extent.

I. INTRODUCTION

Mawji Maharaj established a spiritual sect which is known as Nishkalank school Nine Peethadishwar or heads of this school of thought have so far sat on the gaadi or the seat at Beneshwar. The first Peethadhishwar was the founder head of this Nishkalank school shri Bhagwan Mawji Maharaj who remained seated on this gaadi or seat from 1714 to 1744 for 30 years. The main ideology and objective of this school was the Krishna Bhakti and reenactment of Krishna leelas. Because of his deep devotion for Lord Krishna and his impactful sermons on Krishna's life and his lilas, people thought him to be a Krishna awtar, or incarnation of Lord Krishna.

The main centre of Mawji's religious and spiritual activities was Beneshwar and this is the place where he used to derive his divine knowledge and power to look into the future of humanity which enabled him to make amazing predictions. That is why Beneshwar is considered at par with Prayagraj by the local historians. Mawji was inspired by Lord Krishna and he was a devotional poet and wrote five voluminous scriptures in Wagadi dialect, Som Sagar is the most significant in which Krishna's life sketch is portrayed just Like Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta. All his literature was devoted to Lord Krishna and his maya, illusion. Interestingly most of his compositions, socio religious messages and predictions for future are in the form of songs and bhajans which the tribes sing with joy and enthusiasm even today.

II. NISHKALANK SCHOOL: CODE OF CONDUCT

Mawji was not happy with the society in which he lived. This society was full of evil practices and sinful activities. The idea of the welfare of common man was missing in such a society. He proposed a moral society which he called Nishkalank Society, a society free from any evils. The objectives of such a society were spelled out by Mawji, as under

1. Emancipation of untouchables and Bhils
2. Worship of God
3. Eradication of superstitions
4. Ban on Bride Price
5. Simple living and high thinking
6. Cooperation within the society



Mawji, besides being a follower of Vaishnava cult, was also a social reformer. He focused on the masses of people who lived subjugated life, particularly the tribal community. Such an idiom of his mission was not exclusive of women. His way of attaining a moral society was to lead the masses to a virtuous life. Kabir and Gandhi also practiced such a genre of life. When one looks at the literature created by Mawji and his followers, it vividly shows that the tribal literature is a true index of the culture of that particular era and the very trend reflects and represents the society of his time.

Dr. Sundar Lal Sharma a local writer of this region, wrote a play in the Rajasthani with the title “Yogiraj Samaj Sudharak: Saint Mawji,” i.e. ‘the great social reformer’: Saint Mawji the play is written in the wagri dialect which is a subsidiary dialect of Rajasthani language.

Dr. Sharma, in the foreword of the play, writes that tribals of this area, play Raaslila on the occasion of the full moon night at the Beneshwar Dham, the famous tribal pilgrimage associated with Sant Mawji. Raasleela is a kind of dance performances of presenting the events of Lord Krishna’s life. Some devotees believe that Mawji himself was an incarnation of Krishna whom this play portrays as a Nishkalank avatar of Lord Krishna, Mawji’s teachings and social reforms and the literature that he created is an index of his ideology of Nishkalank school. This idea of Nishkalank school, in simple words, would mean a school of spirituality and purity of life, a life without any evil or sin. Mawji Maharaj expressed his enlightened thought in local Bhili wagri dialect. He composed all his literature on the Beneshwar tapu, the hillock between the confluence of the three rivers Mahi, Som and Jhakham. As Bhagwan Budha derived his divine knowledge under the Banyan tree, Mawji Maharaj got his enlightenment at the holy hilltop of Beneshwar and composed his literature in four volumes which are called ‘Mawji Maharaj ka Chopra’ - Literary volumes of Mawji. This play by Dr. Sharma is a very sincere effort to portray the life sketch of Mawji in a dramatic form but because the play is written in the local dialect wagri, it could not draw much attention outside this region.

Apart from his devotional songs and hymns in praise of lord Krishna and the message for social reform, the most interesting and surprising element of Mawji’s composition is his predictions which have generated so much curiosity and interest amongst the people of this area. These predictions, about various future events, are still very frequently used by ordinary people, they have become a part of the everyday interaction in the society. In the entire society, even today, Mawji is respected by all castes and creeds in this region.

