Secularizing Caste: Mapping Nineteenth-Century Anti-caste Politics in Western India

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Table of Content

INTRODUCTION

In 1935 Dr B.R Ambedkar, one of the most prominent thinkers of equality, and an icon of Dalit politics, was invited by the *Jat-Pat Todak Mandal* (Forum for the Breakup of Caste) of Lahore to talk about the problem of caste. But on reading the speech that he meant to give at the annual conference, members of the Mandal were filled with dread. Its prominent leaders resigned in protest against Ambedkar's selection as the guest, others like Har Bhagwan lost sleep over its content, and the founder of the Mandal, Sant Ram, mentioned how Ambedkar's 'new formula' had left him immensely anxious.[1]

What really created this furor? In the presidential address, meant for the upcoming Annual conference, Ambedkar declared that "it is not possible to break Caste without annihilating the religious notions on which it, the Caste system, is founded". In a letter to Ambedkar, Har Bhagawan, a member of the Mandal, wrote that the Mandal was distressed, for he had "unnecessarily attacked the morality and reasonableness of the Vedas and other religious books of the Hindus," and that "[t]he last portion which dealt with the complete annihilation of the Hindu religion … as well as a hint about [his] intention to leave the Hindu fold does not seem relevant..."[2]

The Mandal tried to persuade Ambedkar to prune his address and make it more palatable. Ambedkar, who was already skeptical of the *Jat -Pat Todak* Mandal's reformism, but had nonetheless begrudgingly accepted their invitation, refused to budge. The conference was cancelled. With his integrity questioned, and political commitment

1 Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *Annihilation of caste: The annotated critical edition* (Verso Books, 2014). 188-193.
2 Ibid,196-197.

perceived as negotiable, an irate Ambedkar was stuck with a thousand copies of the presidential address, which he had printed at his own cost.

Why did the *Jat-Pat Todak* Mandal, whose 'only aim was to eradicate the caste system from amongst the Hindus' object to Ambedkar's proposition? The answer lies in the character of the Mandal. The *Jat-Pat Todak* Mandal was a social reformist organization that mostly comprised of non-Dalit Hindu men. Both the Mandal and its parent organization, the Arya Samaj, argued that the Hindu religion, which had descended into degeneracy in the present, had to be rescued through purification. They sought to sieve out later-day accretions that included the inflexible version of the caste system, popular puranic myths, polytheism, idolatry, and mediation by the priests. The organization streamlined the amorphous set of ideas, practices, and texts, that they classified together as Hindu religion by adhering to the Vedas as the source of all truth.

Within this broader ideological framework, the *Jat Pat Todak* Mandal exclusively focused on the problem of caste and worked to get rid of the 'social evil' by conducting inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages. For an organization that stood on the very foundation of 'reforming' the Hindu religion, and that too by elevating Vedic texts, Ambedkar's insistence of dismantling Hindu religion and discarding the divine authority of its sacred texts must have only seemed sacrilegious.

Besides being outraged by Ambedkar's proposition of annihilating Hindu religion, the reformist organization also saw it as 'irrelevant' to the problem at hand, i.e., breaking caste. For the Mandal, breaking caste, or erasing caste distinctions by encouraging commensality and intermarriage, was a means to revive Hindu religion in its 'purest form'. Ambedkar's approach to the caste question, that of complete annihilation

of Hinduism, was in stark opposition to the one proposed by the reformist organization, which worked towards blowing a breath of new life into Hinduism.

Ambedkar's writings stood out in his immediate milieu. He refused to separate caste from Hindu religion. This was unusual for his time when most nationalist reformers just like the *Jat Pat Todak Mandal* separated the realm of the social and the religious. They argued that the caste order in the past was an organic division of society based on virtues and occupations. But, over time, his 'flexible' and meritocratic institution' ossified and wrongly found a place in later iterations of the Hindu religion by corrupt means. They separated religious iterations on caste from what they perceived as the original 'Vedic truth' of Hindu religion. And resolved the wrong infusion of caste in social spaces by conducting inter-caste marriage and commensality.

Ambedkar refused to bifurcate religion from caste sociality. He argued that the latter had religious consecration in the *shastras* (religious texts) and Vedic texts. He contended that in Hinduism it was a religious virtue or *dharma* to follow caste rules of social isolation, segregation, and untouchability. And so breaking caste in Hinduism also meant breaking *dharma* (duty/religion).[3] We can already see how Ambedkar's approach to the caste question was radical. For him, the problem of caste can be solved only when it's very foundation, the Hindu religion, is uprooted.

Ambedkar is, of course, the most prominent anti-caste thinkers, and his nuanced debates with *Jat Pat Todak Mandal*, and later with Gandhi on the religious consecration of caste are now considered iconic. But Ambedkar by no means is the first to articulate an anti-caste discourse. On closely reading his work I found that the concepts he mobilized,

3 Ambedkar, *Annihilation of caste: The annotated critical edition*.281.

his frames of thought, and evidence on which he based his arguments resonate with nineteenth-century vernacular lower-caste or Shudra writings. His most crucial argument that the S*hastras* (religious texts)— their central concepts and notions, logics and structuring myths, and their ways of making sense of the social world—remain at the root of the caste order, can be traced to nineteenth-century lower-caste writings. I also noticed that he invoked the memory of early-modern caste controversies, and nineteenth-century events to bolster his arguments against caste.

But we know very little about how modern anti-caste ideas took shape in the first place. Most histories of caste politics focus on the twentieth century, on Ambedkar's writings and politics, and only briefly turn to the nineteenth century to furnish a historical context of Dalit politics coming to mature fruition.[4] The Ambedkarite moment is undeniably significant. In the early decades of the twentieth century, as a new nation was being imagined, Ambedkar's politics was instrumental in laying the foundations of Indian democratic culture. But without closely studying the nuances of nineteenth-century anti-caste writings we would be ignoring the historical journey of ideas that lay at the foundation of Indian democratic politics.

This dissertation examines this history, the history of how caste emerged as an object of social transformation through debates and discussions between lower-caste (Shudra) anti-caste radicals and, the usually, upper-caste social reformers in the nineteenth century. Its actors are lower-caste 'amateur' writers who otherwise worked as

4 E. Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (Manohar, 1996); C. Jaffrelot, *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System* (Columbia University Press, 2005); A. Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (University of California Press, 2009); Philip Constable, "Early Dalit Literature and Culture in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Western India," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 2 (1997).

construction contractors, jobbers, mill workers, and clerks. The dissertation closely follows their expressions in nineteenth-century Marathi-language newspapers, journals, monographs, caste manuals, and essays.

Save for Rosalind O' Hanlon's inspiring work, which mostly focuses on Jotirao Phule, the most iconic lower-caste thinker of the nineteenth century, and follows his footsteps to map the history of anti-caste movement, there have been few exhaustive historical scholarships on the anti-caste discourse, especially in the English language.[5] Also, because of the exclusive focus in most scholarship on Phule, he has come to be canonized as the foremost anti-caste leader. Such canonization eclipses the wide range of caste commentaries and activism by other non-Brahman writers in the nineteenth century. This dissertation suggests that while Phule and the Satyashodhak Samaj (The Truth-Seeker's Society), an anti-caste organization which he founded, were crucial actors, the anti-caste discourse of the period emerged out of a broad network of lower-caste writers, editors, booksellers, printers, and activists, many of whom either did not directly associate themselves with the Satyashodhak Samaj, or are lesser-known to us in the present.

Looking beyond Phule's work in order to explore the writings of lesser-known activists is crucial, particularly, in the case of the anti-caste tradition, which was teeming with debates and internal differences. Moreover, when pedagogy, expositions,

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5 Besides Rosalind O'hanlon, *Caste, conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). Phule's works have received significant attention in the form of translations into English language Gobind Purushottam Deshpande, "Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule," *New Delhi: Left Word* (2002).Biographies, prominent among them is the Keer's Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley: father of the Indian social revolution* (Popular Prakashan, 1997). And works that see him as part of a broad a nineteenth century assemblage of modernists Aparna Devare, *History and the making of a modern Hindu self* (Routledge, 2013). The Maharashtra government pledging its allegiance to lower-caste activists published Phule's collected works in Marathi Jyotiba Phule, "Mahatama Phule Samagra Vangmaya (MPSV)," *Edited by Yeshwant Dinakar Phadke. Mumbai: Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya ani Sanskriti Mandal* (1991).

questioning established ideas, and 'recognizing the true character of caste' were an integral part of the anti-caste movement's culture, wouldn't overlooking the speeches and writings by lesser-known, itinerant activists mean painting a partial picture of a layered story?

Standing at a juncture that at once faced both the past and the future, nineteenth-century writings on caste and modernity constitute an important link between premodern expressions of caste and twentieth-century caste politics. Nineteenth-century caste commentaries emerged out of engagements with early-modern and medieval textual traditions, liturgical manuals, and judgement letters on caste disputes by *dharma sabhas* (religio-juridical courts). Moreover, western India has a long history of debates on caste that can be at least traced back to the ninth century CE. And to understand how categories and frames of references from these precolonial caste debates were amalgamated with western liberal ideas, a close study of nineteenth-century writings is inescapable.

In addition to linking premodern debates and textual traditions on caste with recent writings, nineteenth-century lower-caste writings also stood out among their contemporary reformist efforts. Religious reformist organization from Bengal like the Brahmo Samaj (instituted in 1825) and *Tatvabodhini* Sabha (the Society of Those Who Delight in Truth), which found a footing between 1830s-1840s, worked towards reinterpreting *Vedanta* for the English-educated modern reading public of Bengal.[6]

In classical Hinduism, *Vedanta* is considered to be a religious philosophy that is enshrined in the ancient Sanskrit texts called the Upanishad. Dated between 800-200

6 B. Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism, or Faith of the Modern Vedantists: Rare Discourses from Early Colonial Bengal* (Oxford University Press, 2007)., 4.

BCE, the Upanishads purportedly constitute the end of the 'Vedic' canon, and hence their knowledge is called *Ved-anta*, meaning end (*anta*) of the Vedas. The Vedantic philosophy was first canonized by an eighth-century sect called the *Advaita Vedanta* (non-dualist Vedanta). Shankaracharya, a Brahman ascetic and the most prominent philosopher of the Vedantic tradition, reinterpreted the Upanishads to argue that the only True Self is the divine, and the phenomenal world, with all its plurality, is a mere illusion. With the first Shankaracharya, the *Advaita Vedanta* tradition emerged as a robust one and consequently was canonized as one of the six orthodox philosophical systems in Hinduism.[7]

In the early nineteenth century, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, an English-educated native and the foremost reformer of Bengal was the first to creatively engage with the Upanishads and the Advaita Vedanta. He assembled textual sources, translated them into the vernacular, published them extensively, and wrote commentaries on them. Inspired by the monism of the Vedanta, Mohan Roy worked towards 'resurrecting' ideas such as monotheism, rationalism, and morality in Hinduism that he thought were lost over the centuries. Consequently, he refuted idolatry, widow immolation, and inflexible social and occupational roles imposed by caste division, which too were seen as corrupt iterations of the original Hindu religion.[8]

In a similar search for 'true Hinduism', the Arya Samaj, founded in 1875 in North India, too professed a return to the Vedas. Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Samaj, constructed a mytho-historical account of a golden Vedic past—a time of social

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[7] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia. "Advaita." Encyclopedia Britannica, February 19, 2015. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Advaita-school-of-Hindu-philosophy.
8 Bryan Hatcher Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism, or Faith of the Modern Vedantists: Rare Discourses from Early Colonial Bengal.*, 21-22.

unity, prosperity, and virtue. He argued that the Hindu golden age spiraled into degeneracy due to the immorality and greed of the Brahman priests who stopped pursuing Vedic learning and, instead, resorted to complicated ritualism. Like the Brahmos, Dayananda Saraswati, too, claimed to be the true heir of the Vedanta tradition of the Shankaracharya. Saraswati stated that the Shankaracharya was the first Vedic reformer who revived the tradition of Vedic teaching, spearheaded text-based debates, and rebuttal of anti-Vedic thought.[9]

In stark contrast to the religious reformism of the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj, anti-caste radicals argued that the Vedas and the Shankaracharya's revival of the Upanishads are the very source of the problem. Jotirao Phule, in his 1873 treatise entitled, *Gulamgiri* (Slavery), emphasized that Vedas were nothing more than a "practice of scratching on palm leaves with a sharp point, and an [collection] of some magical incantations and false fables that he [the Brahma or the cosmic being] knew off by heart…"[10] In his work, Phule stripped off Brahma or the supreme being of his divinity and instead, characterized him as a capricious, immoral, corrupt clerk among the Aryan-Brahmans, who they appoint as their leader.[11] Alongside Phule, other lower-caste writers like Tukaram Tatya Padwal, whose work we will explore more closely in the dissertation, suggested that with the rise of Shankaracharya, Brahman excesses, which were formerly reined in by the challenge of Buddhism, found new expressions.[12] Thus, in

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[9] C.S. Adcock, The Limits of Tolerance: Indian Secularism and the Politics of Religious Freedom (OUP USA, 2014)., 43.

[10] Rosalind O'hanlon, Caste, conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India., 145. Translation by O'Hanlon.

[11] Phule and before him Padwal drew on the orientalist narrative of Arya invasion. Phule argued that the Aryans, invaded the Indian subcontinent wielding Sanskrit texts like the Vedas. They laid siege on to the indigenous inhabitants of the subcontinents, the ancestors of present-day Shudra and Ati-shudra.

[12] In Slavery, Phule argues, "Shankaracharya reestablished the domination of fraudulent tales from the Bhagwat and rigmarole of the Vedic incantations on the ignorant shusras.IN the terrible wake of this devastating

complete opposition to dominant social reformist thought proposed by upper-caste led organizations such as the Brahmo, Arya, and Prarthana Samaj (The Prayer society), writers of the anti-caste network saw themselves as the true heirs of an anti-Vedic intellectual tradition, which they traced back to Buddhist writings and thought.

Anti-caste writings in the nineteenth century were radical for one other reason. Unlike liberal reformers, monotheist revivalists, and reformist organizations who desperately tried to absolve early Hindu texts, lower-caste reformers refused to reinterpret the shastras and find a basis for social change in Hindu religious tenets.[13] For instance, Padwal clarified in the preface to the second edition of *Jatibhed Viveksar*, "The aim of the text is not to uphold the Hindu religion or its shastras." Similarly, in its editorial of April 9, 1893, *Din Bandhu,* a lower-caste mouthpiece*,* extended its conditional support to M.G Ranade, a prominent Brahman reformer, by suggesting that, "We will appeal to the shastras so long they support us, but we will not stoop to strain a point in the shastras in our favor."[14]

It is not that Shudra writers did not engage with religious texts. In fact, analyzing Hindu religious texts, *puranas* (mythic stories), excavating metaphors and the symbolic meanings in epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata was critical to their caste commentary. But they did so not in search of an eternal Vedic truth or to absolve Hindu religious knowledge from the blemish of an 'irrational caste order.' In fact, close readings of shastras and religious principles were undertaken to find inconsistences, logical fallacies, and unethical principles in the Hindu texts. Through their work, Shudra writer-

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turmoil, his people killed several of the Buddhists by crushing them in oil presses." Translation by G.P Deshpande. See See Deshpande, "Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule."74, 75.

[13] Umesh Bagade, Maharashtratil Prabodhan ani Vargajati Prabhutva (Pune: Sugava Prakashan 2006).,90.

14 This editorial was published in English.

activists argued that the inequalities of the caste order were rooted in the very foundations of Hindu religion and that caste sociality stood on a scaffolding of unethical religious principles. Shudra writers secularized caste by critiquing the corpus of the Hindu religion itself.

Broadly, this dissertation asks: When did the lower castes first start telling their own stories on modern public platforms? What kind of stories did they tell? Which is also to ask: when a community like the lower castes, which has been thus far barred from reading, writing, and producing knowledge start publishing, how did they transform the understanding of caste? By way of these questions, the dissertation not only maps the genealogy of the anti-caste discourse espoused by Dalit democratic politics in the present but in the process, also explores how the category of the Shudra (lower caste) was first politicized.

Who were the Shudra?

Who were Shudra or the lower castes? Within the dominant caste ideology, the lower castes in Sanskrit were called the *Shudra,* meaning 'lowly' or menial. They constitute the fourth division in the four-fold classification, the first three being Brahmans, Warriors or Kshatriyas, and Merchants or Vaishyas in that order. Mythically, the Shudras are supposed to have sprung from the feet of the Purusha or the cosmic man.

This mythical theory of caste differentiation implied that the lower-castes had distinct rituals prescribed for them; they were meant to use vernacular religious texts and not the usual Sanskrit scriptures like the upper-castes and were prohibited from freely exchanging food with the upper-castes. The lower castes mostly performed occupations that required the use of manual labor. For instance: artisan castes such as carpenters,

potters, blacksmiths, tailors, oil pressers belonged to the lower caste. Cultivator castes such as gardeners and peasants too belonged to this broad varna division. They were castes that in the dominant caste ideology were explicitly prohibited from pursuing religious and non-religious literate professions.

Argument and Historiography

The first part of my dissertation deals with the Bombay of 1830s, when the first generation of English educated natives emerged and began setting up their own printing presses, newspapers, and literary societies. The second part of my dissertation deals with the second half of the nineteenth century when semi-literate lower-caste writers began exploring the print world and challenging the Brahman and a few scribal caste reformers. This second moment witnessed what is now recognized as the birth of the modern anti-caste movement.

My dissertation makes a series of interrelated arguments about these two moments. First, I argue that that the anti-caste discourse emerged out of the debates, discussions, and departures between elite upper-caste thinkers and the newly emerging lower-caste writers. These 'elite upper-caste thinkers' came from communities that traditionally dabbled in literate occupations. Mostly they belonged to Brahman, scribal, and in very rare cases, elite Maratha castes. However, within these three groups, customarily, the Brahmans had a mastery over the elite Sanskrit language and so were considered traditional intellectuals.[15] The skills of the scribal castes, on the contrary, were limited to bureaucratic functional literacy.

15 Bagade, *Maharashtratil Prabodhan ani Vargajati Prabhutva*., 91.

Caught in the whirlwind of colonial modernity and the rapid urbanization of Bombay, this English-educated group of upper-caste men soon began to feel that caste restrictions on their mobility and socialization were holding them back from wholly adopting modern ways of being. They experienced caste as a routine of purificatory rituals, family relations, clothing, restrictions on consumption of food, and commensality. They tried to 'reform' caste as they understood it—a traditional disciplinary technique that controlled their entry into the colonial modern world—by adopting new liberal disciplinary techniques. They focused a lot of their efforts towards overcoming their internal aversion to eating meat, bread (*pao*) cooked by non-Hindus, inhabiting mixed spaces, and violating other such upper-caste rules of superiority and purity.

By the mid-nineteenth century, a new generation of non-Brahman and Shudra social observers emerged and reframed the caste question entirely. They were no doubt in awe of the radical reformist texts written by the first generation of liberal upper-caste reformers. For instance, Jotirao Phule dedicated his 1861 *pavada* or Ballad for Chhatrapati Shivaji Raje Bhosale to the memory of Ramchandra Balkrishna Jaykar, the president of Paramhansa Sabha, a secret reform society. Tukaram Padwal, too, makes a notable mention of G.H Deshmukh's *Shatapatre* (A series of 'Hundred letters' published in the reformist newspaper *Prabhakar*) in his *Jatibhed Viveksar*. Later, we will also see how the Satyashodhak Samaj too viewed Dadoba Pandurang's *Dharma Vivechana* (Discernment of Religion) as one of its important reference texts.

Nevertheless, Shudra reformers departed from their Brahman contemporaries, in that their approach to the caste question was much more radical. They moved away from the established ideas of reforming caste that were limited only to the transformation of

the self and focused on the ideological principles foundational to the caste order. For instance, In the early 1860s Tukaram Padwal, a merchant from Bombay, upended the dominant idea that the foundational principle of 'purity of lineage' was the basis of Brahman superiority. This ruffled many a liberal-Brahman feathers. The proposition that not just the Shudra (or the lower castes), but the Brahmans too have inter-caste and mixed origins was ground-breaking on two accounts.

First, Padwal's text *Jatibhed Viveksar* (Reflections on the Institution of Caste) challenged a long tradition of writings on the rituals and duties of the Shudra, dating back to the nineth century. These texts were founded on the notion that in the age of Kali, a degenerate time of the present, only two out of the original four-fold varna classification remained—the Brahman who have managed to retain their pure lineages, and the Shudra castes who are born out of inter-caste mixing.

Second, although Padwal's contemporary reformist Brahmans had somewhat, although superficially, accepted that caste was not determined by birth, they still maintained fidelity to all its symbolic meanings associated with pure origins: purity of blood and lineage, a golden age of Brahmanism, when Brahmans were of pure intent and truly deserved their ascendent status. Padwal's proposition about the Brahman castes' mixed lineage allowed him to establish a point of equivalence between the Brahman and the Shudras, and his challenge to the purity of Brahman lineage hit at the very root of Brahman exceptionalism.

The dissertation also closely studies the 1892 work of Tukaram Patil, an itinerant Satyashodhak activist. In the never studied before work *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* (An Exposition of Religious Falsehood), Patil 'exposed' the entanglement of religion and

caste. He argued that social relations between the Brahmans and the Shudras in a caste society are imbalanced and are not reciprocal. This lop-sidedness, he argued, is pivoted on the complete exclusion of the lower-caste from Sanskrit textual traditions, high-learning, and literate skills: forms of knowledge that assume cultural authority in a brahmanical society. Patil questioned the lack of reciprocal relations in a caste society, which later Ambedkar too refers to as a 'wrong relationship', by asking: how can the impecunious Shudra, whose manual labor is seen as an inferior to the Brahman's intellectual labor be the latter's patron? How is the lower-caste peasant, responsible for feeding and supporting the priests' household?

