

# The Pranami Dharma in the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayas

## A Preliminary Study

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### 1. Introduction

The followers of the Pranami Dharma are variously known as Nijanandis, Dhamis, Mehraj Panthis, Chakla Panthis, Khijara Panthis, Prannathis, Pranamis, Paranamis, Parinamis, etc. They are, however, most popularly known as 'Pranamis' and their order or beliefs and practices as the 'Pranami Dharma'. They salute each and other say, '*Pranam*' meaning 'obeisance to the Supreme'. This is believed to make them a part of the Parabrahma Paramatma or the Supreme Soul.<sup>1</sup>

As in Srimadbhagawat or Bhagwat Gita, the three forms of Brahma, namely, *kshar* or perishable, *akshar* or imperishable, and *aksharatit* or beyond perishable, are accepted in this Dharma. They worship the child-Krishna, the source of whose divine power was the *aksharatit*.

The basis of this Dharma is Prem Lakshana Bhakti or 'devotion in the spirit of a lover'. Here 'devotion' signifies an exclusive love and trust in the Supreme Soul. It is preparedness and earnestness to be of any service to the object of attachment and affection.<sup>2</sup> It involves discarding all other attachments. It is through this Dharma that the Pranamis believe they will ascend to the home of the *aksharatit*—the *Paramdham*. This is supposed to be the only way of reaching Him without sacrificing family happiness because it does not demand the suppression of sensual desire in man but its sublimation.

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<sup>1</sup> The facts which are referred to in this paper were collected during my field-work done in Darjeeling and Sikkim. My chief sources of information are Basant Prava Gurung, Mohan Priyacharya, Matabatal Jaiswal and Laxmikant Sharma, all of whom are either preachers or scholars of this Dharma. I express my special gratitude to them for their kind cooperation in preparing this paper.

<sup>2</sup> P. K. Iyer, *The Divine Message of Lord Prannath*, Panna: Lord Prannath Temple, 1965, p. 28.

The feeling of oneness with the Supreme Soul is experienced once the knowledge of the immortal self is acquired. This knowledge is acquired through prolonged self-inquiry. One who realises Him as the ultimate reality rises above the petty quarrels of isms and faiths—having no desire, passion, urge, doubt or misunderstanding about life.<sup>3</sup>

‘Devotion in the spirit of a lover’ sounds rather strange to a non-Pranami but the Pranami metaphysics recognises no sex differences. The souls of all human beings are, according to this Dharma, females and the only *purus* or male is the Parabrahma Paramatma. The souls of human beings are believed to be *gopies* or angels descended from the Paramdham to see the game of Tamasi power.<sup>4</sup>

Their holy text is popularly known as Swasam Veda, Kulzam Swarup or Anjeel. It has 18,758 *chaupais* or verses arranged in 14 books written in different languages and years as shown below.<sup>5</sup>

Sl.	Name of Book	No. of Verses	Language	Period (in A.D.)	Place
1.	Rasa	913	Gujarati	1658	Jamnagar
2.	(a) Prakasa	1064	„	1658	„
	(b) Prakasa	1185	Hindustani	1678	Anupsahar
3.	Shadritu	230	Gujarati	1658	Jamnagar
4.	(a) Kalash	506	„	1658-72	„ and Surat
	(b) Kalash	771	Hindustani	1678	Anupsahar
5.	Sanandh	1691	„	1678	„
6.	Kirantan	2103	Hindi, Jati Gujarati	1666-91	At various places
7.	Khulasa	1020	Hindustani	1683	Panna
8.	Khilvat	1974	„	1684	„
9.	Parikarma	2481	„	1687-88	„
10.	Sagar	1128	„	1687-88	„
11.	Singar	2210	„	1688-89	„
12.	Sindhi	600	Sindhi	1688-89	„
13.	Marfat Sagar	1034	Hindustani	1691	„
14.	Kayamat Nama	748	„	1686	Chitrakut

Now a few words on each of these books :

**Rasa** : It describes the Rasa-lila between Shri Krishna and the angels.

**Prakasa** : This gives the details of how to reach close to the Supreme Soul.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Iyer, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> G. Sharma, ‘Tartam Bani’, *Pranami Dharma Patrika*, Nos. 9 & 10, October 1 p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> M. B. Jaiswal, *Mahamati Prannath ki Sarwatomukhi Jagani ka Naya Charan*, New Delhi : M. L. Verma, 1985, p. 15.

