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Hari Baba Movement (1931)

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Abstract – Like several revivalist movements of the 19th and 20th centuries in the region of Chotanagpur in Bihar, Hari Baba movement led by Duka Ho in the Singhbhum district also attracted large number of followers and tried to reform the lives of his fellowmen cutting across the tribes. Like other movements in which we find the Gandhian influence, in this context the Hari Baba movement was not different from others. This movement ascended during the Civil Disobedience movement (1930-34) but went into oblivion with the arrest of the leader Duka Ho. Although the movement did not last very long but it had significant impact on the lives of tribals.

Key Words - Revivalism, Hinduisation, Caste Hindu, Chaukidari Tax, Gandhi Raj, etc.

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The Hos or the Larka Kols are mostly settled in Singhbhum district of Chotanagpur with Chaibasa as its headquarter. From the very beginning of British rule, they participated in the Kol Insurrection of 1831 and the Bhumij Revolt of 1832. Subsequently, these areas popularly known as the Kolhan area, was placed under indirect rule of the British and the tribes gained some sort of autonomy. Due to the operations of the Wilkinson's rule the grievances of the tribes did not reach the administration. However, the situation remained peaceful there as compared Chotanagpur proper. In the 20th century the different political situation, economic hardship after World War I, the movement of the Congress workers and the visit of Mahatma Gandhi (1923), etc. stirred the minds of these simple people and more particularly Tana and Birsaite bhagats. Besides, one also witnesses the revivalist, messianic and sometimes millenarian movements among the tribes of Chotanagpur in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Hari Baba movement, led by Duka Ho in the year 1931 was a revivalist movement with a certain political influence of the Congress workers more particularly of Mahatma Gandhi.

'Hari Baba Movement' emerged in Singhbhum district among the Hos and Santals and other aboriginal tribes of Dhalbhum sub-division as well as the two states of Saraikela and Kharsawan state. It ended in overt violence in Kharsawan state. This movement was influenced by the Mahatma Gandhi's ideas of vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol. Its leader Duka Ho, popularly known as Hari Baba advised the Hos, Santals, Mundas and Oraons to wear sacred thread just like the upper Caste Hindus. He expressed that Gandhi Raj would soon replace the British Raj. All these major tribes took this new religious upheaval seriously and had definite political undercurrents. Gradually, it assumed a character of

hurricane which blew over Chotanagpur. K.S. Singh is of opinion that "Behind it lay a century of agrarian strife and turmoils, the Tamar and Kol insurrection (1789-1832), the Sardar and Birsa movements (1859-1900) which exemplified tribals' resistance against the breakdown of their socioagrarian system."[1] Further, the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908) no doubt contained legal safeguards that kept Mundari-Khuntkatti system intact and prevented alienation of tribal lands but it could not arrest the process of disintegration. The exploitation of tribes by the zamindars and mahajans and the inroads of alien socio-cultural influence had continued.[2]

A feeling of 'general unrest' and uneasiness at the local gods not 'pulling their weight' or being 'displeased' gripped the tribals in the region. This was accentuated in the twenties by the Economic Depression just after the World War I and the political uncertainty in the context of the Non-Cooperation movement in which a sizable section of the Oraons, Mundas, and the Tana Bhagats were involved.[3]

While the commotion was going on among the Santals in Dhalbhum (as they refused to pay the Chaukidari tax and danced around the Congress flag every day), a new cult centering around Duka Ho or 'Hari Baba 'emerged. 'Hari Baba' – the name being probably mythical – was a mere popular catchword with which any one of sufficient enterprise could identify himself without deliberately claiming the title. The real Hari Baba of Siriapos, Seraikela state came into prominence and became more and more popular spreading into north Kolhan.[4]

Like a 'Mahatma', the Ho leader set up his 'ashram' in the jungle at Jamrogara near Chitpil, twelve miles north-west of Chakradharpur or in Kera Estate, where people from as far as Manoharpur, flocked to see him and performed the puja ordained by him. In the beginning, he preached traditional purity and racial isolation; his disciples were all aboriginals and one of the articles of his faith was to have nothing to do with 'Tantis', the weavers and others, who were inferior people.[5] He directed his ire against witch-hunting, a work blessed by traditional village priests 'pahans' who found that it had 'enhanced their authority'.[6]

Silu Santal alias Tarachand, who proclaimed himself a miraculous healer and preached to give up drinking liquor in October,1930, got in touch with Duka Ho and Bonga Manjhi of Horobera (Hazaribagh) to strengthen Gandhi Raj. On his advice the Santals collected money and clothes and prayed for hours. According to him, every Santals in a Santal family was to collect some rice and a few paisa and put these into three packets. One for Gandhi and one each for the Hindu goddesses Kali and Durga.