The dissertation further narrates the history of how anti-caste writers, activists, editors, and printers went against the grain and carved out an exclusive lower-caste public sphere. From their own public platforms such as caste organizations and newspapers, Shudra radicals both engaged with and challenged dominant reformist and elite nationalist ideas circulating in the Brahman public sphere. I do so by studying the surviving issues of *Din Bandhu* (Friend of the Poor), a newspaper run by anti-caste radical editors, primarily seeking an audience among lower-castes, peasants, workers, and artisans. Drawing on anti-caste ideas and methods developed over half a century, the *Din Bandhu* disrupted efforts by Hindu cultural nationalists to constitute a homogenous Hindu community, and fuse Hindu religion with a national identity. The astute caste perspective developed by the anti-caste collective and the friends of the Satyashodhak Samaj foregrounded the necessity of bringing about a reorganization of the social realm, before demanding political changes from the colonial government.

Together these chapters make the encompassing argument that anti-caste writers departed from elite ideas of caste reform and demonstrated that caste was not just an individual regime of the self, or a set of religious rituals, but was also an exploitative and humiliating social relation for the lower-castes and the untouchables. Through their writings, rejoinders, and debates, they peeled away the ideological layers underlining a social realm assembled on caste lines and argued that caste seeped deep into people's lives and shaped their world view, morality, idea of civility, and ethics. This shift demanded by caste subaltern writers had enormous implications: it required nothing less than a transformation of the ethical culture and principles foundational to Hindu social life. Together, this history suggests the need to reconsider the centrality of nineteenth-century anti-caste critique to the story of Indian democratic thought.

With these arguments, my dissertation makes two intertwined historiographical interventions:

First, it explores how the caste question was systematically reframed as a primarily political phenomenon by lower-caste reformers and writers in western India. By doing so, it enriches the history of the vernacular anti-caste discourse significantly. Much of the existing scholarship on anti-caste movements focuses on the twentieth century. By this time, the vocabulary of the movement as also of Indian nationalist politics had crystallized. To use these twentieth century concepts to study the nineteenth century would be anachronistic. Studying the anti-caste movement and liberal reformist ideas by deploying later criteria eschews perspectives, writings, and actors that, laid their very groundwork.

Also, by focusing on the nineteenth century, the dissertation brings out what may otherwise not be as evident: that the anti-caste discourse emerged out of discussions and debates with their contemporary liberal reformers, and the intellectual context of that time. The dissertation discusses how for reformers in the early nineteenth-century caste liberalism involved imbibing new habits both of the body and mind. It also meant intense self-reflection and questioning their 'elders' traditions. Similarly, lower-caste radicals criticized elite notions of social change by identifying how Hindu religious ideology shaped social inequalities. And thus, to understand the complexities of how idea of democracy, and politics from the margins in India developed, through various forms of contestations form the periphery, it is essential that we focus on the history of nineteenth-century anti-caste discourse.

Second, the dissertation also contributes to our understanding of secularism and processes of secularization in South Asian history. It argues that the vernacular anti-caste movement in the nineteenth century contributed significantly and shaped the discussion on secularism in India. It demonstrates the different, and sometimes oppositional ways in which upper-caste liberals and lower-caste radicals secularized caste.

As scholars have noted, one of the striking features of colonial rule was its bifurcation of Indian society into religious and civic realms.[16] The *Queen's Proclamation* issued in 1858 was a watershed moment. It not only transferred political and administrative powers from the East India Company to the British government, but it also

16N.B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton University Press, 2011); Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India*; Adcock, *The Limits of Tolerance: Indian Secularism and the Politics of Religious Freedom*; R. Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India* (Columbia University Press, 2014).

inaugurated a new policy of non-interference in religious matters.[17] The policy of non-intrusion was impelled by the understanding that government interference in religious matters had caused the 1857-armed revolt. By this time, the British administration was convinced that Indians were primarily a religious people, and the company had interfered with their primary source of identification—religion.

The deployment of the British lens of separation of the state from the church transformed the political landscape of the subcontinent. Religious establishments like temples and monasteries, nodes of local political and economic power, were now classified and essentialized as primarily religious institutions.

This bifurcation of 'traditional' institutions, practices, and structures into religious and civic had wide-ranging implications, particularly for the caste question. Nineteenth-century upper-caste reformers' approach to the caste question was partly influenced by the colonial framework of bifurcating the religious realm from the social realm. Driven by the urgency to absolve the 'original' foundations of the Hindu religion, they argued that caste was never endorsed by the earliest and the purest version of Hindu religion. Many of them, did so by turning towards the *Shastras* to find evidence, to reinterpret them, and to seek their 'true latent' meaning. They argued that in ancient India, caste was perhaps a 'natural' division of society based on virtues, occupations, and actions. It also might have been flexible and allowed for upward and downward mobility, unlike its more

17 In order to govern in alignment with the policy of non-interference the colonial government fervently began to designate institutions and practices as either religious or non-religious. This then also meant, that those that did not adhere to either of the two categories, had to be pruned and forced to fit into the either of the two molds.17 Although the colonial administration claimed to disengage with the religious realm of the natives, their obsessive classification of institutions and practices as religious/non-religious practically defined the realm of the religious.

recent avatar. They argued that the later-day Brahmans, in order to retain their superior social status, added new religious texts, which elevated caste to a religious principle, gave it divine sanction, and attached irrational ritualism of purity/impurity to it. They believed that once caste was secularized by removing ritual and 'religious' prohibitions, all that remained of the caste order was a rational social hierarchy. For them, these forms of hierarchies of capabilities, status, wealth, and occupation were legitimate, and a part of all modern societies. They secularized caste by extracting its religious iterations from Hindu religion, and rooting it wholly in historical processes. By arguing that caste had social roots, they opened the possibility of transforming it through human efforts.

This step towards secularization of caste was pioneering for its time, but it soon began to receive criticism from a newly emerging cohort of Shudra writers. Lower-caste reformers dismantled the artificial duality of religious and non-religious realm by contending that the Brahmanical ideology ingrained in canonical Hindu religious tenets lay at the very root of caste differentiation. They asserted that caste structure was not a harmless social division of society, which aided its efficient functioning, but was a set of all-encompassing religious rules imposed on the lower-caste and the untouchables by Aryan-Brahman victors who invaded the subcontinent.

They argued against the rationalization of caste by drawing on the stories of their lives. They asserted that caste sociality was experienced by the lower-castes and the untouchables as economic inequalities and relations of oppression, and as humiliation. In short, they suggested that caste was not just an organizing feature of a complex society, but a product of violence, and of subjugation in the past.

Thus, the dissertation argues that the lower-caste activist writers too secularized caste, but this secularization was strongly political in character. They secularized caste not by eluding the question of religion, or separating caste from Hindu religion, but, instead, by locating caste at the very heart of the Hindu religion.

As part of this secularization, lower-caste writers rejected the divinity of Brahmanical Hinduism. Also rebuffing the liberal narrative of 'a few bad Brahmans' in the past, they argued that the entire edifice of Brahmanical Hindu religion was a result of the Aryan invasion: an ancient political conflict. Moreover, Brahmanical rituals, principles, and Sanskrit texts, i.e., the core of Hindu religion, were deliberately designed to perpetuate an unfair hierarchical relation between the Brahmans and the lower castes.

What did this radical secularization accomplish? By inserting themselves in the public debate on the caste question, lower-caste reformers opposed both the orthodox opinion on caste as a divine principle, as well as the upper-caste liberal imaginary of a modern society punctuated by 'rational' forms of inequality. Lower-caste activists argued that the fission of caste into its religious and social features allowed upper-caste reformers to pass off their caste privilege as 'rational' in the social realm and to continue practicing caste and enjoy its fruits.

All of this allows us to see the phenomenon of secularism in a new light. With some exceptions, much recent scholarship on secularism and secularization constructs the history of liberal ideas, and the concept of secularism in South Asia, by locating them at the intersection of nation-state and citizenship or by locating its source in the intervention of elite national leaders. I explore how in the earlier phase of colonial modernity, secularization of native lives first began with them exploring the ways in which caste

rules dictated their mobility and infused their everyday lives. Conversations on caste, embracing new sensibilities, and adopting new knowledge practices were some of the earliest attempts at secularization in the subcontinent. Thus, secularism, rather than being only a political principle advocated by national leaders, has complementary roots in ethical practices and 'technologies of the self' deployed by social reformers engaging with the problem of caste as well as actors from the margins in their quest to democratize the social world.

Sources, Method, Translation

In order to tease out an account of how amateur lower-caste writers, who otherwise worked as shopkeepers, construction contractors, and tailors, departed from the elite-reformist discourse on caste, this dissertation draws on thus far unexplored Marathi-language writings on caste in the nineteenth century, including rare treatises, essays, newspaper articles, advertisement, and letters to the editor, journals, autobiographies, liturgical manuals, caste association reports, and newsletters of reformist societies. I have assembled sources for this research by conducting extensive research in archives and libraries in India and UK.

There is no central archive for the history of the anti-caste movement, and neither is there a category under which archives are organized. Indeed, looking for nineteenth-century printed material, especially those authored by lower-caste writers, is an exercise in Sisyphean patience. For example, besides *Phulyanche Samagra Vangmay* or The Collected Works of Jotirao Phule, published by the Maharashtra Government in 1969, no other nineteenth-century lower-caste writers' works have been republished or compiled in recent times. While limited issues of some prominent nineteenth-century newspapers

were housed at the Teen Murti Library in New Delhi and the Maharashtra State Archive in Bombay, centralized state archives hold very few texts by lower-caste writers. And these are by no means easy to access. In most cases, barring the Nehru Memorial Library, archives are in an abysmal condition. Undigitized and poorly catalogued, every time one handles them, they fray at the edges and crumble into fine paper dust. Access to printed sources was made complicated not only by impractical bureaucratic rules such as seeking multiple levels of permissions, paperwork, reporting to the archivist before and after the day's work, and rules like 'no photographs or photocopy.' But this rare and rich material was also literally 'hidden away' on mezzanine floors that didn't show on the building maps and in cupboards that, according to the librarians, 'did not open.'

Given the limited sources available in centralized state archives, I had to develop my own systems to find caste reformist publications. Local libraries in cities that witnessed significant anti-caste activities in the nineteenth century and drew out a relatively large membership to these organizations was one way of doing it. Most of the research was conducted by scouring through multiple archives at university, college, and trust-run libraries in Pune, Thane, Mumbai, Kolhapur, and Aurangabad. For instance, while excerpts of N.M Lokhande's writings can be found in published Marathi biographies and their appendices, his essays and booklets are dispersed across libraries and hard to find.

In comparison, writings of well-known liberal reformers are relatively better documented. Most writings of upper-caste liberal reformers such as Balshastri Jambhekar, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, and Dadoba Pandurag have been published later in the twentieth century. Jambekar, edited and wrote in two journals namely, The *Bombay*

Durpan (The Bombay Mirror)–the first bilingual newspaper published in Marathi and English, and *Dig-Durshan* (Direction)–the first Marathi periodical to be published on the pattern of encyclopedic texts. Both journals imagined themselves as a site of exchange between Indians and Europeans to discuss "the relevance of European knowledge" in India. The texts are representative of an intellectual response to a volatile social situation emerging from the dispersion of modern ideas and institutions at the level of everyday life.

I analyze the texts I found by using two complementary methods: intellectual contextualization of the ideas of social reformers, and a close reading of their works. Intellectual contextualization involves careful attention to the network of meanings in Marathi and English from which these thinkers drew their vocabulary. This method helped me understand the ways in which intellectual inquiries had begun to deploy ideas from the European thought universe and indigenous intellectual traditions as they engaged with the tumultuous circumstances of nineteenth-century western India.

I used the method of close reading and focused on specific passages to elicit arguments and assumptions of the thinkers who authored these nineteenth-century texts. Through these two complementary methods, I explore the concepts and metaphors from diverse intellectual traditions that are at play in these texts, as well as look at how ideas were translated between English to Marathi as these thinkers analyzed caste.

A quick note about the translation. Unless mentioned otherwise, most of the translation from Marathi to English is mine. When in doubt about the context and meanings of words and phrases, I have referred to the JT Molesworth Marathi to English dictionary, which was published in 1857. The choice of the dictionary was deliberate.

One, it was published in the thick of the historical moment that I study; and two Baba Padmanji, one of its compilers, was a close associate of the anti-caste movement. And so, I assumed that the dictionary would offer the closest translation of the words of its time. Moreover, concepts and words mentioned in the texts but excluded from the dictionary too revealed a lot about their circulation and writers' construction of neologisms. I have tried to remain close to the Marathi-language texts and have worked to retain both the flavor and force of the original nineteenth-century writings. This might be reflected in the non-standardized and awkward construction of phrases and selected quotes.

I have also tried to remain as close to the structure of the text as I can. The texts chosen for this dissertation are some of the earliest forms of prose writings in Marathi. Literature in Marathi, before the nineteenth century, was mostly written in verses or the poetic form. As Marathi authors hurried to adopt this new writing style, they did not particularly replicate the same rules of punctuation as their English referent. And so, very often, as you may also notice, sentences are long and winding, sometimes even running into a whole paragraph. Keeping in mind this early style of writing modern Marathi, in my translations, I make minimal changes to sentence structure, punctuation, and the length of the sentence found in the original Marathi text. I recognize that gaps in translating meanings, contexts, and emotions are inevitable. Nevertheless, throughout the writing process, my aim has been to communicate as much as possible, not only the meaning of words and concepts, but also help the reader sense the anger, passion, humor, mockery, and sarcasm used by lower-caste writers in their commentary on caste.

Chapters

The dissertation is organized into four substantive chapters that demonstrate how the politics of caste changed over the span of nineteenth century in western India. Each of these chapters closely focuses on key texts and events that were central in the process of secularizing caste. Deep diving into intentions, contexts, and historical connections forged by social observers in their writings, the chapters draw out key themes, idioms, and ideas on which the politics of caste turned.

Chapter one focuses on the early to middle decades of the nineteenth century and examines how the first generation of English educated reformers problematized the caste order. Educated in colonial institutions, and many of them, in fact, trained in the Normal Class meant for training teachers, these mostly Brahman social observers were one of the first modern critics of Hindu religious knowledge. They asked critical questions about the origins of religious texts, about their sources and authors, and compared them for inconsistencies. These early inquirers of religious practices initiated the processes of secularizing caste, by raising doubts about the validity of Hindu traditional knowledge, the very source of Brahmanical authority. The chapter examines these early attempts at questioning caste by zooming close onto the writings of Dadoba Pandurang, a foremost social reformer. By closely studying his 1868 work *Dharmavivechana* (A Discernment of Religion), perceived as an insurgent treatise in its time, I argue that while Dadoba Pandurang secularized caste by upending dominant claims to caste's divinity, these early reformist attempts were limited in character. By viewing the caste order primarily as a ritual practice, Dadoba overlooked the deep implications, meanings, and conflicts embedded in the society by the guiding logic of caste hierarchy. By perceiving caste as a

logical error, irrational idea, and a result of limited ways of knowing the world, and not as a relation of power and hierarchy, upper-caste reformers ignored the political aspect of caste.

Chapter two illuminates how the caste question was politicized for the first time in modern writing by Tukaram Padwal, who wrote the first modern critique of caste from a lower-caste standpoint in 1862. This chapter examines Padwal's *Jatibhed Viveksar* (Reflections on the Institution of Caste) to argue that the author secularizes caste, but unlike his upper-caste contemporaries by-passes the division of religious and non-religious realms. He does this by invoking Buddhist anti-Vedic intellectual traditions and heterodox religious traditions, which were critical of the Brahmanical knowledge universe. This chapter also demonstrates how the author restored politics at the heart of the caste order by invoking texts, stories, myths, and historical events that suggested that caste relations between the Brahmans and the Shudra were marked by a history of violence, conflict, appropriation of resources, as well as juridical and legal injunctions. Padwal's work is striking also because it implicitly subverts the most common liberal reformist idea that caste, in the past, was determined by a hierarchy of virtues and conduct and not by birth. By arguing that both the Brahmans and the Shudras have a shared history of mixed caste lineages, Padwal upturned the underlying meanings associated with Brahmanism, such as purity, asceticism, prudence, and righteousness. By highlighting that both the Brahmans and the Shudra, in the past, were equally human and 'fallible,' Padwal's work created quite a stir in its time. I also show that *Jatibhed Viveksar* is a critical text in understanding the history of anti-caste discourse because it was one of the first known printed texts to have politicized the figure of the Shudra. In

the chapter, we will see how the author persuaded his writers to embrace their Shudra identity with pride. This juncture in anti-caste politics is groundbreaking because it's a marked departure from premodern caste politics where 'Shudra castes' were eager to get rid of their 'Shudra-ness' and fought to be recognized as upper-castes.

Chapter three examines how the activists of the Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth-Seekers' Society), a radical anti-caste organization with predominantly lower-caste participation, secularized caste. In this chapter, I focus on *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* (An Exposition of Religious Hypocrisy), the 1892 work of a lesser-known activist-writer, Tukaram Patil. The chapter argues that Patil secularized caste not only locating its religious justifications in human history, but he also further politicized it by 'exposing' their untruthful and partisan character. By the time Patil wrote the treatise, the Satyashodhak Samaj had scrutinized in detail various facets of the Shudra-Brahman castes' relationship. We see this reflected in *Dharma Dhong Parisphotan* too. Patil, in his work, explained how the Shudra castes' exploitation and ignorance were pivoted on their exclusion from the world of knowledge, learning, reading, and writing. In this chapter, I show that Patil's critique of the Shudra relationship to knowledge needs to be seen in the context of a long history of premodern texts called *shudra dharma nibandha*, which chalked out the rituals, occupations, and duties of Shudra castes. In addition to his implicit interlocution with an early modern constellation of ideas, Patil succinctly unfolded the Shudra's position in the social assemblage by drawing on simple metaphors, everyday experiences, and common sense.

Chapter four explores how lower-caste publications carved out their own niche in the vernacular print world in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. It does so

through a close analysis of *Din Bandhu* (Friend of the Poor), a periodical that claimed to represent the lower-castes and laborers. Within the anti-caste movement, *Din Bandhu* symbolized both a moment of rupture from Jotirao Phule, the founding leader of the Satyashodhak Samaj, as well as a point of convergence of diverse lower-caste opinions and organizations. While editors N.M Lokhande and Krishnarao Bhalekar distanced themselves from the Samaj, in order to publish the newspaper, *Din Bandhu* was also seen as the principal site for reporting the activities of lower-caste organizations such as the Bhandari Caste Organization, the United Maratha Organization, and the Namdev Shimpi Society. This chapter argues that the anti-caste discourse's solid grounding in secularizing caste allowed it to bring a unique perspective to the emerging national question of secularism: the rights and privileges of religious minority and majority communities.

Through these chapters*, Secularizing Caste* illuminates the historical texture of the anti-caste discourse in western India. It does so by tracing how lower-caste radicals fathomed the field of power woven by caste hierarchy. At the heart of the Shudra philosophy lay the recognition that Brahmanical control infused the lives of lower-caste peasants and artisans. A radical solution for the seething violence of caste had to be sought. And so, by unearthing the political apparatus that historically consolidated Shudra subjectivities, established dominant routes of circulation of knowledge, and encoded power relations in an intricate ritual economy, lower-caste radicals exposed the temporal character of caste hierarchy.

Chapter 1: Elite Reformist Politics and the Caste Question in mid-Nineteenth-century Bombay

Introduction

The mid-nineteenth century in Bombay was a time of great introspection. When a group of about fifty English-educated youth met secretly in an undisclosed location to pledge the erasure of caste distinction, it set the reformist circles of Bombay abuzz. This collective, which called itself the *Paramhansa Mandali*, met to act upon its foremost objective that of giving up caste, by eating bread baked in a non-Hindu bakery.[18] Ramkrishna Bhandarkar, an Indologist and a notable reformer of the nineteenth century recounts, his initiation into the *Paramhansa Mandali* at the age of sixteen. "When I began to eat the piece of bread that they gave me, my body started quaking with tremors! I felt as if I had done something wrong."[19] This act was seen as transgressive and radical because it intentionally violated their caste status, which could be reinstated only by performing rituals of purification and penance.

But the question remains: why violate caste clandestinely? After all, caste is a social identity determined in relation to other castes in the graded hierarchy. And so, a public declaration of giving up caste distinction would seem to be the only apt performance of the reformist act. While the secrecy surrounding the meetings protected members from a backlash, it also, curiously, revealed the *Mandali's* understanding of the caste order. For the mostly upper-caste members and ideologues of the Society, "breaking caste" meant disentangling oneself from the deeply internalized regimes of discipline of the self, which

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All translations from Marathi to English are mine, unless, mentioned otherwise.
18 Govind Narayan, *Mumbaiche Varnan*, First Pub.1863, 3rd ed. (Aurangabad: Saket Prakashan, 2011), 307.
19 A.K Priolkar, *Paramahaṁsasabhā va tice adhyaksha Rāmacandra Bāḷakṛshṇa*,10.

included an assemblage of intricate ritual life, rules governing family relations, and the internalization of rules of purity and impurity that structured their social world. In its place, they sought to embrace "liberal sentiments" and modern technologies of disciplining the self. And the violation of these internalized ritual practices with other collaborators was seen by the rebels as necessary to challenging caste.