*Shadritu* : This describes how the angels expressed their agony in the beginning of all the six seasons after losing the company of Shri Krishna.

*Kalash* : It is the best text showing the metaphysical path. It describes Prem Lakshana Bhakti and 24 incarnations called Kalki.

*Sanandh* : It asks all to follow the true religion and predicts the transformation of all castes and religions into one caste and one religion.

*Kiranthan* : It is a devotional text which underlines the basic unity among religions. It says that one can reach the Supreme Soul only by purifying one's character.

*Khulasa* : It shows the basic unity of all religions by showing the basic similarity in internal principles of the Veda and the Koran.

*Khilyat* : The true Arabic word for it is *khalwat* which means the 'private talk between lovers'. It has guidelines to redirect the souls of human beings to the Supreme Soul.

*Parikrama* : It describes the home of the *aksharatit*.

*Sagar* : It reveals the painful mystery of this world of suffering.

*Singar* : Same as Sagar.

*Sindhi* : It describes the *hukum* or power of order of Shri Krishna.

*Marfat Sagar* : The true Arabic form is *marfit*. It describes the way of reaching the Supreme Soul and condemns sectarianism.

*Kayamat* : This describes the ways of awakening the soul.

The main message of this text is supposed to be the viability of coordination among all the religions of the world and creation of an order which is universal in its basic tenets and application.<sup>6</sup> It is also known to have discouraged idolatry and emphasise devotion as the best form of worship.<sup>7</sup> The belief in reincarnation has no place in this Dharma.

As in other Vaisnava thoughts, the various *lilas* of Shri Krishna are respected but importance is given only to his Braja and Rasa *lilas* of 11 years and 52 days. And the Pranamis believe that one can experience these *lilas* with the help of the *Tartam Mantra* meaning the destroyer

<sup>6</sup> C. D. Bijalwan and R. D. Jha, *Hridaya Prakash of Hirde Sah*, New Delhi : Shri Prannath Mission, 1976, p. vi.

<sup>7</sup> B. D. Gupta, 'Swami Prannath and the Pranami Religious Movement in the 17th Century Bundelkhand', *Mahamati Prannath Jayanti*, New Delhi : Shri Prannath Mission, 1974, p. 11.

of darkness or knowledge that helps one to be free from the ocean of illusion.<sup>8</sup>

The *Guru* holds an important place in this Dharma. Like the sun to the world, a *guru* is supposed to fill the interior of his followers with the light of wisdom. He is compared to the first candle which lights other candles and eventually loses its distinction as the first candle.

Vegetarianism is one of the most important ideals of this Dharma. The orthodox Pranamis do not eat even onions and garlic. Most of the others do eat onions and garlic but not eggs, meat, etc., and they avoid drinking liquor or using tobacco in any form. They believe that all living animal beings are a part of the Parabrahma and to kill them for human satisfaction is a sin.

### Origin and Spread of Pranami Dharma

The Pranami Dharma was founded by Shri Nijananda Swami whose family name was Dev Chandra. He was born at Umarnkot in Sindh (now in Pakistan) in October 1581. He belonged to a rich Kayastha family but had denounced his home at the age of eleven and had taken *diksha* or initiation from Swami Haridas when he was fifteen years old.<sup>9</sup> Later he went to Jamnagar where for fourteen years, he attended learned discourses on Srimadbhagawat rendered by Shri Kanhji Bhatt. It is believed that Shri Krishna revealed Himself before Dev Chandra when he was forty and gave him the *Tartam Mantra*.