It would be interesting to discuss here some of the predictions made by Mawji Maharaj. If these predictions had been made by some western philosopher, they would have been widely known and attracted wide response and reactions but because, all this is written in the local dialect, these vital indications of the future events did not get any attention. But anytime anything significant or alarming happens people of this region immediately react ‘Oh, Mawji had predicted it,’ but unfortunately, Mawji’s philosophy remained unnoticed because of the language barrier. If the same literature and predictions which Mawji composed in local dialect, had been written in some western language, Mawji would have been glorified as a great philosopher who showed path of virtue to humanity. Mawji was a great visionary and futurologist. All his predictions and social sermons are in the form of religious songs which the tribes still sing with deep devotion. Some of the predictions found in his bhajans and hymns are explained here under:-

1. **Huge mountains will melt into water:-** In one of his predictions “Mawji says that huge mountains will melt into water. This prediction is very much relevant when the scientists say that the global warming is causing the melting of the snow on the mountains. The melting of glaciers is a global concern of the environmentalist and the problem of global warming is a major concern all over the world. It is really surprising to see that Mawji, a simple village man of this tribal area, through some divine power could foresee this problem hundreds of years back without any scientific know how.
2. **The salty water of the sea will turn into sweet water:-** This prediction has also become true as in those parts of the world where there is no enough rain water, particularly in the gulf countries where sea water, through machines, is purified and made useful as drinking water. English poet Coleridge in his famous poem “Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner” while describing the apathy of the stranded mariners in the deep sea writes “Water everywhere nor a drop to drink.” This means that mariner surrounded by the sea water on all sides have no drinking water and the sea water is salty which they cannot drink. But Mawji Maharaj, long time back, made the forecast that the salty sea water will be purified through machines and will be made useful as drinking water. The prediction has come true today.
3. **Burden will be removed from the neck of bullocks:-** The traditional method of ploughing with the help of bullocks will become outdated and all the works of farming and agriculture will be done through machines and that is a reality today. Today this prediction has become true and all the works and activities related to agriculture and farming are done by machines like tractors, thresher, field cultivators, planters, sprayers etc.