Quite clearly, by separating the social dimension of caste from an individual discipline of the self and by focusing on transforming only the latter, this early rendition of the caste question understood caste in a very distinctive way that was more congruent with an upper-caste experience of caste. For this first generation of upper-caste liberals, caste was not a humiliating and exploitative inter-caste social relation, such as it was for the lower-castes and the "untouchables"; it was more a question of traditional rules of caste impeding their wholehearted participation in colonial modern life.

Almost all of the first-generation of English-educated natives came from Brahman or the priestly castes and a few from the middling castes who traditionally performed scribal occupations. Both of these communities, together called the upper-castes, were groups that traditionally engaged with religious texts, juridical knowledge, and non-religious record keeping. With the growing influence of the East India Company, educated natives increasingly realized how critical colonial education was for upward social mobility. And so communities that engaged in literate professions in precolonial India sought to maintain their elite status by embracing these new colonial institutions.

This chapter explores how the first generation of English educated natives, educated in the elite Bombay Native Education Society's Elphinstone College, approached the caste question. I do so, by taking *Dharmavivecha* (Discernment of Religion), an 1868

treatise written by Dadoba Pandurang, an alumnus of Elphinstone College, as my point of departure.

The text was published only in 1868, but for at least twenty-five years before that, it had been circulating in closed-door liberal circles. We do not know the titles of its manuscript versions, but in its published form, it bore the title, *Dharmavivechana* (Discernment of Religion) and was attributed to the anonymous authorship of *Ek Jagadwasi Arya* (A cosmopolitan Arya). A.K Priolkar's exemplary work on nineteenth-century reform in western India is our earliest confirmation that Dadoba Pandurang, a prominent upper-caste reformer and the foremost liberal ideologue of Bombay, was the author of the text.[20]

A careful study of *Dharmavivechana* is crucial to our understanding of the debates that contributed to the articulation of the caste question in western India, the intellectual home to the anti-caste politics in the present. The text was foundational in molding young reformist minds of nineteenth-century upper-caste liberals, who later went on to lead the social reformist movement in western India: Baba Padmanji, R.G Bhandarkar, M.G Ranade, and R.B Jaykar were some of them. Moreover, between 1873 and 1876, the Satyashodak Samaj, a lower-caste led organization that advocated for anti-caste reform, perceived *Dharmavivechana* as one of its intellectual source-books and distributed free copies of the text in towns and villages of western India.[21]

In a clamor of missionaries who insinuated that the Hindu religion was nothing but a bunch of lies, for it validated social hierarchy with divine justifications, Dadoba's refusal

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20Anant Kakba Priolkar, *Paramahaṁsasabhā va tice adhyakṣha Rāmacandra Bāḷakṛṣhṇa* (Mumbai: Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya, 1966).

21 Rosalind O'Hanlon. *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 233.

of caste's divinity, and that too from within the Hindu fold, drew considerable attention. In this chapter, I follow Dadoba Pandurang's writings to understand how this most influential reformist text, which shaped generations of liberals in western India, criticized the caste order.

The chapter begins by exploring Dadoba's argument that caste is the very reason why the Hindu religion has lost its very religiosity in the present times. Not only have caste rules taken over the lives of Hindus, but they also masquerade as *dharma*—duty, religion, and virtue. He bifurcated religion into:a dispensable external chaff, which composed of caste and all its related rituals and observances, and a kernel of truth which led one onto the path of the Supreme being. By discarding its outer husk, and superficial expressions such as the caste order, Dadoba argued that the Hindu religion could be reformulated and its true divinity restored.

How does one sieve out these seemingly impure accretions such as caste from religion? For the author, a true religion— its ideas, texts, practices, and stories—is one that stands the test of *vivek* (judgment or discernment). As the chapter proceeds, we will see how Dadoba persuaded his readers to deploy systematic thinking—observation, judgment, comparison, and historical understanding, and put to the test of reason dominant ideas associated with the caste order.

However, Dadoba's attempts to secularize caste, rituals, religious texts and even the popular iteration of Hindu religion remained limited. As the chapter proceeds, we will see how, although Dadoba dispels the myths of divinity around caste and roots it wholly in social processes such as occupation, he still retains the symbolic meanings associated with caste hierarchy.

We will also see how by disengaging caste from its ritual trappings and religious moorings, Dadoba imagined a new figure of the native: one who travels unhindered, garners new experiences, was cosmopolitan, and whose identity was not circumscribed by caste and community markers. However, as one would see later in the chapter, upper-caste liberal reformers found it far more difficult to translate these ideas into practice.

Reformist efforts by the first generation of English-educated elites.

Two to three decades before the publication of the *Dharmavivechan,* the first generation of English educated, middle-class natives contemplated the possibilities of an improved Hindu social life. Educated in colonial institutions such as the Elphinstone College and Robert Money High school in Bombay, their reformist opinions bore imprints of European ideas of "useful knowledge" and missionary criticism of Hindu institutions and practices. Particularly, they were convinced that European knowledge and skills were responsible for the continent's civilizational advancement. This also meant that India's poverty, backwardness, and colonial rule were the result of its stagnant notion of knowledge.[22]

Thus, Balshastri Jambhekar, the editor of the first native newspaper in western India—*The Bombay Durpan* (The Mirror) and the director of Normal class,[23] argued that Indian antiquity harbored an idea of knowledge restricted to its religious iteration. While Indian philosophers pursued abstruse branches like metaphysics and logic, useful only in religious debates and to gain victories in scholarly arguments, they overlooked the utility of knowledge in the "common business of life."[24]

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[22] Umesh Bagade, *Maharashtratil Prabodhan ani Varga Jati Prbhutva*, 165.
[23] Organized on the lines of L'Ecole Normale in France, Normal class trained teachers in modern English education.
[24] *Durpan*, August 24, 1832, 52, 53.

The English-educated social commentators advocated "new ways of knowing" the world, for they strongly believed in the newness of the present and its radical break from the past. Rejecting the purported timelessness of traditional Vedic knowledge, Jambhekar argued that the advantages of ancient forms of learning have to be understood in their own historical context. In his view, "the certainty required for navigating the everyday business of life in the present could be guaranteed only by ways of knowing rooted in the evidence of the senses (*pratyaksha praman*)[25] and not by 'traditional' Vedic knowledge that drew its authority from faith and concerned itself with other-worldly knowledge *(paraloksambandhi shastra)*."[26] He attributed rapid inventions and technology in Europe, which in turn led to the augmentation of its wealth and political strength, to the diffusion of useful knowledge among ordinary people.

Marathi *Dnyana Prasarak Sabha* (The Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge) broadly shared Jambhekar's views.[27] The newspaper of the society, called the *Marathi Dnyana Prasarak,* published essays that highlighted the linkages between the furtherance of laicized knowledge and the welfare of ordinary people, economic and political development, and the enrichment of the seeker's inner life.[28] By assigning precedence to laicized knowledge over the knowledge of liturgical practices and religious texts for the search of this-worldly truths, the first generation of English educated liberals, made a

[25] Translation Molesworth, J. T. (James Thomas). *A Dictionary, Marathi and English*. 2d ed., rev. and enl. (Bombay: Printed for government at the Bombay Education Society's press, 1857).
[26] Bal Shastri Jambhekar, "Dig-durshan. (Direction)" in *Memoirs and Writings of Ācharya Bāl Gangādhar Shāstri Jāmbhekar 1812-1846*, ed. G.G Jambhekar, (Pune: G.G.Jambhekar, 1950) Vol. 1.
[27] The society's membership included reformers such as Dadoba Pandurang, an author of books on Marathi grammar and an ideologue of the radical reformist organization—*Paramhansa Mandali* and Govind Narayan Madgaonkar, who wrote extensively in Marathi about domestic reform and the need for native improvement. Both of them were involved in the British administration's educational activities in the Bombay Presidency.
[28] *Marathi Dnyana Prasarak*, 5 no.12, (1855), 372.

move towards reconfiguring the symbolic capital of knowledge, a field where power thus far was predominantly concentrated in knowing elite Vedic knowledge.

Within the Canonical Hindu tradition, the superiority of the Brahman emerged from their exclusive access to Vedic knowledge. By calling for the institutionalization of vocational and practical knowledge systems, as well as their diffusion among ordinary people, such liberal discussions on knowledge shook the foundations of Brahman claims to exclusivity. Thus, although unintended, in the nineteenth century, some of the first criticisms of Hindu religious knowledge and Brahman castes' skills, from among the natives, came from upper-caste and middle-class reformist youth.

But to a large extent, the caste question articulated by mid-century upper-caste reformers emerged from their own caste experiences. For instance, in the mid-nineteenth century, practices such as undertaking sea voyages and the consumption of 'unclean food' were issues of social reform. The world of print was animated by discussions on how caste rules interrupted the possibility of an upper-caste Hindu man to travel abroad and the dire consequences for those who had braved this feat. In the early liberal reformist circles of Bombay, the act of embarking on a sea voyage was perceived as not only a courageous one, but the traveler too was lauded for being an 'improved native,' as well as for embodying 'liberal sentiments.' The July 4, 1834 issue of *Durpan* reported that the return of Samuldas Desabhaee from England stirred such curiosity among the people of Bombay that many thronged to visit "the Hindoo who [had] braved the prejudices of caste and the perils of the sea."

Although not much is known about Desabhaee's predicament, middle-class Hindus' found themselves torn between the possible ex-communication from their caste

communities and the increasing opportunities to travel abroad. The December 16, 1850 issue of *Dnyanodaya*, a newspaper published by the America Mission Press, narrated one such incident. A Brahman clerk at the Engineering department was instructed to leave for Eden. Fearing the possibility of ex-communication by his caste brethren, he wrote to the *Shastris* (experts of religious texts, or literally Brahmans who know the Shastras) if the voyage was a violation of his '*dharma*'? In a meeting held by the *Shastris,* some argued in the affirmative, but others stated that travels necessitated by work did not stand in violation of caste rules. Unable to reach a conclusion, the Brahman assembly was disbanded.[29]

An essay published in an 1851 issue of *Marathi Dnyana Prasarak* offered a solution to this uniquely upper-caste problem: How can Hindus "experience the world as their oyster, explore the brilliance, generosity, and impartiality of the Creator, travel across the world to witness His singular creations, meet new people and learn new forms of knowledge from them, to conduct business and augment wealth,"[30] without jeopardizing their caste privileges? The author proposed that if Hindus were to be encouraged to travel abroad, it was imperative that they had to have access to, " a speedy means of transportation that enables a truncated voyage in order to minimize their contact with other non-Hindu co-travelers, a *Dharmshala* (boarding house) for the Hindu with a well exclusively for their use, and provisions for *Dal* and rice near the lodge." This, according to the essayist, "will promote improvement without upsetting *dharma*." In response the *Dnyanodaya* ridiculed the essay by appealing to the "Bombay Association to

[29] Dnyanodaya reported on several such instances of Hindus travelling abroad.
[30] Marathi Dnyana Prasarak Pustak 2, Anka 4 July 1851, 109.

build a special 'clean' (*sovale*) steam engine for the 'clean' Hindus and man them with 'clean' sailors…also make sure they carry with them *shenmati* and *gomutra*[31] in order to purify the *Dharmashala* in England." Addressing the readers, the article pleaded," O Sensible readers, if you truly desire freedom, then you must first disentangle yourself from the slavery of the *Bhatt* (a colloquial and also a disparaging word for the Brahman). So that even if you travel beyond England, on your return you do not have to confront the rituals of *shenmati* (cow dung)…Think! Open your eyes to the dangers of caste distinction."[32]

While, the 'innovative' suggestions of the essay published in *Marathi Dnyana Prasarak* aimed at travelling abroad and yet retaining one's caste status, the members of the Paramhansa Mandali, established by Dadoba Pandurang, intentionally used transgressive practices to violate their 'clean' caste status. Baba Padmanji, a prominent literary figure of the nineteenth century and a convert to Protestantism, recounts his brief association with the Paramhansa Mandali in the early 1850s: "Every meeting was commenced and closed with prayers. The prayers were composed by the late Rao Bahadur Dadoba Pandurang…There was a book which the Society claimed as their Institute of theology; but it contained nothing positive. It was full of negations. A feeble attempt was made in it to disprove the necessity and importance of a revealed religion."[33] In all likelihood, this "book full of negations" was *Dharmavivechana*.[34]

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[31] Cow dung and urine are often used in ritual purification practices.
[32] March 1, 1854 "The Hindus and Foreign Travel," Dnyanodaya.
[33] Baba Padmanji. *Arunodaya. The Autobiography of Baba Padmanji, Containing a Description of His Former Life as a Hindu and the Causes Which Led to His Conversion.* (India: Bombay Tract and Book Society, 1888), 53.
[34] Vasant.D Rao. "A Maker of Modern Maharashtra: Dadoba Pandurang (1814-1882) *Journal of Asiatic society of Bombay Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 28 (1966): 179.

Although never an official member of the Paramhansa Mandali, Dadoba Pandurang was one of its founders. His insights on religious and social reform shaped the ideological direction of the Mandali, but he was never present at its meetings and met the members only after the meeting was over. Most well-known for his foundational texts on Marathi grammar, Dadoba worked closely with the colonial government in the field of education: first as a teacher in the Elphinstone College of Bombay, then to help set up the English school in Surat, and finally as the director of the normal class in Elphinstone College.[35]

In the early 1840s, during his time in Surat, a port-city bustling with trade on the western coast of present-day Gujarat state, Dadoba was influenced by diverse intellectual trends. In his autobiography, he mentions how two Sanskrit scholars—Nirbhayramshastri and Yadneshwarshastri, trained him to read Hindu religious texts so that he could understand for himself the true tenets of Hindu religion without the mediation of the Brahman priests. As he explored how religious practice was significantly different from the ideas propounded by the ancient Hindu texts, he simultaneously conversed with Henry Green, an agnostic free-thinker and the Principal of the English School in Surat. Green's analyses of religions like Christianity for their internal inconsistencies, possibly encouraged Dadoba to hold the Hindu religion to the test of reason and consistency.[36] Along with Durgaram Manccharam Mehta, a Gujarati school teacher trained in the normal class program in Bombay, Dadoba founded the *Manav Dharma Sabha* (The Association for the Promotion of Religion of Men).[37]

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[35] *Ibid.,*

[36] O'Hanlon, Rosalind. *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-century Western India*. Cambridge South Asian Studies; 30. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.pp.98.

[37] Translation by the editors of *Dnyandodaya.*

While the *Manav Dharma Sabha* too remained a secret organization, its work of conducting "religious inquiry" reverberated among both missionary and social reformist circles. Reprinting an article from the January 1845 issue of *Prabhakar*, a reformist newspaper, the February 15, 1845 issue of *Dnyanodaya,* lauded the organization for instilling religious inquiry among the native community. *Dnyanodaya*, a journal published by the American mission press, was enthused to report the establishment of *Manav Dharma Sabha*: " the object of this association is to select what is true out of all religions, to expose the hypocritical arts which the bhutts[38] or religious teachers (in all religions) have put in practice, and the falsehood which they have inserted into their respective shasters for the sake of obtaining a livelihood without labor… the idea of this association is to dispel "ignorance" under the influence of which men have been led to regard the stories told to them by their deceivers as the declaration of God himself. The various means used by imposters to deceive men and get possession of their wealth, [like] the practice of magical art and use of mantras and incantation. And that they should endeavor first of all to "disabuse" the public mind in reference to iniquitous practices." On returning to Bombay, Dadoba established the Paramhansa Mandali on the lines of the *Manav Dharma Sabha* and borrowed its tenets to guide the new organization.

Caste and religious ritualism

In *Dharmavivechana,* Dadoba Pandurang conceptualized the caste question as one inextricably linked to the current depraved state of the Hindu religion. Caste, for him, was an assemblage of religious rituals and practices as well as a complex of rules of social contact governed by the principle of purity and impurity. This included staying

[38] Colloquialism for a Brahman priest.

away from objects and members of "unclean" castes, avoiding the exchange of food and commensality, and restraining inter-caste betrothals.[39] He argued that caste rules that organized Hindu social lives were a part of *vyavaharika dharma* (common or ordinary religion). This notion of religion also included other "superficial expressions of religion" such as worship (*puja*), chanting the deity's name (*japa*), asceticism (*tapa*), rituals of initiation (*udyapana),* and sacrifices (*yadnya*), which constituted the outer husk, or the dispensable aspect of Hindu religion.

For Dadoba, while the practice of *vyavaharika dharma*, "neither caused distress (*klesha*), nor was it a source of sin as some would like to believe,"[40] it was, nevertheless, meaningless, superficial, and hardly the path to realizing the divine meaning. He argued: "It is meaningless to perform these fraudulent (*dambhika*) activities only to garner appreciation and honor in society. All your life you have held these lifeless idols close to your bosoms, offered heaps of flowers at their feet, bathed the idols in a variety of fragrances and performed the *shadopchara* – the sixteen point ritual for them…without reigning in the mind and allowing it to run amok you hold your breath and practiced the *pranayama*, chant the *gayatri mantra*, take a dip in all the holy rivers and lakes of the world, put the body to endless penance, sacrifice innocent animals…No matter how many superficial rituals you perform, they all are mere pretenses and are ultimately meaningless. Doubtlessly, they are not *paramarthik*, which means, they do not lead you to the Supreme Being."[41]

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39 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, (Mumbai: Oriental Printing Press, 1868), 109-110.
40 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana,* 72.
41 Ibid.,

Dadoba illuminates the distinction between *vyavaharika dharma* and its counterpart, *paramarthika dharma*—"the true religion," a complex of good deeds and ethical actions, by drawing on the metaphor of the market (*bazaar*). "Scattered across are different shops … these shops intend to sell the same *saaravastu* (essence); but this small jewel is lost amidst the clutter of commerce, no one knows where it is; and it has very few buyers too. The exchanges *(vyavahara*) that are taking place here are only that of pebbles. The merchant *(vani)* is unaware of what he is selling; and the buyer too is oblivious to what he has bought. And those who truly recognize the worthlessness of pebbles that masquerade as precious stones are reduced to bystanders to this blind-trade *(andhala vyavahara)*. This false *vyavahara* (exchange) cannot be dismantled, because only a few can judge the difference between jewels and pebbles."[42]

This metaphor of the market offers the author the concept of *vyavahara*—a word commonly used in the Marathi language to denote both commerce and this-worldly and everyday business of life.[43] By referring to caste practices and ritual performances as *vyavahrika dharma*, the author ingeniously invoked both meanings of the word:

First, as caste rules and ritual practices increasingly replaced *paramarthika dharma* (spiritual-ethical religion), religion was emptied of its religiosity, and all that remained was a customary exchange in the market full of deluded people. And second, ritual observances and rules of social contact, which masqueraded as religion and organized the this-worldly realm of the people. And so, for Dadoba the *vyavaharika* version of religion, saturated by liturgical practices and caste propriety, was a depraved

42 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana,* 74-75.
43 Translation from the Molesworth Marathi Dictionary, 454.

one. On the one hand, it eclipsed true spiritual-ethical religion, and on the other hand, despite the diffusion of colonial modernity in the nineteenth century, it continued to order the public life of the Hindus by way of "traditional" caste rules and ritual practices that did not stand the test of judgment (*vivek*).

Dadoba's primary criticism of a religion of rituals or *vyavaharika dharma* emerged from the fact that it stood on the foundation of ignorance. He argued that while it kept men engaged and steered them away from drifting onto the path of cruelty, intimidation, and headiness, it also inhibited the cultivation of good sense and virtuous actions. He compared *vyavaharika dharma* to a child's play. Just as playing with toys keeps children away from mischief, rituals, too, kept men engaged. Beyond this, Dadoba saw no value in the practice of *vyavaharika dharma*.[44] He contended: "Those who never intend to attain full personhood and wish to remain minors all their lives, or wish to live in the darkness of ignorance forever, cannot exercise control over their passions, should practice a ritual life. On the contrary, those who aspire to rise above being mere children and leave behind a debased life of cruelty, darkness, ignorance, and are convinced that inhabiting a human body and being bestowed with a human birth has a purpose greater than that of other living beings should turn towards spiritual dharma of higher meaning (*paramarthika dharma*)".[45]

The author explained that while in the ancient past, religion was originally expressed as *paramarthika dharma*, the systematic perpetuation of ignorance around the true character of religion by the wily priestly castes led to the marginalization of

44 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana,* 74-75.
45Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana, 72-73.*

paramarthik dharma by *vyavaharika dharma*. Thus, the preponderance of *vyavaharika dharma* was a historical process and not a divine injunction.

" While there is no doubt that these means and ways to gratify the supreme being were conceived and invented by men, over time, the earliest priests, or proponents (*mulche acharya*) of these means, and their followers, began to secretly conceal the truth about the supreme being and proceeded to claim that these means and paths were shown to them by god himself…As time passed, ignorance (*adnyna*), hubris (*abhiman*) and prejudice (*duragraha*) became widespread and the people began to see the early seers (contrivers of these stories) and their disciples as the manifestations of god himself. In fact, some contrivers (*kalpak*) professed that the Supreme Being could be reached only if the search was mediated by them. The seers insisted that people take refuge at their feet, inculcate their teachings and bow down to them.[46] The religious path shown by them not only turned a blind eye to *paramarthik* dharma, but also professed ideas that were contradictory to it."[47] And so, unsurprisingly, Dadoba referred to a religion of rituals as *vyavaharika*, also because the *vyavaharika* articulation of Hindu religion was shaped by—*vyavahara,* this-worldly social and political process.