Though founded by Dev Chandra, the Pranami Dharma reached its present heights of popularity due mainly to the influence of Prannath who was born in Jamnagar town of Saurashtra in September 1618. He was the fourth son of Keshav Thakur, a Dewan under the Jama ruler of Shri Satta and belonged to the Kshatriya sect. His actual name was Mihirraj.<sup>10</sup>

Prannath met Dev Chandra for the first time through his elder brother, Govardhan. Dev Chandra did not take long to see what was within Mihirraj or to decide to whom he should give the *Tartam Mantra*.<sup>11</sup> Prannath was only twelve when he took initiation from Dev Chandra but he was already a sound scholar of the sacred texts. Like his *guru*, he did not believe in the differences based on caste and

<sup>8</sup> N. Pandya, 'Bharatiya Bhakti Parampara aur Pranami Sampradaya', *Pranami Dharma Patrika*, Nos. 9 & 10 (1979), p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> M. Priyacharya, 'Nijananda Sadguru Shri Dev Chandrajī', *Raj Bidya*, No. 2 (1984), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, Iyer, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Iyer, p. 3.

class and strongly opposed the prevailing social system based on such differences. He reiterated the Vedic sermon that a pious Chandal (untouchable) was superior to a sinful Brahmin.<sup>12</sup>

He travelled through a number of places preaching the unity of all religions. He left Jamnagar in 1665 and toured places like Diu, Navi, Porbandar, Kapaibandar and Lathibandar drawing hundreds of people into his fold. He stayed at Thatta in Sindh for ten months. In 1668 he sailed for Arabia for the second time and stayed in the port towns of Maskat, Koga and Abbas for three years. After awakening hundreds of people in Arabia he returned to Surat in June 1672 and trekked through the sandy places of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Bundelkhand. He also went to Delhi along with his twelve disciples (two of whom were Muslims) to woo Aurangzeb. He kept on moving and visited many more places like Anupsahar, Amer, Sanganer, Udaypur, Rampur, Mandisor, Ujjain, Bwahanpur, Aurangabad, Deogarh and Ramnagar spreading the holy message to people. Prannath finally reached Panna in Bundelkhand in 1683 and influenced the Chatrasal King considerably. He spent about eleven years there and in 1694 left for his heavenly abode.<sup>13</sup>

### Reaching the Himalayas

The Pranami Dharma began to spread in the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayas about one hundred and twenty-five years ago. Among the few early preachers of this Dharma in Darjeeling were Shri Govardhan Das and his son Bhaktudas Sanjel, who came from Nepal and settled in Singritam Tea Estate. Chetandas also came to Tikpur (at present Tukvar) Tea Estate and preached there. But it was Pitambardas who for the first time spread this Dharma in Sikkim and Assam.<sup>14</sup> Other early preachers of this Dharma in this region were Purna Brahmasashtri, Krishnaswamani Upreti, Dwarikadas, Krishnadas Bhattarai, and Dayaldas.

The reference made above to the tea estates indicates that the preaching of this Dharma began during the mid-nineteenth century. But it appears that this Dharma could not spread much until the Guru Mangaldas reached Kalimpong in 1930.

<sup>12</sup> S. Shukla, 'Mahamati aur Kabir ke Samajik Darshan mein Samanta', *Jagani*, Vol. 10, Nos. 10 & 11, 1984-85, p. 12; G. R. Bhagat, 'The Social Philosophy of Mahaprabhu Prannath', *Mahamati Prannath Jayanti*, New Delhi : Shri Prannath Mission, 1974, p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, Iyer pp. 7-20.

<sup>14</sup> D. N. Pradhan, 'Shri Krishna Dharma ra Nepali Samaj', *Pranamanjali*, 1, 1965, p. 6.

Guru Mangaldas was born in 1896 at Illam in East Nepal in a Vaisnava family and belonged to the Sapkota clan of the Nepali Brahmin caste. In 1897, his family migrated to Behali village in Tejpur district of Assam. After staying there for some three years, his family members were initiated into the Pranami Dharma by Guru Pitambardas<sup>15</sup>.

