

## **KUMBHIPATAS**

The Kumhipatias are a sect peculiar to Sambalpur to whom attention was first drawn in 1880 when a party of fanatics went to Puri with the object of burning the idol of Jagannath. They were residents of Sambalpur and stated that they were induced to come to Puri in consequence of one of their co-religionists having been commanded by their guru en invisible being without shape or form-to bring the images of Jagannath Balaram and Subhadra out of the temple and burn them on the road. In obedience's to what they believed to be divine command a body of men and women left their homes in Sambalpur. Within a few miles of Puri 12 men and 3 women separated themselves from the main body and preceded them to the temple. These 15 persons who were almost in a state of nudity came up to the temple shouting "Alekh" "Alekh". Having forced their way in to the building they proceeded to break down door of the Bhogamandap, the building in which the offerings of the worshippers are usually displayed. They then made their way into the great hall of the temple in front of the shrine but found the door called Jay-Bijay shut. On this they went out into the enclosure and rushed about like madmen endeavoring to find an entrance in some other direction. In this struggle which took place one of them fell or was pushed on to the stone pavement. He was lifted up by some of his companions and was assisted out of the temple and shortly after expired.

The rioters being inhabitants of Sambalpur the chief Commissioner of the central Provinces was asked to furnish particulars of the sect and its tenets and in compliance with this request gave the following information. "There is a peculiar sect of Hindu dissenters in the Sambalpur district known as Kumbhipatias. The word Kumbhipatia is derived from "Kumbhi" the name of a kind of tree and

pat the bark of a tree and the sect is so-called because its followers make ropes from the bark of the tree and wear them round their waists. The religion is also known as that of Alekh and its followers claim revelation as its foundation. Alekha swami the god incarnate used it is said to reside in the Himalayss but about the year 1864 he came to Malbaharpur in Banki in the Cuttack district and there revealed a new religion to 64 persons the principal of whom was Govind Das and it was chiefly owing to the exertions of the disciples that the religion was propagated. Alekha swami (which signifies the Lord whose attributes cannot be described in writing) removed to Dhenkanal a Feudatory state where for 3 years immediately preceding his death he led the life of a mendicant and wanderer. Although the religion originated in Cuttack it spread more rapidly in the district of Sambalpur and men of all classes and castes except the Oriya Brahmanas are freely embracing it. It was not so much the peculiarity of the rules of any particular caste or sect that tended to increased the number of converts as the position in life of the convert themselves for example in Khinda the people of whole village embraced the Kumbhipatia religion because the gaontia had done so. The names of some 30 villages are given as these in which the Kumbhipatias chiefly reside.

Further details are given in the Central provinces census Report of 1881 where the following account of the Kumbhipatias is quoted from the Census Report of Sambalpur: "Their religion also known as Alekh appears to have originated in Angul an Dhenkanal Feudatory states about the year 1866. The name of the founder of the religion appears unknown and its followers state that he is a spiritual being without form who lives in heaven. His elder disciple Gobinda Das is dead another known as Narasingh Das has erected his math (temple) in Banki. The Kumbhipatias have another temple in Malbahar in Banki. They have a book called 'Malika' which contain predictions. They are

divided into three sects the Kumbhipatia gosains the Kanapatia Gosains and Ashritas. The two former sects have renounced the world the followers of the one do not eat with those of the others. They appear to be of dirty habits not washing after easing them selves and not bathing at all. The third sect called Ashritas do not renounce the world nor deem celibacy essential nor are they turned out of caste. They look up to the other two sects As their gurus or spiritual guides and follow their religion. They bathe in the early morning and all three sects turn their faces towards the sun at time of rising and setting and prostrate themselves five or seven times. They do not eat after sunset Each sect has a separate temple or place of prayer. They recognize Bhagabat one of the Hindu religious books but interpret it differently to the Hindus. They do not respect the images of the Hindu gods arguing that as no one has ever seen the Supreme Being it is impossible to form his images. They believe in the existence of thirty-three crores of Hindu gods and goddesses but do not obey them asserting that it is not necessary to obey the servant but only the master. Their worship consists of prayer and praise to the immaterial being whom they call Alekh.

Babu Bijay Chandra Mazumdar of Sambalpur has kindly furnished further information regarding the sect which conflicts in some respects with that given above. He states that the leader under whose instructions the Kumbhipatias sought to destroy the idol of Jagannath was one Bhima Bhoi a blind and illiterate man possessed however of considerable mental power. This Bhima Bhoi had his seat at Khaliapali in the Sonapur feudatory state and Khaliapali is still the principal Guru Dwar or hierarch's seat of the Kumbhipatias Bhima Bhoi gave new life to the Kumbhipatia doctrine and made the cult popular throughout Sambalpur. Some Brahamans indeed openly embraced the religion by throwing away their Brahminical threads.

They worship no god prayer is never offered and the temples are merely maths. All the religious books of the Hindus, and not only the Bhagbat are interpreted in a fanciful manner, according to the Alekh doctrine. Formerly no garment was used , and at times the bark of trees only covered their shame. The lay Kumbhipatias observe the customary system, but the specially initiated do not. It is difficult to obtain much reliable information regarding the Kumbhipatias owing to the fact that they do not disclose their secret doctrines to the uninitiated.

(Bengal District Gazetteer : Sambalpur, 1909)