As we proceed with the dissertation, we will see how anti-caste lower caste writers, such as Jotiba Phule, who went on to establish the Satyashodhak Samaj (The Society of Truth-Seekers) in 1878, differed from Dadoba's ascription of a benign character to *vyavaharika dharma.*[48] This first generation of lower-caste writers,

46 Ibid, 70.
47 Ibid,. 70.
48 This first-generation of semi-literate social observes from the margins of the society, scoured for an education from the colonial administration's perfunctory efforts at universal education, schools by proselytizing missionaries in mofussil areas, and patronization by non-Brahman princely-rulers.

publishers, and patrons who began to express their anti-Brahman criticism in the vernacular print world, perceived *vyavaharika dharma* as the very fulcrum of religious fraudulence. For them, rituals were responsible for the exploitation of the peasants and artisans who constituted the majority of the lower-castes. Ritual practices, necessarily mediated by the Brahman for all other non-Brahman castes, was one of the sites where lower-castes crossed paths with the Brahmans. It was also seen as the site of lower-caste exploitation. In exchange for the Brahman's ritual services, the impecunious cultivator offered him a share of his physical labor. And so, for the Satyashodhak Samaj, the regime of *vyavaharika dharma* was far from benign. In fact, it reinforced the incommensurate exchange of the Brahman's 'unproductive and meaningless' ritual labor for the peasant and artisan's productive manual labor.

And so, unlike Dadoba, lower-caste opposition to *vyavaharika dharma* did not emerge from a place of indifference and disengagement but from the understanding that *vyavaharika dharma* was a symptom of the Brahmanical ideology that valued the deceitful intellectual labor of the Brahman over the manual and material labor of the peasant and the artisan. The ordinary members of the lower-castes—the peasants and the artisans, were too deeply entrapped in the ritual practices and exploited by the Brahman for lower-caste activists to simply brush away *vyavaharika dharma* as a harmless demonstration of 'ignorance and immaturity.' Instead, for anti-caste radicals, the ritual realm was a site of heated contestation with the Brahman ideology, it was a site of politics.

Secularizing caste by deploying *Vivek* (discernment)

In *Dharmavivechana*, Dadoba Panduranga begins his verdict (*nirnay*)[49] on caste, entitled "All of mankind belongs to one caste," by confessing to the readers that in the beginning, he was not in favor of dedicating an independent chapter to the discussion on caste. Because, he argued, the simple espousal of non-partisan thinking (*nishpakshapati vichar*) makes it amply clear that 'All of humanity belongs to one caste, and that the (*swabhavika*) apparent distinctions among them, namely superior, middling, and inferior are the consequence of their virtues (*guna*) and birth or lineage (*kula*).'[50]

Needless to say, not only does Dadoba go on to write the *nirnay*, but ironically, it turns out to be his longest chapter. Why does Dadoba proceed to pen the comprehensive chapter on caste? Dadoba explains that "caste relations (*dnyatibandhan*) have emerged and sustained as a result of pure ignorance (*shuddha adnyana*) as well as offensive pride (*durabhimana*) …and have vastly aggravated in recent times. So much so that people are convinced that the true dharma of men is to follow *dnyati dharma* (caste dharma)."[51] Dadoba explained the severity of the situation by arguing that "the initially imagined four *jatis* (castes) are lost to the appearance of forty-thousand castes in their place. Each of these discrete *jatis* have raised a fence of pride and trapped man (*manus*) within its walls."[52] Dadoba lamented that unfortunately, the people woven into caste relations are convinced that being confined to the prison of caste is indeed their *purushartha* (purpose of man's existence)." And thus, he explained that it was essential to write the *nirnay* on caste in order to eliminate this ignorance from the minds of people and, in its place, instill

49 Dadoba refers to each of this sections of his text as 'nirnay' . Almost akin to a decision that he has made.
50 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, 91.
51 Ibid.,
52 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, 91-92.

knowledge about the truth of caste. He argued that "Until people do not disentangle themselves from the noose of caste, they will continue to be robbed of experiencing both this-worldly and divine joy."[53]

Deploying Yukti (good sense) in order to question the divinity of caste

For Dadoba, the purpose of writing the *nirnay* or the chapter was a pedagogic one. Through the text, he sought to dispel prevalent misconceptions about caste. He proposed that "Most people believe that 'castes' *(dnyati*) are groups (*varga*) of people that are tied together by Ishwar (the Supreme Being). And that it is a divine injunction that they practice a common occupation, maintain relations of commensality and conjugality with no other group except their own. These strong ties that are apparent in the present social customs (*loka riti*) are called '*jnyati bandhana'* or caste ties." [54]

But how does one dispel the 'ignorance' around the notion of caste order? He argued that while religious leaders, both in the past and the present, were aware that caste relations are not constituted by divine will, this truth can be revealed to the rest of us only if we were to deploy systematic thinking *(ammal vichar*). Dadoba perceived a strong and straightforward relation between the faculty of thinking and exposing the myth of divinity attached to caste. Unlike other prominent religious reformists such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Dayananda Saraswati, Dadoba does not deem the knowledge of dharma and learning the shastra essential to exposing the divine myth of caste. In fact, he underlines that all that it required was *vivek*, or discernment, careful thinking and a keen observation of the world.

53 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, 92.
54 Ibid., 92.

Dadoba demonstrated his reasoning by deploying *yukti* or 'ingenious thinking.' This he does by a step-by-step unfolding of the matter.

How do we know that caste is not a divine creation (*ishwarkrit*)? Dadoba Pandurang instructs his readers that 'before blindly accepting the divine character of things, first we must resolutely keep in mind that all divine creations can be identified as distinct from artificial (*kritrim*) creations.'[55]

Dadoba Pandurag viewed *vivek* (judgment, discernment) and *yukti* (ingenious thinking) as the key tools for exposing the this-worldly character of caste order. For the author, simple observation of the physical world and the use of sensory experiences were essential to distinguishing artificial and manmade creations from those that were the work of divine inspiration.[56]

He argued that social distinctions and hierarchy are justified only if they are preceded by observable signs of natural differentiation. For instance, he suggested: "The difference between a dog and an ox is so palpable that even a child can distinguish them as two separate species. They are different in their physique, size, dispositions (*sheel, swabhava*), diet, and habits. But we do not find a similar distinction between the Brahmans and the Kshatriya. And so, in order to identify themselves as different they resort to using artificial markers of difference such as the wearing of a sacrificial thread. If the Supreme Being had meant to truly mark the Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and the Shudra as distinct castes, then, as per divine law (*ishwari niyam*), they too should have exhibited observable markers of difference."[57]

55 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, 92
56 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana,* 92.
57 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana,* 93.

Dadoba points out that not only are the Brahmans similar in their physical composition to members of other castes, but they also cannot be distinguished by way of their dispositions, intellectual capacities, and character. Similarly, the virtues and qualities of the Kshatriya (the warrior caste) are no different from those found among the Brahmans, Vaisya, or the Shudra. [58] Thus, for the author, an observable, concrete differences in the physical, emotional, and intellectual constitution of people is imperative in order to mark them as socially distinct hierarchical groups.

Dadoba further contrasted the difference between the two sexes, as an instance where physical markers translate into social difference, with that of caste hierarchy— where the principle of social organization is constituted without a basis in the natural world. Dadoba argued that when the Supreme Being truly wished to create a distinction between people for the purpose of reproduction, he marked men distinct from women. The author contended that although men and women seemingly share many physical and intellectual similarities, *Ishwar* has certainly distinguished them by way of physical dissimilarities.[59] In this spirit, Dadoba asked: "If Ishwar had intended to establish caste distinctions— by marking Brahmans separate from Kshatriya and so on— would he not have followed suit, and classified people into distinct castes by overt markers like he did in order to distinguish men from women? Thus this proves that caste distinction does not have a divine mandate."[60]

58 Ibid.,93
59 Ibid.,
60 Ibid.,

Caste is not determined by physical features at birth.

Having debunked the divine justification of caste, Dadoba moves on to engage with other commonly held assumptions about caste distinctions such as colorism that attribute caste to classification by birth, physical features, and lineage. Dadoba contended that the correspondence between a lighter skin tone and upper caste status does not hold water because the world is replete with instances where people with both light and dark skin tones can be found among both Brahman and Shudra castes. The author proposed that as per the puranic aphorism "*bramhanaitovarna*," if we were to identify caste based on the color of the skin, then would not the *Yavana* (Foreigners), the English and *Mleccha* (Muslims), who are identifiably of a lighter skin tone be identified as Brahmans too? To this, he wryly adds: "would the Brahmans bear to accept this?"[61]

Dadoba emphasized the equality of all men by arguing that the five fundamental substances that constitute all this-worldly matter, the *pancabhuta*,[62] which also constitute the human body, are the same across persons of all castes. Not only do the Brahmans and the Shudras, but bodies of all men, be it the Brahmans, the *Mleccha,* or the *Yavana,* are constituted by the same *pancabhautic* elements, he contended.[63] Dadoba argued that "The elementary substances that shape the embryo of a Brahman in their mother's womb, is all the same responsible for the development of an embryo in the womb of a Shudra woman."

The Brahmans, Shudra, and the Mleccha are not similar only in their external physical appearances, but also in their experience of internal physical ailments such as

61 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, 93.
62 The panchabhute also known as the panchamahabhute are the five solid elements that make up the natural world. These five elements are viz. earth, water, fire, air and sky.
63 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, 93.

suffering from fever and the loss of hearing or eyesight. Dadoba asks: "The shastras propose that the Brahmans are superior to other castes, they refer to the Brahmans as 'Gods on earth', who are born out of the mouth of the Brahma, and are also revered by other Gods. But this purportedly divine caste is neither conspicuously marked different from other castes, nor is it exempted from experiencing internal ailments and diseases. If they were superior to all other castes, why did the Ishwar not exempt them from physical infirmities?'[64]

Dadoba's *vivek* (discernment) and use of *yukti* (ingenious thinking) follow the logic of elimination in order to excavate the true justification of caste order. His inquiry is guided by the question: what is the constituting logic of caste? His interrogation unfolds by identifying and separating the distinct threads that have together popularly, and institutionally given meaning to the caste order over the years. Dadoba's *vivek* and *yukti* performed the work of negation. He isolated various aspects of caste such as birth and lineage, physical features, the color of the skin, intellect and systematically eliminated them by deploying simple ways of thinking like common sense.

Dadoba's *vivek* also follows a curious method of inquiry. Instead of asking if the Brahmans truly espouse the characteristic attributed to them, he tests the tenacity of the dominant claim by inverting the question. This allowed him to expose the nonconnection between caste and its purported characteristics.

In this form of inquiry, Dadoba assumed the characteristics dominantly associated with being a Brahman as his point of departure. By separately analyzing and negating the relationship between each of the attributes— namely color of the skin, occupation,

64 Ibid.,94.

intellectual abilities, and birth—usually associated with upper-caste status, the author brought to light their arbitrariness. Dadoba illuminated the flaw in the dominant logic of caste by clearly establishing that if one was a Brahman, one could perhaps be erudite, but the obverse was not possible. That is, erudition did not necessarily bestow Brahman status or 'Brahman-ness.' The author explained this flaw in logic with the help of two figures, namely, the *shudra* and the *Yavana* (The Foreigner), With the help of these two examples: one from within the caste structure and the other from without, Dadoba argued that the rigidity of the caste structure neither allowed for the upward mobility of the subject from within the structure, nor did it make space for the absorption of subjects who are completely outside the frame of caste structure.

The question is: why was the inversion of the question crucial to Dadoba's caste inquiry? Instead of taking varna categories and the attributes associated with them for granted, Dadoba's inquiry goes to the very root of these assumptions in the caste order. By foregrounding the obverse relationship, that is, "does skin color and intellectual prowess determine varna?" Dadoba could expose the random character of the caste hierarchy. The impossibility of the *Yavan* or the *Mleccha's* inclusion into the Brahman fold, no matter how scholarly, helped Dadoba to highlight the rigid character of the caste hierarchy that is based on arbitrary rules and not on accomplishments and values.

Caste is not determined by intellectual capacity.

If caste was not determined by external physical differences, as with the distinct species in the animal world, was it a hierarchy based on intellect? Dadoba disputed the popular assumption that the 'Brahmans are intellectually superior at birth', a claim often made by

members of the Brahman caste to explain their preponderance in the realm of religious knowledge as well as in the field of modern education and the colonial bureaucracy.

Addressing disputants who asserted this, and who further quoted the shastras in support of their beliefs – ("Brahmans are the guru of all other castes"), Dadoba asks them to "open their eyes, and look around!"[65] On careful observation, he points out, one can find members from the Shudra as well as the *Melccha* castes who are intellectually far superior to their Brahman peers. The *puranas*, too, he added, narrate multiple instances of Shudras intellectually superseding the Brahmans.[66]

But how does one account for Brahman preponderance in the realms of both religious and non-religious knowledge? Dadoba concedes that although one might find discrete individual cases (*vyasti*) of members from the Shudra castes superseding their Brahman contemporaries, it must be known that Brahmans, as a collective (*samsti*), are dominant in the realm of knowledge. However, "the reasons for this discrepancy lie someplace else," and not in their intellectual superiority at birth, he argued.

Dadoba explained that Brahmans have established their dominance in the field of knowledge production over a long period of time. Warning his readers against blindly accepting Brahman intellectual superiority as a result of a unique endowment at birth or the manifestation of divine will, the author highlighted that Brahman dominance in the field of knowledge can be traced to two historically interconnected reasons.
First, Brahmans who practiced priesthood (*paurohitya*) fiercely guarded their exclusive access to ritual knowledge. As a result, on the one hand, they retained their prominence,

65 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, 94.
66 Ibid.,93.

and on the other hand, they ensured that other castes remained in the state of ignorance. And second, the Brahmans continued to act as gatekeepers of the profession of *Paurohitya* (priesthood). They insisted that it was divine will that they alone practice the profession. By asserting that besides the *dwija*, the twice-born upper castes,[67] no other caste was allowed to recite or even receive the *Shruti* (Vedic knowledge) they instilled the fear of violating dharma in the minds of other non-brahman castes. Subsequently, as the Brahman's significance rose, they amassed greater authority. Dadoba repeatedly reminded the readers that the Brahmans did not gain authority (*satta*) and significance (*mahattva*) all at once. Instead, it was a gradual process. As other castes gradually sank into ignorance, simultaneously, the hubris of the Brahmans bourgeoned.

He further explained that as time passed, the two varnas among the *dwija*—the Kshatriya and the Vaishya, soon amalgamated into the Shudra varna, the lowest of the four-fold classification, for they did not engage in occupations related to knowledge production. The Brahmans guarded the realm of knowledge by codifying the rules that besides the Brahmans—the highest of the *dwija* castes, no other caste was allowed to learn the *smriti* and other faculties of Sanskrit knowledge like the *vyakrana, nyaya, mimansa*, the *shastras,* and the *puranas*. In fact, by maintaining exclusive control over Sanskrit, the Brahmans systematically kept other castes outside the realm of knowledge production.[68] Dadoba further narrated that the Brahmans ensured that their authority and importance in the society continuously soared and never dwindled by adding new texts

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[67] The word *Dwija* or twice-born is used to refer to the castes claiming to belong to the first three varnas. The word dwija or twice born has a ritual significance. In the Brahmanical textual tradition, men of only first three varna are allowed to perform a coming of age ceremony called the 'upanayana' or the sacred thread ceremony. This ritual of adorning of the sacred thread across their torso marks their second birth, and hence the name twice born.

68 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*,95.

replete with ideas that justified Brahman superiority. As time passed, these texts and their ideas ossified so much so that they came to be recognized as the truth.[69] And so, Dadoba asks, "Is it unsurprising that there was a consistent augmentation of knowledge among Brahmans and ignorance among the Shudra?"

Dadoba used a concrete example to illuminate the disadvantages experienced by the Shudra castes as a result of their systematic exclusion from the realm of knowledge. He explained, "Let's assume a case where a father of two hands over all his wealth to one of his sons and entirely dismisses the other from his property. Is it not obvious that the second son will be reduced to poverty? In turn, if the father begins to accuse the impecunious son of languishing in poverty while his brother enjoys a prosperous life, are the accusations of this unfair and partisan father justified? This is to explain that in the same way, the Brahman castes denounce the Shudra castes (among others) for 'remaining ignorant.' If one was to look at this situation anew, one would find the many ways in which the Brahmans have constantly and with a firm resolve sought to isolate the Shudras from the realm of knowledge and learning."[70]

By way of this instance, the author highlights a clear parallel between knowledge and wealth. The example allows the author to foreground that knowledge is a form of capital, one like economic resources and wealth. By comparing the discourses and rules surrounding the differential access to ritual knowledge in the caste hierarchy to the father's unjustified dismissal of a son from his property, Dadoba highlights that caste too, like the father's rules, is an arbitrary set of norms and has this-worldly roots.

69 Ibid.,
70 Ibid.,

With this instance, the author explains that although human beings enter the world as equals, social and institutional disadvantages, namely, unequal access to wealth and resources such as knowledge, creates an unequal playing field for different social groups. Thus, on the one hand, by institutionally relegating the Shudra outside the realm of knowledge, and on the other hand, retaining the sole control of learning practices within the Brahman-fold, an unequal playing field was created for the Shudra by the Brahman.

Here we see how Dadoba demonstrates to his audience the use of *Viveki vritti* (a discerning attitude) in peeling away the many layers of justifications that signal caste hierarchy as a natural ordering of people. Dadoba insists on using systematic ways of thinking such as drawing a comparison between distinct species in the animal kingdom and using that information to look for difference among people. Similarly, he persuades his readers to "open their eyes, and look around" in order to broaden their perspective, look for evidences, and approach the situation from a new perspective. We see, Dadoba secularizes the authority of the Brahman, who were often mentioned as 'divine authority' of religious knowledge by historicizing the dominance in the field of knowledge. He stresses the use of historical and causal relationship to understand the Brahman castes' social position in the present. Thus, we see how Dadoba systematically deploys *vivek* to secularize caste.

While Dadoba's explanation of caste privileges and access to knowledge by using a microcosmic example of the father unequally dividing the family's resources among his sons hold the immense possibility of understanding caste as a social relation, he does not develop the point further.

This analogy of the father and his sons was not a new one. A similar example of the four brothers, each taking to distinct professions (writer, soldier, merchant, farmer) or adopting different artisanal skills (goldsmith, blacksmith, weaver, tailor) was a commonly used trope in caste origin stories.[71] 'Untouchable castes' too drew on a similar schema in the narration of their origin stories as well as to explain how they came to suffer their fate.[72] However, lower-caste radicals like Phule refused to accept this justification for caste occupations and unequal privilege.

Emphasizing that caste is not just a form of division of labor or a function of one's occupation, Phule argued that "if three sons of the same father embraced diverse occupations like sheep herding, gardening, and cultivation it does not result into a change in their caste status." He highlighted the arbitrariness of rules of untouchability by asking: "If the *halalkhor* (an untouchable caste) is an untouchable because his profession requires prolonged contact with human waste, by that logic would you treat your mother like a *halalkhorni* (untouchable woman) because she has cleaned her child's excreta?"[73]

Caste as virtues and capabilities

If not birth and natural abilities, what is the basis of caste hierarchy? Dadoba insists on taking a close look at the *smriti, shruti and the puranas* —texts that are perceived as the fount of religious authority (*dharmadhyaksha ani pramana*) by the pundits and priests— in order to understand the emergence of the varna orders as well as the attributes and properties associated with each of the varnas. Dadoba emphasized that "standing at the

71 See *Jatibheviveksar* for the origin of the five artisan castes
72 N. Patnaik et al., *The Ganda, a Scheduled Caste Weaver Community of Western Orissa* (Tribal & Harijan Research-cum-Training Institute, 1989); R.R. Prasad and G. Rajanikanth, *Development of Scheduled Caste Leather Artisans: Profile, Problems & Prospects* (Discovery Publishing House, 1991).
73 Jotirao Phule, *Selected writings of Jotirao Phule*, ed. G. P. Deshpande (New Delhi, India: New Delhi, India : Leftword Books, 2002), 236.

intersection of *yukti* (intellect), original *shatras* (*mula shatras*) and the ancient history (*prachin itihas*), we can conclude that the true grounds of varna distinction are virtues and capabilities of the person and not their birth or lineage."[74] The author reasoned that this conclusion could be deduced from the evidence offered by the shastras.

Dadoba secularizes the shastras by approaching them as a set of historical documents critical to our understanding of caste. Like a historian would verify her sources, the author too insists on judiciously identifying 'true and authoritative' shastras in order to write a reliable history of caste. He warns the readers against assuming all texts and verses written in the Sanskrit language as "the shastras" or authoritative religious texts. He explained, "On careful thinking, it will be clear that *pramana* shastra (true and authoritative shastra) are those that conform to *yukti* (good sense) and primarily are directed in the interest of the people (*lokahitawaha*)."

Dadoba was willing to accept the authority of the shastras only if the latter measured up to *yukti (*good sense). We see the author's endeavor to secularize the shastras by locating their legitimacy not in their divinity or customary importance but in their ability to cohere to *yukti* . While this is a crucial step in the process of secularization, it is also one in the direction of finding new ways to restore the authority of the shastras, as also, 'reforming' the complex of Hindu religion by getting rid of obvious inconsistencies and irrationalities. Thus, Dadoba's secularizing of the shastras was also an attempt to blow a new whiff of life in Hinduism, a religion that the nineteenth-century missionaries claimed was mired in irrationalities.

74 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, 91.