In 1906, he was taken by his mother to Panna in Madhya Pradesh where he began to associate himself with other saints. After a deep study of the texts for three years he went to Surat, visiting places like Ajaigarh, Mhowa, Vira, Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain and Ratlam. Pitambardas was the Acharya Maharaj or religious head there and Mangaldas resumed his theological studies under him.<sup>16</sup> After staying with his guru till the age of sixteen he started wandering to places like Badrinath, Kedarnath, Dwarikapuri and Jagannathpuri on foot. Finally, he reached the Nagore district of Marwar and livened up the temple at Merta village from where he began his preaching. He spent about seven years there and went to Rishikesh, visiting places like Punjab and Bhawalnagar on his way. It was there that he is supposed to have been directed in his dream to go north and preach.<sup>17</sup>

The first followers of Guru Mangaldas in Kalimpong were some wealthy and influential Gurungs and Kumains on whom some Brahmin priests depended. The resistance put up by the local priests was gradually overcome by Guru Mangaldas and he was placed in charge of the Echhay Pranami Mandir from 1931 to 1935. He had to leave Echhay in 1935 and settle in Kalimpong town as the local people got annoyed with what they felt was a monopoly over the temple property donated by Dayaldas. However, his settling in Kalimpong led to the addition of one more Pranami temple in the town and many Marwaris were counted among the Pranami followers. One of the first Marwaris to be initiated by him was a rich trader called Karori Mall.

Kalimpong has long been the most important centre for this Dharma in north-east India.<sup>18</sup> The chiefs of this Dharma who stay in Jamnagar or Surat are always careful not to let its image deteriorate in Kalimpong. Thus when Guru Mangaldas lost credibility a few times because of his controversial acts, noted gurus were sent from those places to convince the followers in Kalimpong. For instance, Nanda Baba was sent

<sup>15</sup> Basant Prava Gurung, 'Pathsala ke Sansthapak Sradeya Gurudev Shri Mangaldasji ki Samchhipta Jiwani', *Pranamanjali*, 1, 1965, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Gurung, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> C. K. Shrestha, 'Sradeya Guruji Mangaldasji,' Kalimpong : Manuscript, n.d.

<sup>18</sup> This is evident from *Darjeelingma Pranami Dharma* written by D. N. Pradhan and edited by Diwakar Pradhan, Siliguri : Sumeru Press, 1987.

there during 1954-55 to restore the deteriorating image of this Dharma. Other learned scholars like Krishna Dutta Shastri and Lalbabu Mishra were sent later and in 1962 the Acharya Maharaj Dharmdas himself went there from Jamnagar to tell the local followers that they could consider Mangaldas as his own self.

Today, there are many Pranamis not only in Darjeeling district and Nepal but also in places like Burmeok, Tharbu, Sadam and Thekabung in Sikkim. Their total number estimated is about fifty thousand. Almost all the Pranami institutions in the region were established by Guru Mangaldas despite his controversial image. A list of these are presented here.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Institutions established by Guru Mangaldas in the region**

1. Pranami Balika Seva Ashram, Kalimpong.
2. Shri Krishna Pranami Mahila Ashram, Kalimpong.
3. Shri Krishna Pranami Gausala, Kalimpong.
4. Shri Krishna Pranami Mandir, Siliguri.
5. Shri Prannath Brahmacharya Ashram Sanskrit Mahavidyalay, Siliguri.
6. Shri Krishna Pranami Vidyaniketan, Siliguri.
7. Shri Pranami Bal Seva Ashram, Siliguri.
8. Shri Prannath Dharmartha Homeo Aushadhalay, Siliguri.
9. Shri Pranami Press, Siliguri.
10. Shri Krishna Pranami Mandir, Kalimpong.
11. Pranami Balika Vidya Mandir, Kalimpong.
12. Shri Krishna Pranami Kunja Kuti, Kalimpong.
13. Shri Krishna Pranami Mandir, Darjeeling.
14. Shri Krishna Pranami Mandir, Burmeok (Sikkim).
15. Shri Krishna Pranami Mandir, Tharbu (Sikkim).
16. Shri Krishna Pranami Mandir, Sadam (Sikkim).
17. Shri Krishna Pranami Mandir, Thekabung (Sikkim).

Now, a few words on the diffusion of this Dharma. It is clear from the above discussion that Guru Mangaldas, guided by his dream, came and revitalised this Dharma in the region but it had already begun to spread much earlier to his arrival in the early twentieth century. Had there been no evidence of the Marwaris being first initiated into this Dharma by Guru Mangaldas it could easily have been considered that this Dharma came along with the Marwari traders. The Marwari traders in the region as well as in their native places have played an important part in providing the much needed financial assistance for the

<sup>19</sup> Guruji Pranami Mission Trust, Kalimpong, 1985.

spreading of this Dharma. It is also true that adopting this Dharma did not mean any significant change in their socio-religious system. They worshipped Lord Krishna and after conversion they had to worship the child-Krishna. Also, they were vegetarians even before accepting this Dharma.