Initially, the followers of Hari Baba sect were more than two thousand. They worshipped the Hindu god Hanuman, observed Thursday as a holiday, bathed twice a day and worshipped Tulsi plant. This movement was largely attributed to Congressmen promising to raise the status of the Hinduised tribals. They played on their forest grievances though not as much as on land rent.[7]

The following of Hari Baba, celebrated their conversion with dances and feasts, with shouts of 'Haribol' and 'Gandhi Ki Jai'. The followers of Hari Baba also sang some special songs. In the Tamar area they sang a song meaning 'The British are no more; victory to Gandhi Mahto, Hari Baba'. They made fun of Christian missionaries and asked the Christian tribals to join their movement.

By May 1931, the disciples of Hari Baba and Silu Santal alias Tarachand were moving with mango twigs through the village in Dhalbhum, Mayurbhani and into a few villages of S.E. Kolhan.[8] They pulled down the telegraph line as a mark of defiance to British raj. Some times, Silu Santal performed the hook-swinging ceremony in spite of protests from the local 'ghatwals' and 'chaukidars'. He even threatened them, asserting that he did not care for the British soldiers, as their guns would cause no injury to his disciples who would win Swaraj. A definite messianic overtone now marked the movement. Gradually, the Hari Baba movement spread to the north of Chakradharpur PS in the Kera portion of Porahat with temperance as the part of its program. It further spread to north Kolhan where it was more popular. It preached temperance, one of the main items of the Congress programme.[9]

Duka Ho was in constant touch with the local Congress workers and his movement influenced the tribals of Chotanagpur of the Gua mining belt as well as village near Jamda.[10] On 19 July 1931, he visited the Congress headquarters at Chakradharpur; he later denied having preached non-payment of rents and taxes and wearing of 'Khaddar'. He established a liaison with Silu Santal alias Tarachand and his disciple Jai Chand alias Jai Singh Santals from Dhalbhum who had set himself up at Hurungda about 7 miles from Kharsawan at the foot of steep hills running on to Tamar in Ranchi. Duka Ho also visited Silu Santal to 'exchange ideas'. Although, Silu Santal asked him to keep off his sphere of influence, initially, but later on they cooperated with each other. Tarachand became an associate of Hari Baba, who declared that if the 'Hos paid attention to him' and 'carried on the worship according to his instruction', a great meeting attended by himself and Mr. Gandhi would be held on some hill near Jamshedpur. The 'state of things' as existed before British raj would be 'restored', if the Hindus again oppressed the Hos, the latter would drive them out with bows and arrows.[11]

The connection between the Hos and Santals and their leaders, which 'usually keep strictly apart' was interesting; the 'general ideas was to unite the tribes of Chotanagpur by giving them some common kind of religion and organization.[12] This might seem a bit far fetched but the fact that there was some connection between Silu Santal and Duka Ho, was rather curious as those two tribes usually remained strictly apart and the Hos were of very little use for the Santals. Besides, the Hari Baba movement was also connected with the forest grievance of the tribals,[13] a common plank for all the tribes. Silu Santals entered the Kharsawan state on 16th July 31 without permission and collected 3000 to 4000 Kols, Bhumij and Santals of Kharsawan, Saraikela and Tamar and caused them to cut timber and other trees from the State Reserved Forests for ercetion of 'mandirs and other houses'.[14] The ruling chief of Kharsawan described in his telegram to the DC of Singhbhum that the members of his state police had been injured by the followers of Tarachand and asked for 25 armed police to be deputed.