Taking recourse to one such set of *smritis* and the *puranas*, Dadoba expounded his argument by illuminating the 'origin' narrative of *varna bhed* (varna order). "When the Ishwar (Supreme Being) first created the world (*srishti)* and then mankind (*manav jati*), He instilled in them four distinct attributes: the virtue of truth (*shuddha stwagunatmaka*), the virtue of passion and courage (*satwapradhanarajogunatmak*), virtue of itinerancy, husbandry and mercantilism (*rajahapradhanatamagunatmak*), and the characteristic of ignorance *(shuddha tamogunatmaka*).[75] Those who espoused the virtue of *shuddha satwagunatmaka* exhibited attributes such as quietude, control over the senses and appetite, austerity, and asceticism, although in a dormant form. Those who cultivated these virtues and put them into practice came to be called 'the Brahmans'. This further led to them practicing the *karma* (work) most befitting their imbued attributes. They performed the *karma* of knowledge production, teaching, and performance of the sacrificial fire (*yagna*).

Second, those who possessed the virtue of *satwapradhanarajogunatmak* demonstrated the latent presence of virtues such as courage, virility, competence, and generosity, and on the honing of these virtues, they were eventually called the Kshatriyas. It was suggested that the Kshatriya perform the function of governance and politics, conduct most suited to their virtues.

People who exuded the virtue of *rajahapradhanatamagunatmaka* showed inclination and proficiency towards the *karma* (work) of animal husbandry and trade. They constituted the third varna in the hierarchy and received the appellation –'Vaisya.'

75 Guna are properties of 'created things' they are essentially constituted of three basic gunas : satva, raja and tama.

And finally, those demonstrating the characteristics of ignorance, lack of control over their senses and passions came to be identified as the Shudra. They constituted the servile class for the occupation is most suitable to their attribute of ignorance.[76]

Dadoba emphasized that each of the varnas received their names according to their attributes and conduct, and not on the basis of their lineage and birth. Traits, virtues, and subsequently conduct are not passed on through the bloodline but, instead, are endowed by nature (*prakriti*) in no predetermined pattern.[77] Dadoba further discussed that "in fact, the correspondence of attributes and conduct does not have to be deliberately determined. People with certain virtues will inevitably gravitate towards appropriate occupation and work that best suits them."[78]

Dadoba Pandurang was not the only upper-caste reformer who argued that originally, the four-fold classification of people was not based on lineage or descent but on people's virtues. A series of letters together called *Shatapatre* (a Hundred Letters), published by Gopal Hari Deshmukh in the reformist newspaper *Prabhakar* is symptomatic of this worldview. Deshmukh's piercing critique of the Brahman castes' preoccupation with shastras and the performance of rituals emerged from his concern that the Brahmans in the present had lost sight of 'duty proper to their varna status (*swadharma*).' Widely known as *Lokahitawadi* (A well-wisher of the people), in his letters published from 1848 onwards, Deshmukh emphasized that 'true Brahmin-ness' was characterized by a scholarly pursuit, practice of good deeds, and the ability to make reasoned judgements—i.e., to distinguish truth from falsehood. But present-day

76 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, 98, 99.
77 Ibid., 99.
78 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, 99.

Brahmans blindly followed customs, not once holding them up to the test of reason, reducing the complex intellectual imperative of the Brahman varna to the mere performance of *Puja* (ritual worship). Deshmukh lamented that "there remains no difference between the *Bhatts* and the *Guravs* (Shudra priests)."[79] The comparison was meant to deride the Brahmans and draw their attention to how 'low' they had plummeted. In his view, their fixation with ritual performances and negligence towards learning and righteous actions had reduced the Brahmans to "*majurdar*" or laborers just like the Shudra.[80]

Deshmukh thus punctured Brahmanical arrogance by reinforcing Brahmanical values—the symbolic hierarchy between intellectual activity and manual labor, and associating the Brahman with the former. All the more, by attributing intellectual labor, learning, and ethical conduct as essential virtues of 'Brahmaness,' Lokhitawadi secured a superior status to the abstract idea of the Brahman, all the while devaluing both the Shudra varna and the manual labor reserved for them.

While these early upper-caste liberals were persuaded by European notions of improvement, they were unable to completely give up the four-fold framework of varna. As they formulated the caste question, they wondered, how can the caste order be transformed so that it does not impede the practice of 'improved life'? One way of looking at Dadoba and Deshmukh's formulation is that it opened up the possibility of transforming the idea of caste, from a mechanical organizing principle based on lineage

79 Gopal Hari Deshmukh, "Jati Vishayi Vichar", in *Lokahitawadinchi Shatapatre*, ed. Narayan Raghunath Inamdar (Pune: S.R Deshmukh, 1962) 243.
80 Gopal Hari Deshmukh, "Charvarnanchi Sampratchi Sthithi", *Shatapatre*, 246.

to one that is based on meritocracy.[81] Nevertheless, caste radicals like Phule must have been suspicious of these dubious upper caste attempts at making meanings, principles, and hierarchies derived from caste hierarchy coherent with social reform. Shudra writers went on to argue that the Shudra did not take to manual labor because they were ignorant. On the contrary, their ignorance emerged from caste rules that imposed only and only manual labor on them.

Caste as a benign division of occupation in society.

While he recognizes the folly of classifying a plethora of occupations into four discrete categories, Dadoba also pointed out that in the case of countries that have achieved 'some level of improvement,' occupations can be, more or less, classified into the above four varna-based categories. The question then is why does the author draw parallels between a caste society and 'improved' religion (*sudharlele desh*), a short hand for western societies that do not deploy varna or caste as the organizing principle of the social world?

I argue that by way of this comparison, Dadoba seeks to demonstrate that the 'erstwhile' varna classification was not vastly different from the unintentional classification of occupations that took place in societies where caste was absent. Like in the case of 'improved societies,' that do not ascribe occupations and social status at birth, the varna order of antiquity, unsullied by caste, too, was nothing but a simple correspondence of occupation to dispositions and not lineage. By foregrounding that the varna order, as described in the shastras, was a form of classification drawn from the

81 Gopal Hari Deshmukh, "Charvarnanchi Sampratchi Sthithi", *Shatapatre*, 243. He corroborates this classification as a universal principle. According to him, this form of classification exists in all countries but unlike India, bolstered by religious tradition.

ordinary course of work, Dadoba seeks to disengage the varna order from caste order, its degenerate later form.

By illuminating the ways in which the logic of varna order shared more similarities with the division of occupation in societies in western societies than with the caste order in the present, Dadoba sought to do two things. First, this comparison allowed Dadoba to construct the premise that the emergence of caste (*jatibhed*) is a disruption in the seemingly egalitarian logic of varna. And two, it also makes way for him to explain the story of how the varna order transformed into caste as we experience it in the present as a partisan system of classification. In a way, by offering a story for this transformation, Dadoba seeks to narrate a history of caste in its present form.

Transformation of Varna into Caste hierarchy

For Dadoba the answer to this question lies not in the shastras, but their flawed interpretation by people and Pandits alike. He argues that "without paying any heed to the hidden meanings (*gudartha*) tucked away into the texts, everyone (*sarva loka*) has ignored the intentions of the original writers of the texts." The uncritical embrace of the literal meaning of the text, word-by-word, had led to the ossification of the belief that Brahmans truly emerged from the mouth of the Supreme Being and hence Brahmans in the present, their direct descendants, can rightfully claim their superiority even today.[82]

Dadoba argued that while the *Purusasukta*, a Vedic hymn on caste, relates that the Brahmans were born out of the mouth of the supreme being, the Kshatriya from his arms, the Vaishya from his thighs, and finally the Shudra emerged out of his feet, it must be understood that this allegory is purely metaphorical, a figure of speech, a flight of the

82 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, 101.

poets' imagination. Dadoba lamented that this misinterpretation is accepted as the truth not only by ordinary people, but also is widespread among renowned Pandits and scholars.[83] The author argued that the flawed method of interpretation is the result of the specific practice of knowledge production in India. No matter how widely renowned for their erudition, the knowledge of the scholars in this country is provincial and unidimensional (*ekdeshiya*). Further, he explained that in addition to having very little knowledge of things beyond their narrow area of study, they were ignorant about objects in the natural world as well as narratives from the past and common business of life (*sarva lokavyavahara*). [84]

The deficiency in the knowledge systems of the pandits is marked by their inability to offer a metaphorical reading and taking the literal meaning of the shastric texts at face value. Their espousal of superficial meaning as the truth was accompanied by their inability to recognize that the literal reading of the text was fraught with logical inconsistencies. And therefore, for Dadoba, the Pandits' inability to identify glaring contradictions in the texts, ask critical questions, put the texts to the test of reason, demonstrated the inadequacy of their Brahmanical tradition of learning.

Dadoba inquired, "Why does no one ask how did the first men emerge from the mouth and the limbs of the Supreme Being? Did the Ishwar vomit the Brahmans from his mouth? Or did they Kshatriya, Vaishya, and the Shudra emerge, tearing his limbs apart? How have these doubts escaped their inquiry?" he further asks, "what about the millions

83 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana,* 101.
84 Ibid.,

who live in other countries and are outside the *chaturvarna*?[85] From what part of his body did the Ishwar create them?"[86]

Dadoba illuminated the loopholes in the 'ways of knowing' internalized by the Pandits by bringing to the readers' notice the internal incoherence between the many origin stories of the universe in varied *Puranas*. He explained that many *Puranas* relate that the Ishwar created the Brahma before he created the rest of humanity. The *Puranas* recognize Brahma's exceptional birth by referring to him as the first Brahman. Despite being called 'the first Brahman' the Puranas make no reference to his birth from the mouth of the Supreme Being. In fact, Dadoba added, "it is well-known that Brahma was born out of the Ishawar's navel." Puzzled by the contradictions in the literal interpretation of the shastras Dadoba exclaims, "The ordinary people and the pundits bestow their unhesitant faith in the shastras and the Puranas. But the latter, in turn, trap them in their contradictions, from all four sides like a noose."[87]

For Dadoba, reading the shastra for their true meaning required the reader to permeate the superficiality of the texts replete with figures of speech and poetic imagination, and excavate the true intention of the author. This method of interpretation, for Dadoba, was apposite because it allowed the reader to resolve the contradictions that emerged from reading the text for its literal meaning. This further allows for the validity of the shastras to be retained, despite the glaring logical inconsistencies. Dadoba demonstrates an alternative interpretive practice where the intended meaning of the *purusakuta* is assumed to be encrypted in the shastras. He argues that although the texts

85 The four-fold varna hierarchy
86 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana,* 101.
87 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana* 102.

represent the Supreme Being, the Ishwar or Bhagwanta, in an embodied form, it must be understood that it is merely a metaphorical style of representation. The allusion of a physical body to the Ishwar who is *nirgun* (without attributes), one who is not circumscribed, is purely the work of human imagination.[88]

He mentioned that the allegory or(*rupaka*) of the four first-men constituting the varnas builds on the imagination that circumscribes the supreme being with an embodied presence is nothing but *vakyalankara* (figure of speech). For instance, those who exude the qualities of quietude, the government of the senses and passions, show people the right way, and are men of knowledge, also called the 'Brahman' are said to have emerged from the mouth of the Ishwar. The mouth is where the word is articulated and language unfolds. It is the seat of teaching and erudition. Its preeminence is marked by its association with knowledge. Similarly, men who are endowed with the attributes of strength and valor, are imagined to have emerged from the arms, a part of the body that is indispensable in the act of mounting an attack on the enemy at the war front. The profession of trade and mercantilism necessitates an itinerant life. In order to travel, and cover great distances it is essential that one's legs, the carriers of the body have to be strong. Hence the texts poetically imagined those who possess the qualities that enhance commerce emerging from the thighs of purusha.[89]

By arguing that religious texts were not the word of god but, in fact, were written by mortal men who used figures of speech, and had underlying intentions, Dadoba certainly secularized religious utterances about caste. But this kind of secularization stopped short

88 Ibid.,100.
89Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, 100.

of questioning the meanings these texts fixed, the context that impelled the writing of the text, or the politics of the text itself. We see just this in Dadoba's reinterpretation of the Purushasukta. While the author seeks to iron out the incoherence in the text by justifying the correspondence of the varna with the parts of the body, he glosses over the fact that the hierarchy of meanings attached to the different parts of the body, especially the mouth and the foot, have their roots in the logic of purity and pollution. The meanings attached to the mouth and the foot, decoded as the highest and the lowest parts of the body respectively by the author, are constructed in a cultural universe where contact with filth and dust is perceived as impure. Similarly, the association of the mouth with knowledge and the articulation of the 'word' emerges from the assumption that the production of knowledge is an activity that is superior to physical labor of the of the Shudra artisans.

While the notion of purification and pollution is not exclusively associated with the caste order, most of the caste practices that unfold into the social word operate within its logic. Thus, it would be wrong to assume that the hierarchy of the varna is derived from the common sense meanings attached to the different parts of the body. In fact, the obverse is true. The superiority associated with the mouth and the subservience of the feet is immersed in the same, if not derived, constellation of meanings that the caste order inhabits.

As the chapters of this dissertation unfold, we will see how lower-caste writers too secularize the religious texts and the ideological framework of caste. But they go a step further and upend the latent meanings and principles, which have the same roots as caste hierarchy, and shape upper-caste common sense about the body, filth, intellectual and manual labor, and their world view in general.

This notion that caste is not determined by birth but by one's occupation finds a place in Dadoba's autobiography too. He narrates how he once ran into a "Bhil Chieftain" in the treacherous Shindhav mountain pass on his way from Mumbai to Jaora in Central India.[90] He recounts, "On seeing that I was accompanied by two guards from the collector office, the Bhil Naik heartily welcomed us to his territory. He was a very dark (*kalakulkulit*) and a portly man with gold earrings and a chain around his neck. He must have been about fifty. In return for a payment the government had recruited him to protect travelers against bandits. For a long time, he has been keeping an eye on the robbers and marauders from his tribe. How wise are the English to recognize that it takes a thief to catch a thief!"[91] Dadoba's disbelief at the subdued character of the Bhil Naik is telling of how the dominant colonial perception of the Bhils, as wild marauders, was infused into the imaginations of the educated middle-class in the nineteenth century.

Dadoba's astonishment did not end here. As he continued to make his way through the mountain pass, he encountered another man, who he thought 'exuded a martial air.' Dadoba narrates, "On asking the man about his whereabouts, he replied, 'I am a Konkanastha Brahman, for long I have plundered and killed travelers like you.' To this, I asked, 'despite being a Brahman, you were engaged in such a heinous crime!' He retorts, 'When wealth is at stake, what is the difference between a heinous act and dharma!' I asked him, 'Now that you have given up this trade, why do you still live

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[90] The Bhils are an ethnic group and are now classified as a tribe by the Indian government. The Bhils have a long history of dwelling in the forest regions of north western and central India. The British government denoted them as Criminal tribes in 1871 and the community has been consistently associated with wildness by the colonial census and administrative mechanism. This community has had a history of conflict with local kings, and later with the colonial government over the use and control of timber, and forest land. For more on Bhils see Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid histories : forests, frontiers and wildness in western India* (New Delhi Oxford University Press, 1999).

91 Dadoba Pandurang, *Rāvabahādūra Dādobā Pāṇḍuraṅga ātmacaritra* (Mumbai: Anubhava Pablikeśanas : Vitaraka Anubhava Vitaraṇa, 1993)., 144.

here?' He said, "We have been inhabiting the ghat for the past two generations. Where will I go at this ripe age? I will take my last breath here."[92]

This encounter, too, like the last one, left Dadoba surprised (*akalpita gammat*). While the author is befuddled to chance upon a Brahman in the unlikeliest circumstances and location, he is also amused at the transformation in 'virtue and conduct' of both the Bhil Naik and the Brahman. He attributed his amusement to the incoherence between the castes the two men were born into, and the practice of their conduct in the present.

On the one hand, the author was surprised to find a Brahman, the exemplar of cultivation and culture in the 'wild.' He was also stunned to find him espouse an occupation of a social outlaw. On the other hand, he was pleasantly surprised to come across a Bhil, a member of a tribe that was closely associated with colonial ideas of wildness, an antithesis of modernity and civilization, sincerely engaged in the task of maintaining order for the state itself.

By discussing the two chance encounters, Dadoba draws our attention to the fact that virtues, conduct and behavior neither is the work of the divine nor is it determined by birth. In the case of the Bhil and the Brahman wealth and money were important factors that determined the change in their conduct. Two, the joint discussion of these two cases allowed the author to throw light on the possibilities for 'reform' that a *viveki* perspective can offer us. While travelling, which involves leaving our immediate surroundings, opens the possibilities of stumbling upon unforeseen circumstances a non-partisan and open frame of mind prepares one to both understand new situations and to dismantle our preexisting notions and prejudices.

92 Dadoba Pandurang, *Rāvabahādūra Dādobā Pāṇḍuraṅga ātmacaritra*, 145.

Politics of Improvement, Cultivation, and Individualism

The story allows Dadoba to suggest that 'improving oneself' and embracing new ways of being, like in the case of the Bhil Naik, are an antidote to a life structured by caste norms and rituals. This transformation can be achieved by internalizing *vivek* or discernment as a disposition of the mind, and stepping out of the social milieu of birth (*samsarga*)—the fundamental site where caste sociality is internalized.

"A true *viveki* person, indeed a rarity, uses balanced judgment and rejects unquestioning faith elicited by a religion mired in rituals and caste practices. They learn to leave their hubris behind and come to understand the secret that that this-worldly life must be inhabited by taking recourse to truth, ethical conduct, and sincerely taking refuge with the *Paramatma* (the Eminent being)."[93]

Dadoba argued that *viveka* is also a source of courage. On recognizing the fraudulence in rituals and scriptures, a prudent *viveki* person stands up against them, unafraid.[94] Thus, *viveki* or a discerning attitude needs to be acquired by conscious cultivation and disciplining the self. Surrounding oneself with good company, being privy to virtuous conversations, reading good literature, righteous texts and moral stories, and a relentless pursuit of true knowledge are key to the act of conscious cultivation.[95]

Dadoba also proposes that our rootedness in the social milieu (*samsarga*) into which we are born and our failure to step out of our social location impedes the ability to develop a non-partisan and a discerning frame of mind. The author suggests that it is crucial that we introspect, and ask ourselves the question: "why do I hold my religion so

93 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana,* 71.
94Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana,*79.
95Ibid., 70.

close to heart? What makes me so insistent with my religion? What are the roots of my resolve (*agraha*)?"[96] This internal inquiry, he argued, will lead us to the 'roots' of our religious ardor, which in turn can be traced to the social influences (*samsarga*) that we acquire by being part of a particular community. The family and our social relations color our minds. Trapped in our given milieu, we cannot compare our thoughts with people outside our immediate social relations. "I entrust my faith in a particular text or prophetic figure because I was born into this lineage (*kula*). But if I was born into a different family, alternately, I would have espoused a different religious text and a different prophet."[97]

Dadoba further warned his readers: "do not underestimate the power of *samsarga*. Our thoughts, which we acquire by way of *samsarga*, are deeply rooted in our minds, so much so that uprooting them is an ardent task". Our prejudices, Dadoba states, are the fruits of our social intercourse (*samsarga*). In this light, it is not unsurprising that the author referred to himself as a *jagadwasi* —a cosmopolitan or a dweller of the world.

Dadoba's astute awareness about the stifling character of 'samsarga' makes an appearance in his autobiography too. As the author recounts the memories of his youth, he implicitly suggests that *paramhansik vritti* and a *viveki* mentality can be cultivated by extricating oneself from the samsarga (social relations) that is bestowed upon us by the accident of birth. And in its one should deliberately compose a new social world.

In his autobiography, the author represent himself as a person who actively seeks to disentangle himself from his immediate social relations, the one that he was born into

96 Ek Jagadwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*,81.
97 Ibid.,82.

and forges relationships of friendship and intellectual camaraderie. The story of these new social bonds is intertwined with the accounts of new places. Replete with stories of his itinerant life, Dadoba's autobiography, to a large extent, reads like a travelogue. The young Dadoba appears to be enthused by the prospects of leaving his immediate physical and social surroundings to explore a new and an unknown world. He relates in detail an account of his travels to the kingdom of Jaora [98.] A twenty-two-year old Dadoba was offered an opportunity to tutor the young Nawab of Jaora. He was excited by this prospect and anxiously waited to receive his father's consent. "I had a great desire to travel around the country (*deshatan*)," he recounts.[99]

Dadoba's autobiography is an invitation to the readers to accompany him on his adventurous journey. The text is replete with thick descriptions of towns, cities and places of importance that he crosses, historical centers, popular religious sites—temples and the river of Nasik, the bustling markets of Malegaon, and the dangers, surprises and the unlikely people he came across in the Sindhav mountain pass.[100]

Although one of the earliest, Dadoba was not the only liberal in nineteenth-century western India who imagined the modern native as one who actively disentangled himself from his relations of birth and consciously composed a new social network replete with diverse friendships and intellectual camaraderie. In fact, in the mid-nineteenth century travel and sea voyages, were often lauded as ways of escaping parochial particularities and broadening the possibilities of thought and new experiences. Traveling was also an issue of social reform. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the Marathi

98 Now in present day district of Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh.
99 Dadoba Pandurang, *Rāvabahādūra Dādobā Pāṇḍuraṅga ātmacaritra*.,139.
100 Ibid.,138-142.

reformist press was teeming with travel accounts, descriptions of far-away cities, and news about foreign lands.

Balshastri Jambhekar, the editor of *Durpan*, the first bilingual journal in Marathi and English and a contemporary of Dadoba, emphasized that "native improvement" could be sought by exposing oneself to a new geographical terrain and by coming in contact with people outside one's immediate social location. He wrote: "The difference between a civilized Philosopher, and an ignorant man, is as great as that between light and darkness—truth and error—human reason and animal instinct. The ignorant man is content with the monotonous career of his life; his observation is limited to the nature around him, he wants to go no further than the common necessaries of life, and his knowledge extends only to his own country, and to the people among whom he dwells; whereas the other, with all the labour that a human being can bestow, endeavors to penetrate into the secret works of God."[101]

Jambhekar's "philosophical man" resembles the figure of the *viveki* man etched by Dadoba. Admirers of "European arts and sciences," the first generation of liberal natives drew heavily on commonly used European enlightenment tropes such as the philosopher versus the ignorant man, light versus dark, truth versus error, human versus animal, and parochial versus the cosmopolitan.