Historically, their settling in the region coincides with the first coming of this Dharma in the region. Yet, it is not proper to call the Marwari traders the agents of diffusion of this Dharma. It had originated in their native land, but they did not bring this Dharma to this region of course, trade never excludes cultural and social exchange totally.

The real agents of the diffusion of this Dharma seem to be the Nepali Brahmins who shared many common religious and cultural traits with the Marwaris, such as worshipping Krishna and following vegetarianism. Even their dress was similar : both wore *dhotis* or loin cloths. They have almost similar physical features too. But their motivation to spread this Dharma in this region needs some elaboration : their religious initiation in north-western India is not enough.

The middle of the nineteenth century is an important period in the history of this region. Thousands of Nepalis, specially those belonging to the lower castes, had left Nepal to work in the tea gardens, forests or agricultural areas of this region. Whether they were enticed by the British to come here, or whether the poverty in Nepal drove them away from home is beside the point here. The important point to be noted here is that they left in thousands. In Nepal itself, the clientele of the Brahmins had thus diminished considerably. On the other hand, the Rana regime promised no congenial atmosphere for their religious and metaphysical pursuits. And in the region itself there had begun a rapid process by which the missionaries were converting the local people to Christianity. Despite annexation by the British, the Tibetanisation process which was stronger in Sikkim was very weak in Darjeeling. So perhaps, the Brahmin preachers aimed at achieving two things at the same time. They could be with their traditional clientele once again and at the same time they could hold back their people from being influenced by Buddhism and Christianity.

### **Impact on Social Structure**

It has been more than a century now since the Pranami Dharma has had followers in Darjeeling and Sikkim. Given a distinct religious order as seen above this must have had some impact on the social structure of the region. It is high time for the ardent followers to pause and look

back at the distance they have covered. Such attempts however are yet to be seen.

One is yet to see the Pranami Dharma bring within its fold, the Buddhists and Muslims, if not Christians of the region. Community-wise, there is hardly any Lepcha or Bhutia Pranami except for one Bhutia lady who is married to one Pranami Limbu of Puduung village. Among the Bengalis, only a few families of Bankura district of West Bengal are reported to be followers of this Dharma. However, the Marwari followers are many and almost all of them are sympathetic as many of them worship Krishna and all are vegetarians.

Among the Nepalis, the followers mainly belong to upper castes like Bahun, Rai, Limbu and Gurung. There are quite a few low caste followers also, especially in Jaigaon, bordering Bhutan. The major concentration of the Pranamis in Kalimpong is in its east facing slope between Echhay village and Durbin Military Cantonment. Elsewhere they are mainly concentrated in the urban areas.

Untouchability has been denounced by every *guru* from as far back as the seventeenth century; but in practice the shedding of caste bias has been rather difficult for most. Although today there are quite a few non-Brahmins who give *diksha* the traditional notion that the Brahmins are ritually the purest and that they alone should give *diksha* persists even now.

It may be recalled here that it was the Brahmin priests who had most resisted the spread of this Dharma in the beginning, at least in Kalimpong. Since this Dharma gave less importance to rituals and called upon the people to worship only the Supreme soul the Brahmins had no role to play in this new order. But gradually they seem to have dominated the temporal order of this Dharma. In the first ever committee of five persons constituted in 1920 to run the Echhay Pranami Mandir, three were Brahmins.<sup>20</sup> The Darjeeling Branch of Shri Krishna Pranami Dharma Sabha constituted on September 9, 1984 has 44 members out of which only twelve are non-Brahmin Nepalis, three are Marwaris, and the rest either Brahmins or Chhetris/Thakuris. And the eight executive members of this Sabha are all Brahmins.<sup>21</sup> On September 24, 1985 a still larger committee was formed which shows a decrease in the ratio of the non-Brahmin//Chhetri Nepali castes *vis-a-vis* other Nepali castes and an increase in the strength of the Marwaris.<sup>22</sup> The following table will make this clearer :

<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit.*, Pradhan, 1965, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Raj Bldya*, 1984, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.*, Guruji Pranami Mission Trust, Kalimpong, 1985.