Tarachand and his disciple Jaichand were declared 'undesirable'. Nevertheless, Tarachand was expected at Hurangda to address a meeting of 3000-4000 tribals assembled there but in the meantime, he was arrested by Seraikela Police near Sirni on 25th July. In his absence Jaichand held the meeting on 25th July. The State Police consisting of a Sub-Inspector and a head constable deputed to watch the proceedings of the meeting asked him to do his puja,[15] a mixture of Hindu and animist practices, which ended at about 6 p.m. When the police asked him to 'come along', the people assembled there pounced on the police, assaulted them with lathis, but no one was

seriously wounded. The Police retreated to Kharsawan without-making any arrest. Around two thousand people remained at this place for the whole of next day and dispersed during the night or in the morning of 27th July. On the request of the Raja, one head constable and twenty armed constables arrived at 10-11 a.m. on 27 July under Sergeant Major Price and were deputed to deal with the situation.[16] The armed police arrested eleven persons including Jaichand and dismantled the erected structures. As 'Hari Baba enthusiasts' were taking an increasingly 'seditious attitude', Duka Ho himself was arrested on the evening of 27th July at Jamrugarh or Jangalgarh or Jamrogara, 12 miles N.W. of Chakradharpur[17] where about 300 people had assembled to perform the pujas and to hear their masters without any opposition by an armed party led by the SP, Singhbhum.[18]

One Mangroo Bhumij alias Hari Baba of village Chilkpo of Kharsawan was also arrested. He was not of such great importance as others.[19] Following the arrest of three most 'influential' leaders of the movement there were no signs of 'any general excitement'. Jaichand was charged with assaulting the police and Duka Ho with instigating the witchhunting and molestation of Tantis that 'disturbed the peace'. Tarachand was, later on, released by the Saraikela Police, and he remained aloof from the movement. The movement was thus nipped in the bud. There was, however, no 'traceable connection' with the Congress. The movement seemed to undermine the authority of 'Munda' and specially 'Mankis', the traditional arm of the government in tribal areas. It bluntly declared that there was 'no need to be afraid of government, if it came to the use of arms, only 'water would come out of the Sarkar's guns.'[20]

G. Vanhoutta[21] in his book 'Hari Baba' opines that Hari Baba was 'one of the most intimate disciples of Gandhi', his message was that the reign of Gandhi had arrived. However, on the advice of Rajendra Prasad, the Congress now took the view that it was dangerous to stir up these primitive people who might get out of hand and turn on them.[22] There were some signs of Congress activities in Hazaribagh and the neighboring areas. Hopna Manjhi wanted to revive the Sacred Thread movement among the Santals but he did not achieve success.[23] The sub-nationalist movement, however, went on in other parts of Chotanagpur.

In Manoharpur, some of the 'Mankis' and 'Mundas' had been encouraging Hari Baba movement, to ward off sickness and cattle disease and ensure better harvest of paddy, etc. One Joto Tamaris, who styled himself a disciple of God Hari in non-police tract of Manoharpur PS had encouraged it near Gua mining area and in some of the villages near Jamda and discoursed on the line of Duka Ho. Hundreds of

lizards and butterflies, suspected of attracting evil spirit, were killed. The local administration decided to take action against those 'Mankis' and the 'Mundas'.[24] Despite this, the religious movement spread like wild fire over the entire tract of Singhbhum and penetrated in the region of Ranchi through Tamar and also spread to Gangpur in Orissa.

Several female successors of Duka Ho came into existence. Nani Kui, the wife of Duka Ho, moved about preaching Hari Baba's cult after the arrest of Duka Ho. She set up her 'akhara' and distributed holy water (Haripani) on payment of few paise at Nandpur near Manoharpur. She learnt a lesson from her husband's imprisonment and took every step very cautiously. She sought written agreement from every body coming to her that they would not interfere in other person's chore and that they would not disobey the government. It was, however, decided by local authorities to put an end to the movement because it was impossible to say what it might lead to eventually. Some 'Mundas' who were divested of the offices for their Congress activities in 1924 in Kolhan, had started exhorting the people to flout the authorities of 'Mankis' and 'Mundas'.[25] They were arrested. The Hari Baba movement was declared illegal and 'Mundas' and 'Mankis' were ordered to stop it by the local authorities.