In the works of both Jambhekar and Dadoba, the notion of the liberal individual was taking root. They imagined a new native individual unmarked by particularities of

101The text is originally in English. Bal Shastri Jambhekar , "Dig-durshan. (Direction)" in *Memoirs and Writings of Ācārya Bāl Gangādhar Shāstri Jāmbhekar 1812-1846*, ed. G.G Jambhekar, (Pune: G.G.Jambhekar, 1950) Vol. 1, 28.

geography and social location and whose ideas about the world were entirely his own—unattached, underived, and distant from social influences and prejudice.

Asamskrita: One without Samskara or culture

It is curious how, in his autobiography, Dadoba barely gives the reader an insight into his caste location and the extended relations into which he was born and raised, save for a brief nod to his immediate family members. But on the contrary, he gives a detailed account of the intellectual community and the social relations that he established as he navigated his way through the newly emerging modern educational and professional institutions. For instance, he introduces the readers to the friends and co-travelers he meets as a student at the Native Education Society's School in Mumbai, in Elphinstone institute, as a teacher at the Normal class, and at the English School at Surat. He recounts the ways in which he crossed paths with European teachers, missionaries, and administrators who were most impressed with his ability to translate and speak in English.

He also relates a tragic incident in Surat to further stress that relationships of brotherhood and fraternity can be established beyond those forged by blood, birth, and lineage. The story begins in 1841 when Dadoba had just moved to Surat as the Assistant English School Master at the first English school established in the city. Having just settled into a new city, and moved by the longing to be surrounded by filial connections, Dadoba made a deliberate choice to live in a neighborhood that was inhabited by Marathi families from Mumbai. However, in the face of his child's death, none of his neighbors came to his help. He reflects, "My wife and I were confronted by the sudden death of our nine month old son. We were alone in the city with no support from the family. The

mother wailed, with the dead child in her lap. On hearing the cries from our home the Marathi prabhu neighbors shut their doors and windows on us... Perplexed and alone, I puzzled over the burial of my son. Nevertheless, I was rescued by Durgaram Mehta and Dinamani Shankar Shastri, who on hearing the news rushed to our side. They also accompanied me to the banks of the Tapi River for the infant's burial. Despite, sharing the same home towns (*desha*), not once did it cross the Mumbaikar's (people from Mumbai) minds that, 'they have no caste and familial relations in this city, we should rush to their rescue'. Least to say, their children studied in my school."[102]

Incidents like these, perhaps, influenced Dadoba to recognize the emptiness of ascriptive relationships and explore the possibility of forging new affective bonds rooted in friendship and fraternity instead of relationships of birth.

Dadoba's endorsement of the state of *asamskrita* (the uncultivated/the unconditioned) is striking in this light. *Asamskrita* is a negation of *samskrita*, a quality associated with one who is subjected to *samskara*—an initiation into the social world by rites and ceremonies. Relatedly, *samskara* also means to be marked or impressed upon. And so, *Sanskara*, among other things, includes rites of initiations that officially bestow a caste status and community membership. For instance, in a caste society, an infant undergoes *samskara* or rituals that are appropriate to the caste into which the child is born. In this spirit, for Dadoba, to be unmarked by ascribed social location, *asamskrita* (meaning one who is bereft of any *samskara*) is a desirable way to inhabit a world fraught with religious and sectarian animosity.

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102 Dadoba Pandurang, *Rāvabahādūra Dādobā Pāṇḍuraṅga ātmacaritra*,189 and 227.

Dadoba's deployment of *asamskrita* as a desirable state of being is curious because both *sanskara* and *sanskrita* are normative concepts and are a part of a constellation of meanings associated with purification, perfecting, polishing, and embellishing.[103] The normative concept of *samskrita* not only refers to the subject of *samskara*, but it also shares a common etymological root with *Sanskrit*—the "refined language" spoken by those who undergo rites and training that in turn mark them as cultivated and refined.[104]

By the first millennium BCE, only a small elite section of the Indian society was trained in Sanskrit. It was a language of learning and was not used as a means of communication in everyday life. Sanskrit, the language of the Vedas was a repository of knowledge that was accessible only to the "*samskrita* subjects"—i.e., Brahman men, who had undergone the necessary *samskara*, or initiation, in order to learn Sanskrit knowledge.[105]And so, alternatively, it excluded the '*asamskrita*', namely Brahman women and the lower-castes who have not undergone '*samskaras*'.

While Dadoba inhabited a social and intellectual world where *samskara* and *samskrita* circulate as normative concepts, he inverted this normative order and instead attached a positive value to *asamskrita* , the negation of *samskrita*. And so for him, an ideal modern native should be one who is *asankrita*—unmarked by his caste and community, possessed an unsullied state of mind, perceived the entire world as his home, and shared a fraternal relation to the people of this world.

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103 See entries on *Samskara* and *Sanskrita* in Molesworth Marathi Dictionary, 490.
104 Patrick Olivelle. "Orality, Memory, and Power: Vedic Scriptures and Brahmanical Hegemony in India." In *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon,* edited by Vincent Wimbush (Rutgers University Press, 2008),215-216.
105 Patrick Olivelle. "Orality, Memory, and Power: Vedic Scriptures and Brahmanical Hegemony in India," 216.

They also ought to maintain an unbiased approach (*saman buddhi*) towards the Veda, Quran, Angels and other religious texts. Unlike an *aviveki* (men of poor judgement) person who views these religious texts as the unmediated words of the supreme beings, an *asamskrta* person believes that these texts are propounded by man (*purushakrut*). They believe that the virtuous thoughts codified in the religious texts take shape in the human mind in the form of dispositions and good sense by way of divine inspiration. Thus, these texts are not the words of God but instead are words inspired by the divine that manifest themselves in the human**.** For Dadoba an *asamskrita* inclination of the mind does not impede one from both selectively incorporating and relinquishing virtues and propositions no matter where they are found. In fact, this unsullied disposition of an *asamskrita* person enables relations of brotherhood and fraternity beyond relations of blood, birth and lineage.

Translating Caste Politics in Practice

While the upper-caste liberals imagined themselves navigating the new colonial world, unconstrained by their ascriptive status and ancestral norms, in reality, they transgressed caste rules with a great deal of secrecy, reluctance, and fear. For instance, men who had returned home after travelling to Europe often promptly agreed to perform penance by donating money to temples, feeding Brahmans, and performing sacrificial rituals.

In 1843 Bal Sashtri Jambhekar succumbed to performing an elaborate ritual of penance after being threatened with excommunication by the orthodox Brahmans of Bombay. The orthodox group argued that Jambhekar had endangered his Brahman-ness by advocating for Shripat Sheshadri's readmission into the Brahman caste. Sheshadri was

already ex-communicated, for he had violated his caste purity by staying with his Christian convert brother.[106] Later in the 1860s, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, a leading liberal voice in western India was pushed to perform penance for sending his son abroad and supporting the marriage of a Brahman widow.[107]

The apparent incongruity in the words and deeds of upper-caste reformists was for all to see, but it particularly provoked criticism from lower-caste social reformers. Jotirao Phule directed his ire against M.G Ranade, a foremost liberal social reformer and a founding member of the Indian National Congress, on a similar issue. Phule's biographer, Dhananjay Keer, narrates that on hearing about Ranade's sister's widowhood, Phule suggested to Ranade: "You can make best of this sad lot. God has given you an opportunity to practice what you preach! Make bold to give effect to your vow by getting your sister remarried. No good is obtained without a struggle. Social reform does not come of itself. You have to practice and make people accept it by your courage and suffering."[108] On hearing that Ranade feared his father's reaction and excommunication by the Brahmans of Pune, Phule shot back at him angrily, "Raosaheb! Then don't pretend to be a social reformer!"[109]

Phule also emphasized that reformist efforts of upper-caste intellectuals and reformers, who edited newspapers, founded societies for the diffusion of knowledge, and organized lectures and discussion, were nothing but 'empty lip-service.' He argued

106 Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology : Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*. 90-90.
107 Umesh Bagade, *Maharashtratil Prabodhan ani Varga Jati Prbhutva.*(Pune: Sugava Prakashan, 2006,185, 186.
108 Dhananjay Keer. *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley: Father of the Indian Social Revolution.* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1974), 136.
109 Ibid., 136.

that their speeches and writings on social change was so narrow and limited that it excluded the lower-castes and the "untouchables" from it schema.

Refusing the invitation to the 188 Conference of Marathi Authors, Phule emphasized: " Men who talk much about the human rights for all but in reality who find it hard to give happily and openly giving these rights, and from what we can see of their current behavior they will not be able to give these rights anytime in the further either, a meeting (sabha) called by such people and the books written by them do not sit well with our sabhas (meetings) and our books… these men in ivory towers[110] and who can only make ceremonial and meaningless speeches in big meetings can never understand what we the Shudras (lower-castes) and Atishudras ("untouchable" caste) have to suffer and what calamities we have to undergo. All this is not entirely unknown to the founders of various conferences and organizations. They (the Arya-Brahmans) pretend to be modernists as long as they are in the service of the British government. The moment they retire and claim their pensions they get into their brahmanical touch-me-not attire…become caste chauvinists…"[111]

What do these acts of secretly breaking caste and scurrying to atone for caste violations tell us about the elite liberal understanding of caste? If there was anything that the upper-castes feared, it was their ostracism from caste community and family. This fear of excommunication was of course led by the possible loss of community support, but more importantly they dreaded losing their privileged caste status. The anxiety of excommunication also emerged from the aversion to the figure of the 'untouchable'. In

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[110] The original adage used here is "untavarun shelya hakne" meaning , herding sheep from atop a camel's back.

111 Jotirao Phule. *Selected writings of Jotirao Phule*, (Ed.) by GP Deshpande. (*New Delhi, Leftword:* 2002), 200.

fact, in the 1850s the missionary newspaper *Dnyanodaya* (Dawn of knowledge) reported that upper-caste converts complained that they were ostracized and treated no more than 'untouchables'. Upper-caste liberals sought to reform the caste order, all the while dreading being likened to the untouchable, the lowest in the caste hierarchy.

We see this in Dadoba's writings too. Dadoba extends the principle of 'elemental equality' of the *panchamahabhuta* to the Yavana, the English and the Mleccha, but not to the untouchables. The reason for their hasty inclusion in the 'list of elemental equality' could be traced to how, in the nineteenth century, upper-caste middle-class lives were touched by colonial institutions such as offices, schools, parks, and cafes more than ever before. These new public spaces were increasingly populated by a mix of Europeans, the British, Christian converts, and Muslims. This increasingly exposed upper caste Hindus to umpteen possibilities that could violate their state of purity. Moreover, the time was also replete with incidents of the upper-caste men being castigated for sharing food with foreigners— colonial administrators or Christian missionaries, for travelling abroad, and mingling with Christian converts. And so, what might look like an attempt to foreground 'natural equality' was nothing more than finding a way to navigate a world full of other non-Hindu urban and upwardly mobile communities.

Upper-caste modernists viewed caste relations as a set of traditional practices that intercepted their participation in colonial capitalist modernity. Caste was a traditional fetter that withheld the lucid mobility of public men in cities and small towns that were rapidly modernizing and increasingly exposing urban members of the upper-castes to umpteen possibilities that could violate their state of purity. Some viewed traditional disapproval of inter-caste marriages an inconvenience, because it came in the way of

finding more status appropriate matches for their daughters. Looking for grooms within ones caste meant settling for a much smaller pool of choice.[112]

More broadly, upper-caste reformers framed caste as a problem that stunted national progress: it fractured Indian society, making it incapable of resisting colonial conquests, and was also seen as the reason for Indian backwardness for it hampered sea voyages for trade and elite education.[113]

In any case, most Brahman and Prabhu (scribal caste) reformers stopped short of viewing caste as a power relation and a source of lower-caste exploitation and humiliation. Although Dadoba Pandurang makes a reference earlier in *Dharmavivechana* to the political character of Brahman domination of Sanskrit knowledge and the deliberate exclusion of the lower-castes and the 'untouchable' castes, he depoliticized caste hierarchy, as such.

In a rather anticlimactic conclusion to the text, Dadoba holds everyone in the caste order equally responsible for the perpetuation of caste hierarchy. He contended: "What lies at the root of the *Dnyatibandhan* (caste relations), religio-legal texts (*vyavahara shastra*) or the social rules that emerge out of people's sense of propriety? [I argue that] Conduct precedes textual codification. And so from this, we can conclude that the restrictions on inter-caste commensality and marriages have led to the formation of innumerable castes… undoubtedly people's ignorance and hubris is to be blamed for this… the codifiers of the religio-juridical texts emerged from these already established classes… and so, they were inclined to accept them. In order to retain the classes that

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[112] *Dharmavivechana* 110, 111.

113 Umesh Bagade, *Maharashtratil Prabodhan ani Varga Jati Prbhutva.*(Pune: Sugava Prakashan, 2006).

existed in their time, they thought of ingenious ways to justify the conduct codified in the shastras, this is their only fault. To accuse the writers of the shastra as the conspirators behind the caste hierarchy is unfair. People's ignorance and their hubris is the only reason for the inception of caste…"[114]

In the next chapter, we will see how lower-caste reformers took a sharply anti-brahmanical stand. For instance, Tukaram Tatya Padwal's 1862 work *Jatibhed Viveksar* (Reflections on the Institution of Caste)[115], the first caste critique published from a lower-caste stand-point, and Jotirao Phule's polemics were the first to argue that the Brahman castes, who stood to gain the most out of caste hierarchy, were responsible for its consolidation and perpetuation. Both Padwal and Phule traced the emergence of caste hierarchy in the present to a political conflict in the past. They drew on the works of European orientalists such as H.H Wilson and Max Muller and well as missionary ideologues—John Muir and John Wilson, to emphasize that the present day Brahmans were the descendants of the Sanskrit religious texts wielding Aryans, who used violence and deceit to conquer the subcontinent and enslave its indigenous inhabitants. Woven into an ideological structure that perpetuated exploitative social relations and humiliating interpersonal practices, the aborigines were called Shudra and Atishudra in the new Brahmanical regime.[116]

As the anti-caste discourse gained traction, the upper-caste formulation of the caste question was increasingly discredited. Lower-caste radicals identified the Brahman as a definite adversary for their politics. Moreover, contrary to the cosmopolitan subject

114 Ek Jagdwasi Arya, *Dharmavivechana*, 111, 112.
115 The text's title is translated by Tukaram Padwal himself.
116 Rosalind O'Hanlon. *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, 80, 81 and Thomas R. Trautmann. *Aryans and British India*. (University of California: 1997), 197.

of liberal politics, they foregrounded an autochthonous political subject —the vanquished inhabitants of the land marked by both a specific geographical location and a history of loss caused by Brahmanical deceit. Thus, by leveraging an ethical position from their claims to autochthony, anti-caste radicals veered the caste question towards the discourse of social justice and away from the discourse of liberal self-transformation.

Conclusion

Like Dadoba, lower-caste radicals too believed that the caste order was perpetuated by ignorance and hubris; like him, they too wished to expose the truth underlying the arrangement of caste that allowed its generational reproduction. But, in a move contrary to the upper-caste reformers, who argued that caste was only an unnecessary-chaff of Hindu religion, lower-caste reformers identified caste as its very founding institution.

As we will see in the rest of the dissertation, lower-caste writers were not willing to disengage with *vyavaharika* dharma, the chaff of Hindu religion comprising of caste practices and rituals, as effortlessly as the liberal reformers were willing to. For in this very aspect of *vyavahara,* meaning exchange and also ritual, the exploitation of the lower-caste peasant was rooted. Like their elite counterparts they too secularized Hindu rituals and texts, but they did so not by sieving out the 'social' and 'untrue' aspects from the true core of Hindu divinity. In fact, they secularized caste by arguing that very founding conflict of brahmanical Hinduism was historical in character.

Undoubtedly, among nineteenth-century natives, upper-caste reformers initiated the secularization of both Brahmanical knowledge and the caste order. However, they stopped at acknowledging the historical character of religious texts and caste and overlooked their political and conflictual character. On the other hand, Lower-caste

radicals secularized caste, but they did so by systematically reframing the caste question as a primarily political phenomenon.

Like the lower caste, upper-caste reformers too were singed by the strict practice of caste rituals. But because of their privileged social location their caste rituals were limited to their family, social relations, and to themselves. In fact most of the rituals that they performed reinforced their privileged status.

For the lower-caste peasants, the scenario was vastly different. They were tied into the ritual economy of caste, in such a way that with every performance of rituals, the Brahman's supremacy, privilege, and the peasants' subordination was further reinforced, both symbolically and economically. And so for the anti-caste lower-caste activists, caste was ritual, but it was not merely a religious phenomenon that could be sieved out, in fact, rituals and caste relations structures the peasants' social and economic life.

Chapter 2: Reshaping the Figure of the Shudra: A close study of Tukaram Padwal's *Jatibhed Viveksar* (Reflections on the Institution of Caste).

Introduction

In 1874, the Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth Seeker's Society), a well-known anti-caste collective of lower-caste activists in Maharashtra, distributed, in a village near Pune, free copies of *Jatibhed Viveksar* (Reflections on the Institution of Caste), a book whose author is identified simply as *Ek Hindu* (a Hindu or one Hindu).[117] Adopting the text as an ideological resource for its activism, the Samaj took it to peasants and artisans, who constituted the majority of the lower castes in Maharashtra. As they did with much of their early literature, Samaj activists likely read the text aloud to them.

Anti-caste critics had recognized the potential of the text nearly a decade earlier. In 1861, the first edition of the text was published by Vasudev Navrange, a lower-caste publisher and an anti-caste activist; the second edition (1865) received support from Jotirao Phule, the founder of the Samaj, and arguably the most prominent anti-caste activist in late nineteenth-century western India. The anti-caste activists' enthusiasm for *Jatibhed Viveksar* was propelled by the fact that the text was one of the first published critiques of caste from a lower-caste perspective.[118]

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117 The translation of *Jatibhed Viveksar* as *Reflections on the Institution of Caste* is by the author of the text. All other translations from Marathi to English are mine unless mentioned otherwise.

118 In 1855, A few years before *Jatibhed Viveksar* saw print, Jotirao Phule wrote a play entitled *Trutiya Ratna* (The Third Eye). The play demonstrates how the entanglement of caste, ritual knowledge, and material exploitation immiserated the laboring peasants. While the play was not published, its multiple manuscript copies were found in 1979. Phule must have intended for the manuscripts to be circulated among his close associates, and the play to be performed. *Trutiya Ratna* was finally published in 1979 in the Marathi Journal *Purogami Satyashodhak*. Rosalind O'Hanlon. *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 122-123.

Jatibhed Viveksar is innovative on two counts. One, it is amongst the first in the Marathi public sphere to systematically question, in modern reformist language, the injunction against *varna sankara* or the intermixing of castes. This injunction was a linchpin of the Dharmic definition of the caste order, and its rules governing ritual purity. Two, it is also amongst the first to refashion an old figure, the Shudra, into a new one who would quickly come to occupy center-stage in anti-caste politics. Within the Brahmanical framework, the lower caste or the Shudra was identified as the "menial one." Brahmanical religious texts and ritual manuals justified the inferior status relegated to the lower castes by saturating the figure of the Shudra with a constellation of negative meanings. *Jatibhed Viveksar* did not accept these meanings—it presented the Shudras, instead, as indigenous heroes who were vanquished by the Aryan invasion.

The intellectual sources, frames of thought, and historical instances mobilized by *Ek Hindu* have shaped the common sense of what later came to be known as 'anti-caste politics'. Most significantly, the conceptual and methodological categories used by B.R Ambedkar, a national political leader and the foremost thinker of social justice in the twentieth century, have resonances with *Ek Hindu's* work. *Ek Hindu's* discussion of juridico-religious texts such as *Manusmriti, Yajnavalkya,* and the epic of *Mahabharata* re-emerged as a crucial point of discussion in Ambedkar's writings. Like *Jatibhed Viveksar*, Ambedkar too invoked the memory of caste controversies that unfolded between the "Shudra" caste of the Sonar (the goldsmith caste) and the Chitpavan Brahmans in order to illustrate the historical character of the Shudra-Brahmin conflict.

Although *Jatibhed Viveksar* illuminates how the first generation of lower-caste thinkers intervened in their contemporary political discourse and laid the groundwork for

the articulation of caste politics in the future, there has been little historical or textual exploration of the book (the principal exception is a brief discussion in Rosalind O'Hanlon's pathbreaking 1985 work on the lower-caste protest initiated by Jotirao Phule). Historians of anti-caste politics in Maharashtra and contemporary social movements have canonized Jotirao Phule by foregrounding his activism and writings such as *Priestcraft Exposed* (1869) and *Slavery* (1873). However, this has come at the cost of eclipsing writings such as *Jatibhed Viveksar*, which not only influenced Phule's works but also shaped conceptual frames of the anti-caste movement.