Ethnic background of Guruji Shri 108 Mangaldasji Smarak Samiti,  
established on 24th September, 1985

<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Official Position</i>
A. Nepali	1. N. B. Bhandari	<i>Cheif Advisor</i>
	2. Dr. M. K. Chhetri	<i>Advisor</i>
	3. T. R. Sharma	<i>Advisor</i>
	4. K. N. Upreti	<i>Advisor</i>
	5. T. M. Rai*	<i>Advisor</i>
	6. P. L. Gurung*	<i>Advisor</i>
	7. L. P. Tewari	<i>President</i>
	8. Mohan Priyacharya	<i>Secretary</i>
	9. C. K. Shrestha*	<i>Asst. Secretary</i>
	10. C. B. Chhetri	<i>Asst. Treasurer</i>
	11. C. B. Kumai	<i>Member</i>
	12. Renulina Subba*	<i>Member</i>
	13. H. R. Sharma	<i>Member</i>
	14. R. W. Dikshit	<i>Member</i>
	15. Saroj Sharma	<i>Member</i>
	16. A. Ghimire	<i>Member</i>
	17. U. K. Kumai	<i>Member</i>
	18. Bhanuprasad Gurung*	<i>Member</i>
B. Marwari & Others	1. Jivanram Marda	<i>Vice-President</i>
	2. Munshiram Agrawal	<i>Treasurer</i>
	3. Shyam Bansal	<i>Asst. Treasurer</i>
	4. Atmaram Agrawal	<i>Asst. Treasurer</i>
	5. Gajanand Poddar	<i>Asst. Treasurer</i>
	6. Jagdish P. Agrawal	<i>Asst. Treasurer</i>
	7. Durgadutt Agrawal	<i>Member</i>
	8. M. M. Mintri	<i>Member</i>
	9. Harnarayan Agrawal	<i>Member</i>
	10. Jaikishan Agrawal	<i>Member</i>
	11. Purushottam Das Shah	<i>Member</i>
	12. Dhani Bhai Birj	<i>Member</i>
	13. Deep Chand Agrawal	<i>Member</i>

\* lower castes.

The impact of this Dharma on traditional, caste-based, commensal relations has been negligible. High castes eating food from the hands of the untouchables has still remained a matter of chance rather than a commitment to their religious ideal. But marital relations have been influenced to some extent. A negotiated marriage is usually endogamous and between two Pranamis only. The problem arises when a Pranami boy or girl is not available or not willing for marriage within a caste. In such occasions, marrying outside one's caste becomes inevitable. The push and pull between caste and Dharma endogamy is sometimes settled in favour of the latter, resulting in intercaste marriages.

Family happiness depends on a number of factors of which a similar dietary habit is perhaps one. From this point of view it is desirable that a marriage be within the Pranami community. Otherwise, if there is no proper understanding between the members, the family is liable to break due to inconsistencies of all sorts. And such otherwise mundane things of life are found to be important to the family happiness of these otherwise otherworldly people.

In this connection, it may be worthwhile to reproduce what Wilson had to say about this Dharma as early as 1861 :

As a test of the disciple's consent to the real identity of the essence of the Hindu and Muhammadan creeds, the ceremony of initiation consists of eating in the society of members of both communions : with the exception, it does not appear that two classes confound their civil or even religious distinctions : they continue to observe the practices and ritual of their forefathers, whether Musalman or Hindu, and the union, beyond that of community of eating is no more than any rational individual of either sect is fully prepared for, or the admission, that the God of both, and of all religions, is one and the same.<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

What marks out this Dharma clearly is perhaps the significance given to all other religions by the various gurus, particularly Prannath. None of the saints, either in the Hindu or in other religions, before or after him, is known to have given as much importance to the texts of other religions as he did. But then he grew during the lifetime of Aurangzeb and not during Akbar's, Shahjahan's or Jehangir's time. When seen in historical perspective Prannath's contribution is therefore highly commendable.