4. **The fruits will be grown without its season:-** This prediction has proven true. Here Mawji predicts that in future fruits and vegetables will be grown in every season, and not only in the particular season they belong to. Now any fruit is available all the time of the year. This has been made possible by agriculture science and research and use of various farming techniques of breeding. This change is very much evident in this wagar region itself. The sugarcane juice is available throughout the year and corn cobs are available in any season of the year. Surprisingly this was predicted by Mawji more than three hundred years before.
5. **Hindus and Muslims will sit together and will eat together:-** This prediction is also true today as one can see the rift between Hindus and Muslims has narrowed down. Historically Hindus and Muslims are two distinct societies but now they are sharing good relations. This prediction has come true today. The democratic system of the country has removed the barriers between caste and sects and inspite of communal feelings, a kind of homogeneity in society is very much evident.
6. **Untouchability will vanish and all will be treated equally:-** There will be no discrimination on the basis of the work of a person. The work considered of higher standard in society will be carried out by lower categories of societies and the lower level things will be done by a higher category person. Same is true today as one can see that the people from the so called lower categories of the society, who come under the umbrella of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, are working in big positions in government offices and persons from the so called higher sections of society are working in their subordination. Mawji could foresee these drastic changes centuries before.
7. **Inter caste marriages will be a reality:-** Boys and girls belonging to lower class will marry boys and girls from higher class and vice versa. This prediction has come true as inter caste and inter religious marriages are a reality today, A higher caste girl marrying a lower caste boy and the higher caste boy marrying a lower caste girl is becoming a common phenomena, nowadays and it does not create much social resentment, something never heard of in this caste ridden society in the past.
8. **Wealth will shower from abroad:-** This is also true today, the talented and skillful Indians are doing so well in the different parts of the world and they are bringing so much wealth home today. The foreign exchequer of government today is all time high. And the way the things are happening India will do even better in times to come, as the Indian diaspora's contribution in the nation building is remarkable. The nonresident Indians are the true ambassadors of Indian culture and economy all over the world.
9. **All barriers of caste and creed will shatter:-** India is a caste ridden society but almost three hundred years back Mawji could foresee the coming events and present day scenario of society in which caste has hardly any relevance.
10. **The religious scriptures will lose their significance:-** Mawji said that religious books like Puranas and Kuran would also lose their impact. People would not believe in their directives and the respect for such scriptures would decline.
11. **Great rivers like Gangas and Yamuna will become dry:-** This prediction is also true and these great rivers which are the lifeline of north India have become polluted and in some parts, have dried up and the government today, has to launch Namami Gange programme to deal with this situation and to save these rivers from vanishing.
12. **Wells will be dug in the ocean:-** This prediction has also proven true today as the oil refineries have become operational in the ocean for extracting crude oil from the bottom of the sea. Bombay high refinery is a living example of this.
13. **Water will never be finished in Abu Dara:-** This prediction is about Mawji's meditation place Beneshwar Dham where Abu Dara is a deep water reservoir in the Mahi river. This Abu Dara is a part of the river basin and is very deep. Nobody has ever been able to gauge its depths. Mawji predicts that water in this Abu Dara will never finish at any time whatever may be the situation. It will always remain full of water. It is absolutely true that even in the harshest famine years water has never receded in Abu dara even when the whole river basin got exposed and dried up but Abu Dara remained filled with water.
14. **The lower caste women will wear ornaments and jewellery:-** This prediction is also true today as the lower castes who were treated as outcastes by upper caste Hindus and were living in a very pathetic and miserable condition, having nothing to eat are rolling in riches today. They were not allowed to drink water from the village well, not even allowed to walk through the village and were treated as untouchables. But the situation changed drastically after independence and some people and their women now put on expensive ornaments and gaudy clothes. Mawji, hundreds of years back, had predicted these changes in the society and at that time people laughed it off by terming these predictions as nonsensical. That is the reason people at that time composed and sang the song, which is very popular till date, "Mawji to Gando Keway Maharaji" means that "Mawji has lost his sanity and does talk all sorts of nonsense."



Thus, the impact of Mawji Maharaj on the tribal culture is immense. There are many more predictions that Mawji, through his divine and visionary power, did record in his chopras. With the passage of time, as, his predictions, one after the other, came true, the faith of the people became more and more strong and absolute in Mawji as a divine saint. He was such a great visionary and futurologist but his name and works remained confined only to this region and the outside world remained unaware of the charismatic saint and his life. One major objective of the present study is to present before the academic world this wonderful treasure of wagri literature in English language which has remain obscure for centuries.

This influence of Mawji and his works, would be termed as the basic guiding force for the tribe of this region. Mawji is indeed the original spring of nector for the tribal culture of this region. He gave them a definite direction and showed them a path of virtue to move on.

The tribals in a chorus sing a song in the praise of Mawji. Even these unbelievable and, at that time, somewhat nonsensical things said by Mawji create curiosity and liking for him. Because the ignorant illiterate disciples of Mawji Maharaj must have seen something saintly, something divine, something charismatic in his character. A free rendering of a song is given under:

“The colour of devotion spreads in the society God, you join the devotees

We have mingled with this colour and you have occupied our hearts. We will not be scared dear Mawji.

With magic tricks you have driven away the ghosts and has sown the seeds of happiness.

And played on the flute of peace Every house holds Mawji’s voice

You have awakened the people from slumber Mawji is the Nishkalank avtar incarnation.

This madness of Mawji is really so sweet, so nice, so lovely”

All such songs describe the kind of love and devotion people had in their hearts for Mawji. Undoubtedly Mawji is the beginning or the originator or the starting point of tribal revival. He is indeed a trend setter of tribal culture and life in this wagwar region. The impact and influence of Mawji on the tribal community of this region is very deep, permanent and absolutely indelible.

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Impact Factor:
5.928

ISSN

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