To my knowledge, Dhananjay Keer's 1964 biography of the anti-caste activist Jotirao Phule is our earliest confirmation that Tukaram Tatya Padwal was the author of *Jatibhed Viveksar*. Keer informs us that Tukaram Padwal, a *Bhandari* by caste, belonged to a network of the first generation of educated lower-caste writers and reformers.[119] Both Keer and Rosalind O'Hanlon, in their works on Jotirao Phule, suggest that Padwal's friendship with Jotirao Phule brought him closer to the anti-caste social network.[120] Padwal was among the first generation of lower-caste writers to participate in a vernacular publishing world that was thus far dominated by Brahman writers. Hardly recognized as an anti-caste activist, Padwal inhabited the network of non-Brahman social activists.

But we know very little about Padwal except that he was a moderately prosperous merchant and engaged in business for a European firm. Along with other small traders and merchants, Padwal was at the forefront of an agitation against the levy of indirect

119 *Bhandari* is a non-Brahman lower-caste in the caste hierarchy in western India. Members of this caste are native to the coastal region of Konkan and Bombay. They are known to practice toddy-tapping.
120 Dhananjay Keer. *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley: Father of the Indian Social Revolution.* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1974), 93-95 and Rosalind O'Hanlon. *Caste, Conflict and Ideology.* 42-43.

taxes on commodity trading.[121] He also organized adult education classes for peons, small shopkeepers, contractors, workers and opened schools for the children of artisan castes, 'untouchables,' and peasants.[122]

By 1880, he joined the Theosophical Society and worked closely with its founders, H.S Olcott and Helena Blavatsky.[123] Besides supervising the Bombay chapter of the society after its founders moved to Adyar in South India, he contributed to the society by publishing copies of the Bhagwat Gita, Patanjali's Yogasutra, and compilations of Rajayoga and Sankhya Karika.[124] He continued to engage with the vernacular publishing world by establishing a publishing house called *Tatwavivechana* (an inquiry of truth). Along with compiling the works of the seventeenth-century poet-saint Tukaram entitled *Tukarambaba ani Tyanche Shisya Yanchi Abhanga Gatha* (Tukarambaba and his Disciples) in 1889, he also published *Eknath Maharajanchya Abhanganchi Gatha* (The story of Eknath's Devotional Poetry).[125] Tukaram Tatya was known as a generous patron in the religious reformist circles. In a letter, Helena Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophical Society, refers to him as a "positively extraordinary man: ready to throw

121 Christine E Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India : Politics and Communities in Bombay City, 1840-1885.* Oxford Historical Monographs. (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 137. The Ratepayers Association of Bombay (1871) accused the rich merchant landlords (the shetia class) for persuading the Municipal Corporation to replace property taxes with taxes on commodities. Rich merchant landlords owned buildings, mansions, and prime property in the city and so they escaped the new tax regime.

122 Ibid.,

123 Critical of dominant interpretations of Christianity and the ways of the "western civilization", Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott formed the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875. Tukaram Padwal must have been one of their earliest members in India. He was General Secretary of the South section of the society but resigned from the position in 1889, stating that he was inundated with work and his "little command in English" made things all the more difficult. The Theosophist, Vol 10 April, 1889:Ixxix. Also see Kenneth W Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India. III.1, Socio-religious Reform Movements in British India.* Cambridge Histories Online. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 168-169.

124 "Tatya, Tukaram", *Theosophy World,* accessed July 26 2020, https://www.theosophy.world/encyclopedia/india-theosophy.

125 G.M Kulkarni, *Marathi Vangmay Kosh*, Vol 2, part 1(Mumbai: Maharashtra Government), 90.

thousands for a whim".[126] Better known as a publisher, patron, and a theosophist we know very little about Padwal as a writer.

In the present study, I argue that the genealogy of the modern caste critique is incomplete without a contextualized and close reading of one of Padwal's few written works: *Jatibhed Viveksar.* I explore Padwal's anti-caste critique by asking: Why did Padwal's argument about *varna sankara* among Brahmans rattle the English educated upper castes? Why does the author call himself "*Ek Hindu*"? What intellectual resources does he rely on to construct his anti-caste critique? How does *Ek Hindu* reimagine the figure of the Shudra?

Padwal's Foil

Almost as soon as it was published, *Jatibhed Viveksar* met with bitter hostility from upper-caste quarters. In 1862, the editors of *Dnyana Prakash* (The Light of Knowledge), a bilingual journal published from Pune with a predominantly Brahman editorial board, took issue with it for "insulting their ancestors." What makes the journal's ire all the more interesting is that this was a reformist journal: its editors saw themselves as critical of Brahman orthodoxy. The journal was amongst those that vehemently criticized the depraved character of the Brahman castes and questioned the validity of religious knowledge—a key source of Brahmanical superiority, and advocated for the reform of Hinduism. Which raises the question: what made Padwal's intervention offensive not only to the orthodox Brahmans (this was only to be expected) but also to the reformists?

126 Alfred Trevor Barker et al. *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett and Other Miscellaneous Letters* Transcribed. (United Kingdom: T. Fisher Unwin Limited, 1925), 11.

Both orthodox and reformist Brahmans seem to have objected especially to the book's strictures against *varna sankara*, a stricture that rests at the heart of many early modern treatises and manuals on caste. The concept of *varna sankara* is based on the idea that in the age of *Kali*, the most degenerate period in the mythic Hindu time-cycle, the social world is divided into two groups: one, the multitude of *misrajati* (mixed-castes) that constituted the Shudra or the lower-castes and two, the Brahmans who have managed to maintain their pure lineage by adhering to the rule of endogamy. *Jatibhed Viveksar*, however, argues that not just the lower castes but the Brahmans too have mixed-caste ancestors and thus cannot claim purity of lineage. The predominantly Brahman editors of the newspaper were appalled by the allegation that their ancestors too were the progeny of mixed and "immoral" sexual unions.

Padwal's proposition also caught the middle-class Brahmans off-guard because it departed from the contemporary register of caste reform. The upper-caste liberal polemicists of the nineteenth century, such as Balshastri Jambhekar and Gopal Hari Deshmukh among others, argued that the reasons for the degeneration of Hindu religion in the present could be traced to the corrupt practices of the Brahmans.[127] As a counterpoint, they invoked an exemplary Brahman past, when their ancestors lived a virtuous, scholarly life and deserved their superior status. They invoked this pure past, untainted at the source, in order to provoke the Brahmans to reclaim a lost golden past, albeit within the frameworks of colonial modernity. While Padwal did not doubt the virtues and scholarship of the very first men —the *Rishi* (sages) to whom the Brahmans

127 Umesh Bagade, *Maharashtratil Prabodhan ani Varga Jati Prbhutva* (Pune: Sugava Prakashan 2006) and Susan Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India. IV.3, Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age.* (Cambridge Histories Online. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 157, 158.

traced their ancestry and kinship, he argued that they, nevertheless, had mixed caste origins. *Jatibhed Viveksar* stirred much controversy by casting 'aspersions' on the very purity of Brahman lineage—the fount of Brahman exceptionalism and the very foundation of Brahmanical social reform.

In the previous chapter, we saw how liberal reformists such as Dadoba Pandurang and Deshmukh concurred with colonial administrators and missionaries that the caste order was a relic from the Indian "traditional past" but were unwilling to give up the moral meanings encoded in the varna hierarchy.[128] Rather, they sought a rational version of the caste order that would not impede their attempt to live an 'improved life.' And so, caste entered reformist discussions as a foil, a symptom of degenerate Hindu morality. They counterpointed it to the ideal of a flexible varna hierarchy that for them had existed in the golden past and had allowed for social mobility on the basis of merit.

In the previous chapter, we also saw how among mid-nineteenth century liberal circles, social reform centered on undertaking sea-voyages and consuming "unclean food."[129] Embarking on a sea-voyage was perceived as not only a courageous act but the traveler was also lauded for being an "improved native" who embodied "liberal sentiments." In the mid-nineteenth century, as the caste question was being discussed in the register of purification and penance within the dominant reformist circles, *Jatibhed Viveksar* offered a solution to the problem by questioning the very principle of purity that resided at the heart of reformist caste question. By challenging the dominant notion of

128 Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*,177, 178.
129 Also see Lucy Carroll. "The Seavoyage Controversy and the Kayasthas of North India, 1901—1909." *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 2 (1979).

varna sankara, a normative injunction against the mixing of castes, Padwal further opened the principle of 'purity' for discussion.

Life of the Text

The first edition of *Jatibhed Viveksar* was published in 1861. By the second edition, published in 1865, the treatise was much thicker. The text spanned over 59 pages in its 1861 edition; its second edition comprised of 170 pages. The author heavily cited Hindu religious texts and drew on religious mythologies from the *Puranas* in the second iteration of the text. It sold a thousand copies (a huge number for the time) and made way for the third edition in 1885.[130]

Although the publication of the second edition in 1865 chronologically followed the first (1861), conceptually, it was already foreshadowed in the 1861 edition. The introduction to the first edition confessed that the author's desire for a protracted discussion was abridged by fear of a poor reader's response. But if the text elicited wide support, the introduction promised, the author would publish a more elaborate second edition—comprising of evidence from the *shruti* and *smriti.*[131] The introduction also appealed to readers to bring to the author's notice errors or inconsistencies that might have eluded him and to come forth with excerpts from religious texts (*granthadhar*) that would further strengthen his arguments. Padwal thus viewed the publication of successive editions as an exercise in collaboration with his audience.

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130 I primarily map the journey of the text from its first to the second edition, because it is here that the text transforms significantly. Not only is the second edition more voluminous than the first, but the author also introduced new conceptual frameworks. Also, by the second edition the author finds a strong political voice. I have not been able to access the third edition. To my knowledge there is one surviving copy of this in the University of Mumbai library. My understanding is that this edition is not vastly different from the second one.

131 The *Shruti* are the sacred texts comprising the central canon of Hinduism viz. Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, & Upanishads. On the other hand, *Smriti* literally means "that which is remembered," and it is entire body of the post Vedic Classical Sanskrit literature.

While the second edition retained the thematic structure of the earlier version of the text, it bolstered its assertions with additional evidence from religious texts. For instance, both editions argue that later insertions in the *Manav Dharma Shastra* and other *Smritis* are conspicuous in venerating Brahmans above the gods.[132] While the first edition finds support for this argument in a *shloka* from *Manav Dharma Shastra*, which he cites and translates, and provides a further list of references, the second edition replaces the list of references with extensive quotations of Sanskrit verses from these references, followed by their Marathi translations.[133]

The second edition is also more aggressively anti-Brahmanical. While the first edition was undeniably critical of Brahmanical manipulation of religious texts and their dominance of Hindu morality, the second edition's criticism of Brahman duplicity and the inconsistency in their words and deeds brims with rage and derision. In the first edition, the author laments: "caste distinction (*jatibhed*) is not only meaningless (*nirarthaka*) but it is also catastrophic (*anarthaka*). From it [*jatibhed*] emerged nuisance like malice and strife. The upper-castes (*varishta jatis*) get some respect from the poor, but besides that there are no gains…The Yavana, Mleccha etc are strangers, but the upper castes (*varkad jatiche lok*) treat the lower castes too as strangers, in fact they keep the

132 Ek Hindu, "Upodghata", *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd ed. (Mumbai: Ganpat Krishnaji Press, 1865), 4-8. Padwal cites the *Manav Dharmashastra Adhyaya* 8, *sholka* 317: " Wise or unwise the brahman is a great divinity; just as fire is a great divinity, whether applied to the sacrifice or not applied." Shloka 318, " Even is the place where corpses are burned the glowing purifier (fire) is not defiled, and when it has received the oblation in the sacrifice it is more magnified." Translation by E W Hopkins, *The Ordinances of Manu*, Trübner's Oriental Series y.(United Kingdom: Trübner & Company, 1884), 301.

133 He further signals that dicta of similar tone and tenor are found in, " the *Manusamhita Adhyaya* (Ad.) 1. *Sholka* (Sh.) 100, 101, 105, Ad 8. Sh. 112, Ad.9 Sh. 317 ...*Bramhavaivartapuran*a Ad.5, *Mahabharata Adiparva* Ad.18, and *Vanaparva* Ad. 199 and Padma Purankriyayugasagar…"

lower castes farther away than they keep the others (*parake*). Is there no end to this injustice?"[134]

In the second edition, the author replaces the above section with sharper remarks still. "The Brahmans in the present not only dabble in usury, but they also sell milk, butter, oil, seeds, grains, lacquer substances that they were prohibited from trading [by the *shastras*], and that jeopardized their Brahminess. Despite this the present-day Brahmans not only continue their trade, but they also conjure fake papers to plunder people's homes. From the shastric point of view, it appears that neither do they deserve the Brahman status, nor can they call themselves Brahmans. They are the lowest of the low, lower than the Chandala (untouchables)."[135]

By the second edition, Padwal also anchored his anti-Brahmanical politics to an attack on *varna sankara*. While the mixed-caste lineages of the Kshatriya and Vaishya castes surface fleetingly in the first edition, the concept of *varna sankara*, its historical context, and political implications are properly introduced only in the second edition.[136] Padwal said, "According to the texts (*granthadhar*) and common knowledge (*sadharan janasruti*), there are no pure lines of descent among the Vaishya and the Kshatriya, but in

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[134] Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar* , 1st edition. (Bombay : Printed and published by Messrs. Wassudeo Babaji & Co., booksellers, 1861), 31.

135 Padwal contends that: " Ideally, according to the shastras , the Brahmans ought to wake up at dawn and perform ablution and *sandhya* and surrender themselves in devotion all day long. They are expected to spend their time in performing activities useful for others and maintaining good conduct. But the picture is vastly different in the present. Brahmans barely take a bath once a day, these days many of them are clueless about *sandhya* and ask what is devotion? Their conduct is bad too. Greed has driven them away from deeds proper to the Brahmans … Several of them have surrendered to lust and spent their days in the arms of a Shudra concubine, or even worse, a *mleccha* whore!" *Ek Hindu*, *Jatibhed Viveksar* , 2nd ed, 35, 36. The figure of the *mleccha* recurs in Padwal's text, and is symptomatic of another transformation that is beginning around the this time—the consolidation of a 'Hindu' community.

136 In the first edition Padwal argues: "according to the texts (*grantha*) and common knowledge (*sadharan janasruti*), among the Vaishya and the Kshatriya there are no traces of the original lineages, from this it can be inferred that the Vishaya and the Kshatriyas of the recent times are a fabricated (*banau*) lot." Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar* , 1st ed, 31.

my opinion, out of the four varnas that the shastras mention, none of them are of pure descent, in recent times all castes including the Brahmans are born out of varna sankara."[137]

The assertion that the age of Kali is comprised only of two varnas—the Brahman and the Shudra—is an old one. Puranic stories arrive at this inference by way of the mythology of Parashurama—a Brahman livid with a vengeance, who eliminated Kshatriyas from the face of the earth. While debates erupting in the seventeenth century with the coronation of Shivaji have questioned the validity of the assertion that no Kshatriya lineages survived in the Kaliyuga, the status of the two extremes in the varna hierarchy—the Brahman and the Shudra, remained relatively unchallenged.[138] And so Padwal's argument that not only the Shudra castes but all four varnas, including the Brahmans, are of mixed caste origins struck at the very root of Brahman pride.

With the introduction of *varna sankara*, the second edition also pried further open a pandora's box of 'sources.' Padwal introduced to his readers the world of early-modern caste disputes and a field of liturgical and mythological caste scholarship. He engaged in detail with two key texts to illuminate the *varna sankara* origins of Brahmans in western India: the *Sahyadri Khanda,*[139] a section of the *Skanda Purana*; and the *Shudrakamalakara*, from the *Shudra dharma nibandha* genre.

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137 Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd ed., 35.
138 Madhav Deshpande, "Ksatriyas in the Kali Age? Gāgābhatta & His Opponents," in *Indo-Iranian Journal* 53, no. 2 (2010): 97.
139 While the *Skanda Purana* is dated to the ninth century C.E, the *Sahyadri Khanda* is a compilation of manuscripts produced at different points in time and in different regions. Madhav Deshpande notes that the text makes references to figures both from 345-370 C.E and also to those from the thirteenth century such as Madhavacharya, a key figure of the Vedanta school with Saraswat Brahman following. The disparate parts of the text were first compiled in 1877 by Gerson De Cunha who claimed to have organized fourteen manuscripts together in one place. Madhav Deshpande, "Ksatriyas in the Kali Age? Gāgābhatta & His Opponents,"97.

The use of *Sahyadri Khanda* is unsurprising because the text, dated latest to the thirteenth century, is a compilation of stories about how Brahman sub-castes local to the Konkan region fell from virtue because they engaged in "illicit" sexual relations, menial occupation, and failed to perform caste appropriate rituals.[140] Besides the *Sahyadri Khanda*, Padwal also invoked *Mumbai chi Bakhar* (A History of Mumbai) by Robert Murphy to prove the mixed-caste origins of the Palshe Brahmans.[141] Murphy, an Irish Indologist, argued that while the Palshe are recognized as Brahmans in Bombay, their history could be traced to a Shudra ruler called Bhimaraja. Padwal found support for Murphy's assertion in the *Skanda Purana* that attributes the Palshe an ancestry born from the union of a Golak Brahman woman and a Bhil man.[142]

Although one of the earliest, Padwal was not the only nineteenth-century social observer who mobilized *Sahyadri Khanda* to problematize the caste question. Ramchandra Bhikaji Gunjikar drew heavily on the text for his 1884 controversial work titled *Saraswati Mandal*. Himself a Shenvi (a scribal caste), Gunjikar composed *Saraswati Mandal* by assembling Puranic references, myths, legal correspondence to

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140 Rosalind O'Hanlon. "Performance in a World of Paper: Puranic Histories and Social Communication in Early Modern India." *Past & Present* 219, no. 1 (2013), 103. Citing the Ad. 82 of the *Sahyadri Khanda*, Padwal remarks that Karadhe Brahman, a Brahman sub-caste, were the descendants of Karashtra, a Brahman born to a widow outside of wedlock. Further he draws on the 81st Ad. of *Sahyadri Khanda* to emphasize that the Chitpawan Brahmans were descendants of fishermen residing in the Konkan littoral. The Devrukhe Brahmans, migrants to the Konkan from Devrashtra, were indulgent, ignorant of Vedic knowledge, consumed meat, were uncouth and lived near the mountains. This life of depravity led other Brahman sub-castes to declare the Devrukhe unfit for association. Ek Hindu , *Jatibhed Viveksar* , 2nd ed., 39, 40.

141 Ek Hindu , *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd ed.,39-44."Murphy Saheb" is probably a reference to Robert Xavier Murphy, who came to Bombay from Dublin as the first English teacher to the Bombay Native Education Society. In 1834 he began editing the newspaper *Bombay Gazette* and was briefly the editor of the newspaper, *The Bombay Times*. His essay on the history of Bombay published in *The Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society* gained traction among the first generation of English educated middle-class, like Govind Narayan Madgaonkar, who wrote *Mumbai che Varnana* or a Description of Mumbai in 1863. Ek Hindu , *Jatibhed Viveksar* 2nd Edition), 39-44.

142 Padwal notes that according to the *Manusmriti* the Golak Brahmans themselves were born to a widow. He notes that texts such as the *Smrityarthasara, Bramha Purana, Prayoga Parijata* claim that since Golak Brahmans have Brahman parentage they can practice rites meant for Brahmans. Ek Hindu , *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd ed., 42.

affirm the Brahman status of the Shenvi caste.[143] However, unlike Gunjikar, Padwal drew on the *Sahyadri Khanda* not to claim an upper-caste status but to demolish Brahmanical hubris by underlining their fallible origins.

Padwal did not let scribal and artisan castes, who yearned for upper-caste status, easily off the hook. The second edition of *Jatibhed Viveksar* drew upon *Shudrakamalakara* to assert the Shudra caste status of not only Shenvi and Sonar castes, which claimed Brahman status, but also of the Kayastha and Patane Prabhu, Bhatye, Pachkalshi, Maratha, Khatri, and Bhandari castes, all of which claimed the Kshatriya status. *Shudrakamalakara* (Kamalakara on the Shudra),[144]dated between 1610-1640 CE, is an authoritative legal digest that defined the duties and rituals appropriate for the Shudra castes. Padwal was likely drawn to its detailed discussion of various combinations of mixed-caste parentage of Shudra castes and ritual performances and professions befitting them.[145]

The *Shudrakamalakara* had earlier played a crucial role in the adjudication of caste disputes that began in the seventeenth century and continued to the middle of the

143 Nineteenth-century Shenvi intellectuals often drew on the *Sahyadri Khanda* since it glorified their past and was less indulgent towards the Chitpavan, Kirvanta and Karkhade Brahmans, the other competing Brahman castes of the Konkan region. The text spoke of them as newer Brahman groups with a depraved ancestral history. Narendra Wagle proposes that Shenvi intellectuals often argued that they were a branch of Bengali Brahmans who migrated to the western coast. This was a desirable association because Bengali Brahmans were perceived as the foremost native participants in colonial modernity, earliest members of the colonial bureaucracy, and home to 'new ideas' and reformist societies. See N. K. Wagle, "The History and Social Organization of the Gauda Sarasvata Brahmanas of the West Coast of India," Journal of Indian History 48 (1970),12. Also see, Frank, F. Conlon. "Caste by association: the Gauda Sarasvata Brahmana unification movement." *The Journal of Asian Studies* (1974): 351-365.

144 Translation by Vajpeyi. Ananya Vajpeyi, "The Sudra in History: From Scripture to Segregation." In *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*. Ed. by Bronner, McCrea and Cox. (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2015), 338.