<sup>23</sup> H. H. Wilson, *Religious Sects of the Hindus*, Calcutta : Sisil Gupta, 1958, p. 196.

Despite the respect and recognition given to other religions by Prannath, he basically appears as a leader of a socio-religious movement within the folds of Hinduism. This becomes clear from the following lines :<sup>24</sup>

राजा ने मिल रे राय राय तणों । धरम जाता रे कोई दौड़ो ।  
जागो ने जोघारे उठ खड़े रहो । नींद निगोड़ी रे छोड़ो ॥  
छुटत है रे खड्ग छत्रियों से । धरम जात हिन्दुआन ।  
सत न छोड़ो रे सतवादियों । जोड़ बड़यो तुरकान ॥  
वलौकी में उत्तम खंड भारत को । ताये उत्तम हिन्दु धरम ।  
ताके छत्रपतियों के सिर । बाये रही इत सरम ॥

(O The Rajas, the Ranas and the Raiyats ! The Religion is in danger. Rise to its rescue. You warriors, rise from the accursed sleep and be on your feet. The swords of the Kshatriyas seem to be broken. Religion of the Hindus is endangered. You followers of the true religion, do not abandon it. The Turks are gaining the upper hand. In the three ' Lokas ' the land of Bharat is the most glorious and in it Hinduism is the best of religions. The crowned heads of the land are down with shame.)

The importance given by Prannath to Islam and its teachings was perhaps a historical necessity that he felt in his earnestness to save Hinduism which had suffered a lot due to internal belligerence as well as external control. He may have even felt that Muslim rule would never end in India and that the only way to keep the Hindu religion going was, to him, by pointing out the essential unity of all religions.

This explains in a way why the followers of Pranami Dharma have basically remained a Vaisnavite sect. Idolatry which was denounced by Prannath is once again appearing among them though still in a mild way. It is perhaps functional to this Dharma to increasingly accept the many other deities and texts of the Hindu religion which were never prescribed by Dev Chandra or Prannath. Thus, the latent apathy of many Pranamis toward the Muslims and Christians should not arouse any confusion in the minds of those who want to know about this Dharma.

It has also been observed that the social activities of the Pranami Dharma are slightly different in the region from what it is elsewhere. The missionary-like activities, such as the establishment of hospitals and orphanages, and the distribution of food and blankets to the poor are

<sup>24</sup> Gupta, 1974, p. 10.

typical of this region where Christian missionaries have brought into their fold a large number of local people. Though the Pranami missionaries have not come out in the open to compete with the Christian missionaries, they have kept their doors open for those who are poor and helpless and who otherwise would go to the Christians. It is perhaps this latent interest that is shared by many high caste Nepalis and Marwaris to stop the Hindus from leaving their religion if not to actually initiate more people into the Pranami fold, which have made them well-wishers of this Dharma. Not only the Hindus of this region but also those from Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, etc., have lent their support in the form of financial assistance to the Guruji Pranami Mission Trust in Kalimpong. It is perhaps this cause, that is, counteracting the Christian spread, more than anything else, which has been an important factor behind the survival and spread of this Dharma in the region.

It is also interesting to note that the entire affair seems to be an Aryan monopoly. It has not spread among the Dravidians, nor much among the Mongoloids. It is largely concentrated in the Aryan areas of north-western India. The leaders of this Dharma are also reported to have a fraternal relationship with the leaders of the Arya Samaj and some of them are in the forefront of the Viswa Hindu Parishad as well.

It may be noted further that the major part of the financial burden in meeting the expenses of the various establishments is borne with assistance mainly from the Hindi-speaking people of the plains of India. One asks : Can a huge sum amounting to lakhs be channelled into this region just to counteract the spread of Christianity ? Perhaps not. There must be other interests of which linguistic colonialism could be one. One will notice that the followers of this Dharma have a strong allegiance to the Hindi language and use a lot of Hindi words in their day-to-day conversation. Many Nepali preachers in the region even preach and write in Hindi. This is not unwelcome but an over-indulgence in the Hindi language may prove to be counter-productive in the long run not only for this language but also for this Dharma.

## STATEMENT ABOUT OWNERSHIP AND OTHER PARTICULARS

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*I, J. Victor Koilpillai, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.*

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