Despite these measures of the authorities, the leaders declared that anyone who would refuse to join the movement would invite the curse of Hari Baba who 'showed himself' at night among the branches of trees'.[26] Non-believers would turn into birds or else grow tail. A detailed ritual of spirit hunting was laid down.[27]

One significant aspect of this movement was the fall of the prices of goats and fowls. The main reason was the belief that black goats and fowls should not be kept as they harbored evil spirit. This belief was prevalent in the north of Porahat and South of Kolhan.[28] It adversely affected the poor tribals in general.

The local authorities wanted to check the spread of movement by hook or by crook. Duka Ho had been bound down u/s 107 of IPC and was in jail in default of security. Tarachand also met with a similar fate. The Kharsawan State had sent an extradition warrant for the arrest of Tarachand for abetment of theft. Thereafter, the Hari Baba movement continued in a subdued form.[29] When ΑD Tuckey was at Chaibasa on September, 1931, Rev. Mr. Dixon told him that 'the Hari Baba movement had swept all the people near Manoharpur and they would not listen to him at all at present... spread violently all over Anandpur'.

Whatever might be the fact, Ward differed absolutely with Rev. Mr. Dixon.[30]

A few Hos in Manoharpur who instigated the people not to pay rent, were also arrested. Hari Ma and Joto Tamaria were taken into custody for disturbing the peace.[31] The local authorities started a damage control exercise. On 18 January 1932, the DC, Singhbhum visited six villages near Kasira to check the spread of movement.[32]

In Ranchi, the movement was certainly not seditious but the authorities differed in their characterization of it. The Roman Catholic Mission fearing large scale desertion of converts was 'inclined to exaggerate its danger' and asserted that it was seditious. The local authorities in Gumla did not characterize it as anti-Christian and anti-Mohammedan. Similarly, Rev. Schill of Naotoli Mission was also of the similar opinion. So, the threat perception of the local authorities or the Christian missionaries differed according to their interest and situation.

Another Hari Ma appeared at Palkot[33] dressed in a loin cloth and credited with supernatural powers, and was visited by a large number of villagers. Yet another Hari Ma was dumb. The Roman Catholic Mission with their converts having been weaned away from Christianity to worship of Hari Baba, reported that seditious songs were being sung in Tamar.[34]

Angrezi Bahadur noy,

Gandhi Mahto Ki Jai

Hari Baba Ki Jai

The British are no more;

Victory to Gandhi Mahto

And Hari Baba.

The Hari Baba cult again made its appearances in practically the whole of Gumla sub-division. Except for a case in Besia PS in which the followers of Hari Baba damaged some places of worship the movement had not been attended by violence.[35] In Gumla, one Hari Ma took bonds from her followers in which it was started that if they left the new religion, they would be fined by the government, the landlords and by the panchayat.[36] She was warned by the local authorities to desist from her activities.

Some followers of Hari Baba broke into chaukidar's house and smashed up the household and declared that his wife was a witch. Later on, they were persecuted. The movement reached the farthest limits to Birmitrapur, and Hathibari police stations in Gangpur state and then petered out when the government took action against the offender for violating sacred places, alleged by desecrating Hindu

idols at Solenhira in Besia on 8 June 1932 and molesting the people.[37]

Economic depression and general tribal unrest owing to British imperialism were the two contributory factors encouraging the Hari Baba movement. However, 'the consciousness for regaining the lost ground certainly came from the Civil Disobedience movement' opines Prof. J.C. Jha. Many leading lights of the Hari Baba movement regarded as mini 'Mahatmas', convinced their followers that there was no need to be afraid of the government for their guns emit water only.

The local authorities initiated proceedings against the seven accused in the Besia case. The prime object of the movement appeared to them was to make money. Actually, the movement was used to reconvert the Christians to the old faith and to discourage consumption of liquor. The SP of Singhbhum considered that the movement was likely to die a natural death in the course.[38] The Hari Baba movement subsided except in Chainpur PS in May 1932.[39] However, it remained in the wild form in parts of Gumla, Khunti and other subdivisions. The Christian missionaries started a campaign against the Hari Baba movement and tried their level best to prevail upon the tribals in general and Christian converts in particular to ignore it. Anti-Hari Baba sentiment grew among the Christian converts. A case u/s 295 IPC in Besia PS was registered against a Christian for demanding the image of 'Hari Mai'.[40] Thus the movement stayed low key for another six months.

Economically, the movement caused hardship to the tribal people as the prices of goats and fowls, which were suspected of 'harbouring evil spirits'[41] fell to two annas or paise. The potters made fortunes, the price of water pots in which 'Hari Pani' was kept rose to six or eight annas a piece. Some people sold their cattle at 'ridiculously low price' to buy 'new necessities'. Probably many young men lost their lives in the frenzied dances and aerobatics. Missionary's advice was not listened to; they were jeered at.[42] The followers of Hari Baba movement forced the Christian tribals to join them. These were 'dark and bad' developments for the Christians in general. Villages after villages gave their allegiance to the new faith. The Hindu and Muslims too were forced to contribute to the 'Puja'; all were forbidden to work on Thursday. There could be 'no work day or night' amidst the songs and dances going on full blast.[43]

The movement had followings among the Mundas and allied tribes, though as it progressed, it included entire pagan population, tribals and even non-tribal 'sadans'.[44] The Catholic resisted them but the Lutheran Christians were less firm in resisting them.

The tribals shouted the slogans of 'Gandhi Raj', 'Swaraj', 'non-payment of rent' and all out drive was made against 'bhuts'. The movement could take a violent turn in such a 'thoroughly unsettled state'.[45] The entire tribal tracts were seized by a 'mid-summer madness'. In its tirade and operations against 'bhuts', the movement resembled like the Birsaite and Tana Bhagat movements but while the latter two movements attacked the traditional authority of 'pahans', the watch dog of the underworld of spirits, the former sought to strengthen its position.

In the beginning, there was an attempt to exclude inferior castes and uplift the status of the tribes to Caste Hindus by wearing the sacred thread. There was no Christian influence because the movement originated in a non-Christian state, Kharsawan.[46] Later on, it embraced all tribes of Chotanagpur. K.S. Singh is of the opinion that it was typical of the tribal world of simmering discontent, a situation brought about by the continued disintegration of the tribals 'socio-economic system got transformed by Gandhiji's short visit to their world'.

Some popular Song of 1931 during the Hari Baba movement was as follows:

4 1166		
1. Hae	disun	The land has gone mad
balutana		The drum beats
Baje Saritan		Your mother was dumb.
Engam Konkijan	apum	Your father
Konkajana	·	They are tined
was dumb (too) Alas!		On the upland, fields,
Haereko laga Ćhabajan		hills and
Piri Kutunri buru borane		The Cat-spirit the Lizard
Valleys		spirit lived.
Pusi Chandijan, tetenga		From village to village to
bongajan		hamlet
Alas		to hamlet
Hasre Ko laga Cha	abijan	The digging implements
Hatu hatu tola tolare		and the
Saboro gainstajan	tupa	were at work, Alas
basket.	·	
tunkijan Haereko		
2. Birsa and Hari Baba (Jadur)		
was dumb (too) Al Haereko laga Cha Piri Kutunri buru be Valleys Pusi Chandijan, t bongajan Alas Hasre Ko laga Cha Hatu hatu tola tola Saboro gainstajan basket.	bajan orane etenga abijan re tupa	On the upland, fields hills and The Cat-spirit the Lizar spirit lived. From village to village thamlet to hamlet The digging implement and the were at work, Alas

Saboro gainstajan tupa	were at work, Alas		
basket.			
tunkijan Haereko			
2. Birsa and Hari Baba (Jadur)			
1895 Salre Birisam rakablenaea			
Birisa 29 Salre Hari babam uparlen			
Kedaea Birisa, Bonga hon manoa			
Kom Hari Baba gandogol Kedkoa			
O, Birsa, You had come up in year 1895			
O, Hari Baba, you had come up 29 Years after Birsa			

O, Birsa, the twenty-cubit long turban was drenched with blood

O, Hari Baba, you disturbed the spirit.

The year 1932 witnessed no big incidents like the 'Janeodhari' or Sacred Thread movement among the Santals or the Hari Baba movement among the different tribes of Chotanagpur. Small and scattered events happened throughout the year under the guidance of Congress workers. As the movement died out, the proceedings against the leaders were dropped in 1931. The Christian missionaries especially Roman Catholic Mission, whose converts went back to the side of Duka Ho, had the apprehension of sedition against the government but the Government of Bihar did not take it seriously.

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