145 Theodore Benke, *The Sudracarasiromani of Krsna Sesa: A 16th. Manual of Dharma for Śudras.* (PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2010); Ananya Vajpeyi, "The Sudra in History: From Scripture to Segregation," 337; Rosalind O' Hanlon, Gergely Hidas, and Csaba Kiss, "Discourses of Caste over the Longue Dureé: Gopinatha and Social Classification in India, ca. 1400-1900," *South Asian History and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2015):115.

nineteenth century. Home to the text was the illustrious Bhatta family of Banaras, which included the author and his nephew Gaga Bhatta—the Banaras jurist who affirmed Shivaji's Kshatriya status and consecrated him in 1674.[146] The text retained its importance through the nineteenth century.[147] Finally, in the colonial period, it was the only *Shudra dharma* text translated into Marathi and published by the Bombay-based Nirnaya Sagar Press first in 1880 and then in 1928.

The second edition of *Jatibhed Viveksar* also came with an appendix. It included a *nirnay patra* (judgement letter) from the Shankaracharya of Shringeri,[148] a 1788 letter signed by the Resident of Benares, Jonathan Duncan, affirming the *varna sankara* origins of both the Shenvi and Palshe Brahmans, as well as a letter signed by both the secretary and the undersecretary of Bombay presidency denying Brahman status to the Sonars of Bombay. The inclusion of this evidence, so to speak, made Padwal's assertions about *varna sankara* more difficult to refute.

Why "Ek Hindu"?

Through the treatise's multiple iterations and discussions about it, the author retained the pseudonym—*Ek Hindu*. The decision to adopt the pseudonym was

146 Theodore Benke, *The Sudracarasiromani of Krsna Sesa: A 16th. Manual of Dharma for Śudras*, 13. The Bhatta family was "home" to this text because, as Benke argues, the composition of the text was a collaborative family enterprise. Kamalkara Bhatta's text drew heavily on the works of his father Narayana and his cousin Nilakantha. The Bhatta family, originally from Paithan, the center of brahmanical religion and learning of the Deccan region, migrated to Banaras. Multiple generations of the Bhatta family were predominantly interested in demarcating the ritual life of the Shudras. Their participation in scholarly production of legal digests, adjudication of caste disputes, and in the case of Gaga Bhatta—a jurist who performed consecration of a "Shudra" King both facilitated and responded to the changing political conditions in the early modern period. Ananya Vajpeyi, "The Sudra in History", 339.

147Widely cited, *Shudrakamalakara* was also mentioned in the 1779 Brahman judgment letter that affirmed the Kshatriya status of the Kayastha in Western India. Moreover, In 1730 the Peshwa, the eighteen-century Maratha power of Pune, ordered the use of *Shudrakamalakara* as a directive for Shudra conduct in their newly extended empire in central India. O'Hanlon, Rosalind et al. "Discourses of Caste over the Longue Dureé", 115.

148 One of the four leaders of the Hindu monastic tradition of Advaita Vedanta.

deliberate. From the preface to the second edition, we can infer that the readers and reviewers of the text had requested him to reveal his name. In response, *Ek Hindu* stated, "If revealing my name adds further import to this book, then I surely will; but from what I know my name makes no difference to the import of this book, and so I continue to write the second edition under the name Ek Hindu."[149]

What did this pseudonym enable? Most of all, it allowed the author to present his critique as internal, as autocritique—distinguishing it from the criticisms by colonial officials and Christian missionaries. The internality of the critique marks the very way the treatise proceeds. It invoked canonical religious texts like the *Shastras* and the *Puranas* in order to critique the traditional notion of caste division. The autocritique bears the imprint of *Vajra Suchi*—a Buddhist text dated to the ninth century C.E and attributed to a Brahman convert to Buddhism called Ashwaghosha. Once a Brahman, Ashwaghosha used his access to the *Shastras* and the Sanskrit language to critique the caste order on the terrain of Brahmanical knowledge.[150] *Vajra Suchi*, though a Buddhist text, is an extraordinary commentary because it drew on Hindu religious texts in order to refute the principles underlying the caste order that are endemic to the Hindu scriptures themselves.

Padwal found this method of internal critique persuasive. This is clear from his response to the missionary critics of *Jatibhed Viveksar*, who decried the treatise for citing the Hindu *shastras* to argue against the caste order, and in the process retaining its allegiance to the religious texts.[151] "I thought it was a good idea to fight the adversary

149 Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar,* 2nd ed., 1.
150 Meera Vishwanathan, the author of "Cosmology and Critique," suggests that the attribution of Vajra Suchi to Ashvaghosha is disputed. See Meera Vishwanathan, "Cosmology and Critique" in *Insights and interventions: essays in honour of Uma Chakravarti*, ed. Kumkum Roy (Primus Book: New Delhi, 2011), 159.
151 Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd ed.

with their own weapons."[152] He argued that in a debate, it is essential to engage respectfully with the textual sources (*granthadhar*) of the adversary, especially when one's intention is to dismantle the opponent's premise. The aim of his essay, he added, is to "persuade the Hindu minds to see the disconnect between the representation of caste discrimination (*Jatibhed*) in the *Shastra* and that which prevails in the disposition of the people (*lokanchya pravruttit*)… [and] to share with my countrymen the outcomes of my investigations (*shodh*)."[153] This assumption that a debate is most effective when it draws on categories internal to the object of critique steered Padwal's dialogue.

The pseudonym also allowed Padwal to distance himself from criticisms such as those made by the Christian missionaries. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, in addition to the few educated natives who were passionately driven to cultivate a vernacular print culture in western India, Christian missionaries also contributed to the shaping of a new public realm in Maharashtra. Convinced that proselytization could best be achieved by publicly challenging the cultural authority of the Hindu worldview and religious scriptures, they made the most of the press, public pulpits, and open debates.[154] Bilingual and Marathi missionary periodicals like the *Dnyanodaya, Satyadipika* (The Light of Truth), and *Prabhodaya* (Lord's Mercy) advanced their evangelical project by denouncing Hinduism as a religion that deceived its followers into believing that caste—an ascribed status conferred by this-worldly social processes—was actually a divine prescription.

152 Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd ed., 2.
153 Ek Hindu, "Prastawana", *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd ed.
154 Rosalind O'Hanlon. *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India.* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). 50, 65.

Why was the author keen on highlighting his differences from the criticisms made by the missionary writers? Lower-caste efforts to criticize caste, question Brahman monopoly over knowledge, and disseminate education among the Shudras and the Ati-Shudras ('untouchables') were often ridiculed by many conservative social observers as a beguiled acceptance of the missionary bait leading towards conversion.

Although such ridicule exaggerated matters, there was some proximity between missionaries and lower-caste reformers. The first generation of lower-caste reformers shared a sense of affinity with the missionaries in western India on many counts. First, missionary schools opened their doors to pupils from castes that were traditionally prohibited from acquiring an education. Many lower-caste reformers, including Padwal, were educated in missionary schools, and some even looked up to missionary teachers and thinkers such as John Wilson and Murray Mitchell.[155] Second, before the rise of non-Brahman publications like *Dinabandhu* (Friend of the Poor) in 1877, native presses led by upper-caste editors refrained from publishing writings of lower-caste authors. But missionary newspapers like *Dnyanodaya* and *Satyadipika* were among very few publications that acknowledged lower-caste efforts such as Phule's endeavor to "set up schools for low caste Hindus."[156] Impelled by the desire to grab every opportunity to highlight dissenting voices and activities within the Hindu religion*, Satyadipika*, a missionary periodical from Pune, often published Phule's work, reported activities of the Satyashodhak Samaj, and published essays written by lower-caste students.[157]

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155 Rosalind O'Hanlon. *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, 64.
156 *Dnyanodaya*, August 15, 1853, 262-263.
157 Veena Naregal. *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere. Permanent Black Monographs*. Opus 1 Series. New Delhi: Permanent Black : Distributed by Orient Longman, 2001,160.

Padwal was surely aware of the close interface between social reformers and missionaries, and moreover, that the discontent of non-Brahman converts with canonical Hinduism emerged, to a large extent, from humiliating caste experiences. Baba Padmanji was one such non-Brahman convert and a prominent public figure in western India.[158] Padmanji, in his autobiography, wrote that the hypocrisy of the Brahmans, exploitation of the lower castes under the garb of religious rituals, and the Hindu religion's inability to converge morality and religious merit persuaded him to seek conversion.[159]

Although Padmanji and Padwal did not explicitly mention each other, they inhabited overlapping social networks. They were both close associates and friends of Jotirao Phule. Besides, with only a handful of educated non-Brahmans trying to dip their toes in the Marathi public realm, Padmanji and Padwal would have hardly been strangers. Besides the conversion of Padmanji, the furor caused by the excommunication of Shreepat Sheshadri for sharing a room with his convert brother Narayan Sheshadri in 1843 must have still been a recent memory for Padwal.[160]

By retaining the name *Ek Hindu*, Padwal differentiated himself from non-Brahman dissenters of caste who perceived conversion out of Hinduism as the only way to escape caste humiliation. Indeed, Padwal made explicit his disagreement with conversion as an act of dissent against the caste order. He argued that embracing ostracism and abandoning the family is not the only touchstone of breaking the fetters of caste (such, notably, would be the way that caste would be broken by those who

158 Padmaji, originally from Belgaum joined the institution of the free church of Scotland in Bombay in 1848. He converted to Christianity in 1854 and wrote several books comparing the Hinduism and Christianity.
159 Baba Padmanji. *Arunodaya. The Autobiography of Baba Padmanji, Containing a Description of His Former Life as a Hindu and the Causes Which Led to His Conversion.* (India: Bombay Tract and Book Society, 1888), 2.
160 See Kenneth Jones. *Religious controversy in British India.* (Albany: State University of New York, 1992), 25.

converted to Christianity). "[Caste can also be forsaken] by practicing good conduct (*sadachar*), abandoning untruth and by reposing faith in one Supreme Being, all the while inhabiting a domestic life."[161]

As the dissertation unfolds, we will see how Padwal's reformist ideas were ambiguous. While he retained close relations with radical figures like Jotirao, who also wholeheartedly endorsed his texts, Padwal took recourse to a form of social reform that challenged caste without necessarily dismantling Hindu religion. This form of social reform was itself one of the phenomena that constituted a modern Hinduism. This dimension of reform called for a religion that located morality and ethical conduct at its heart, one that assumed equality of all in relation to the divine, and a religion that advocated a transparent relationship between the scriptures and the individual. To put it differently, this reformist perspective called for the remaking of the Hindu religion.

Padwal's Intellectual Resources

What makes *Jatibhed Viveksar* noteworthy is also its careful curation of extracts from shastric texts and its identification of voices critical of caste from the Indic past. By drawing on both Buddhist criticism of a Brahmanical world-view as well as puranic myths, and subversive verses of lower-caste poet-saints from the thirteenth and the seventeenth century such as Saint Namdev and Tukaram, *Ek Hindu* shaped his narrative into a "device to tell a history of the new present moment".[162] This insurgent past allowed Padwal to both insert himself in a longer genealogy of anti-caste culture and elevate the

[161] Ek Hindu, "Prastawana", *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd ed.,3.
162 I draw this phrase from Novetzke's work. Novetzke. *Religion and Public Memory : A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 194.

present reformist moment as a necessary one by noting that the anti-caste efforts in the past "achieved little success" despite their significance.[163]

In the introduction to the text, the author mentioned that his arguments against caste division have roots in the *Vajra Suchi*. By incorporating a translation of the Buddhist text in *Jatibhed Viveksar*, the author incorporated *Vajra Suchi* in the constellation of modern anti-caste thought.[164] True to its name, a needle with a diamond tip, the *Vajra Suchi* mounted a clear and a sharp critique of caste division. The text questioned the legitimacy of the *Purusha Sukta,* a Vedic hymn explaining the birth of the varna order, by asking: if all four varna were born out of the body of the *Purusha* or the cosmic man, how is it that they belong to distinct varnas? The text anchored its arguments in the social and physical world that surrounds it in order to dismantle the justifications for varna differences.[165]

Padwal's use of *Vajra Suchi* as a reference point for his criticism of the caste order was certainly imaginative but not unusual. In the intellectual universe that he inhabited, the *Vajra Suchi* was already known to be an incendiary text. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a foremost proponent of reformed Hindu religion, drew on the *Vajra Suchi* to implicitly argue that critical egalitarian traditions cannot be exclusively traced to European knowledge and that they can be found in the Indic past too.

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163 He argues that, " Many sensible (s*udnya*) and thoughtful (*vicharvanta*) people have pondered over how to break caste pride (*jatyabhiman*) and unite with the Supreme Being, in their own unique ways they penned several texts and found distinct sects but they achieved little success; because, their followers and successors were neither perceptive nor persevering."

164 Also find a similar discussion in Rosalind O'Hanlon. *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, 226-227.

165 Meera Vishwanathan, "Cosmology and Critique", 16.

Roy had planned to successively publish and circulate Bengali translations of the *Vajra Suchi,* and the first issue of the project saw print in 1829. However, this venture came to a halt and was eventually abandoned.[166] A few years later, in the 1835 issue of *Transactions of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, B.H Hodgson, an ethnologist and the British Resident to Nepal, published an English translation of the Sanskrit text. In a letter addressed to the secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society written in 1829, Hodgson mentioned that from his "learned old Bauddha friend," he received a copy of a rare Sanskrit text that was full of "wit and wisdom."[167]

The circulation of the text in the colonial period is not the only route by which *Vajra Suchi* entered the Marathi public realm. Bahinabai, the seventeenth-century poet-saint, incorporated translations of the *Vajra Suchi* in eighteen of her *abhangas* (verses). Bahinabai faced bitter opposition from her husband for proclaiming that she had accepted the poet-saint Tukaram, a member of the lower castes, as her Guru. A Brahman woman accepting a subordinate position to a Shudra saint was perceived as going against the grain. Bahinabai questioned this presumption by invoking the *Vajra Suchi*: "who is a true Brahman? How can one call Tukaram, who has experienced the divine, who is an exemplar, a Shudra? Can we call ourselves Brahman because we were born into brahminhood?"[168]

By annotating *Jatibhed Viveksar* with excerpts from the Buddhist text Padwal was, in fact, locating himself in two intersecting intellectual traditions—the social

166 R.C Dhere, *Sanatan Sahitya ani Lokasahitya,* 117.
167 B.H Hodgson, *Transaction of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Transaction vol.III (London: Murray and Parbury, Allen & Co, 1835), 1-2.
168 R.C Dhere, *Sanatan Sahitya ani Lokasahitya* : *Kahi Anubandh*, 104.

reformist tradition that had galvanized the minds of an English-educated middle class in Bombay and the *warkari* tradition of Maharashtra.

The author locates the conflict between Buddhism and Vedantic Hinduism at the fore of an insurgent past: "professing that it is unjust to view our countrymen (*deshabandhav*) as lowly and defeated, some of our thoughtful (*sudnya*) and beneficent (*paropakari*) countrymen of the past, turned many to the path of Buddhism. They launched a trenchant attack on the Dharmashastra that justified the caste order. With more people embracing Buddhism, peace began to prevail in the country (*desh*) …there were signs that the country was returning to a state of prosperity. In the meantime, a pandit from the south by the name of Shankaracharya emerged to reinstate the authority of Vedic dharma. On convincing a few rulers to join hands with him, the Shankaracharya forcibly reestablished the rule of the Dharmashastra and an even stronger reinforcement of the caste order."[169] Padwal presents the Buddhist past as a time when virtues of equality, justice, brotherhood, deep thinking, and benevolence shaped social relations. For him, it was Buddhist ethics that enabled the rejection of the caste order.

In the text, Shankaracharya's dharmashastric moral framework emerged as an adversary to the democratic ethic of Buddhism. In Padwal's narrative, the Buddhists strove to change hearts by using thoughtful reason, dialogue, kindness, and consent, but the rise of Shankaracharya was marked by force and violence. This imagination of a Buddhist past, a time when ethics and good sense prevailed, and caste and dharmashastric rules were suspended, foreshadowed the author's desire for a reformist present.

169 Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd ed., 104.

Padwal's invocation of Buddhism, an Indic anti-Brahman tradition, stands out in its immediate milieu. In the last chapter, we saw how liberal reformers secularized caste by relegating it an inessential aspect of the Hindu religion. Caste, they argued, was a benign social order that has infused itself into the complex of the Hindu religion. By invoking an anti-Vedic tradition from within the Indian past, be it Buddhism or the heterodox warkari sampradaya, Padwal questions the divinity of caste not by bifurcating it into religious and the social realm, but by questioning the very Vedic foundations of what would later be termed as the complex of Hindu religion. And so, among his contemporary liberal reformers, Padwal's secularization of caste is unique. Its invocation of Buddhist and other anti-Vedic intellectual traditions allows it to foreground a critique that does not resort to the bifurcation of caste into its religious and social realms.

We see this in his invocation of ideas from the *warkari sampradaya* too. Although much of Padwal's caste commentary was moored in local caste relations, specifically drawing on Puranic stories and caste histories local to the Konkan littoral, his imagination of an insurgent anti-caste past was an expansive one, stretching across the subcontinent. Discussing the work of heterodox saints who departed from canonical Hindu religion, the author presents short sketches of the twelfth-century devotional saint Basava in Karnataka,[170] Nanak from fifteenth-century Lahore, and Ramananda, a fourteenth-century devotional saint who migrated to Banaras on departing away from his southern devotional sect on the question of caste hierarchy. Padwal then crosses into Bengal to mention Chaitanya—a Vaishnava poet-saint and returns back to Maratha country to

170 Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd ed., 104. Padwal records, "in the *shalivahan saka* of the tenth or the eleventh century in Tailangana a wise man by the name of Bhasavaswami came along. He noticed that members of the Shudra castes too demonstrated *guna* (virtues and attributes) but the caste order impeded their potential to flourish. And so, in order to break caste he established a Shaivaite sect."

mention the fourteenth-century Gorakhnath, a key figure of the Nath monastic order who also established the Kanphatya sect.[171]

While Padwal was among the earliest social observers to draw on the works of poet-saints in order to compose his caste critique, the linkages between socio-religious reformism and Bhakti ethics were already being explored by Scottish missionaries working in western India. Reverend Murray Mitchell of the Free Church of Scotland in Bombay likened Bhakti devotionalism in western India to Protestant Christian doctrines in his 1849 essay *The Life of Tukaram as given in Bhaktalilamrita of the Marathi Poet Mahipati.* Nineteenth-century missionaries constructed Bhakti tradition as a reformed version of Hinduism by finding moral parallels between Protestantism in their preclusion of priestly mediations and social inclusiveness.[172]

For Padwal, who inhabited the cultural field of social reform shaped by missionary writers and upper-caste thinkers alike, the juxtaposition of *warkari* morality and modern reformist ideas was not a stretch of imagination. In his 1864 letter to *Prabhakar*, Gopal Hari Deshmukh underlined how the *warkari sampradaya* transformed dominant social practices: "they [the warkaris] recognize themselves as belonging to one Vaishnava caste. The Brahmans and the Shudra both touch each other's feet."[173]

In another regard, too, it is unsurprising that a lower-caste intellectual like Padwal viewed himself as the modern heir to the 'anti-caste' tradition of the *warkari* saints. I say

171 Ibid.,108. Padwal informs us that Gorakhnath too advocated 'breaking' the caste order and practiced the yogic tradition to attain salvation. The author concludes his discussion by enlisting a pantheon of fifteenth and sixteenth century poet-saint from northern Indian subcontinent, " Ashananda, Kabir, Rohidas, Pipa, Surananda, Sukhananda, Bhavananda, Dhana, Saina, Mahananda and Paramanda", as key figures of an Indic anti-caste past.

172 Philip Constable, "Scottish Missionaries, 'Protestant Hinduism' and the Scottish Sense of Empire in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-century India." *Scottish Historical Review* 86, no. 2 (2007): 301.

173 Sadanand More, " Ekonisavya Shatakatil Warkari Sampradaya", in *Adhunikta ani Parampara* ed. Rajendra Vohra. (Pune: Pratima Prakashan, 2000), 30.

so because the social network of lower-caste professionals, writers, and activists that both Phule and Padwal inhabited had a firm grounding in the *warkari* culture. O'Hanlon's pioneering work on Phule mentions how multipronged conversations critical of Hindu orthodoxy electrified this social circle, which in turn contributed to laying the intellectual foundations of the Satyashodhak Samaj.[174]

For lower-caste writers like Padwal, who consolidated a new anti-caste discourse, a familiarity with the poetic labor of the *warkari sampradaya* offered an indigenous lens to understand the social world, and a public realm that the *warkari sampradaya* had constructed by way of devotional practices, performances, and music.[175]

Padwal was particularly drawn to the *abhangas*[176] of his namesake poet-saint, Tukaram, the seventeenth-century figure from Dehu near Pune. The stinging criticism of caste practices, untouchability, and empty ritualism of Tukaram's *abhangas* offered Padwal a clear line of continuity between his own inquiry and religious unorthodoxy in the past. However, while Padwal was one of the key figures to usher the *abhangas* of Tukaram from the realm of performances and popular religious memory into the publishing world, he was not the only one. Selections from Tukaram's *abhangas* were

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174 Sadanand More, " Ekonisavya Shatakatil Warkari Sampradaya", 42-43. Many of Phule's lower caste associates came from families that were steeped in the warkari tradition for generations. Tukaram Pinjan, one of Phule's associates an activist of the Samaj, recounted how a few friends including Phule would assemble at Pinjan's shop and have animated conversations about Kabir's poetry. These gatherings were attended by a Kabir panthi mendicant —Dnyangiri Bua, who would read Kabir's *beejak's* to the group and translate them into Marathi. Gyanoba Krishnaji Sasane, born in 1851, was one such acquaintance. Sansane's grandfather was a devout follower of Kabir, the fifteenth-century weaver-poet from north India. At a young age Sasane too was drawn to Bhakti and renounced home for a mendicant's life. Only after three years, when he renounced his mendicancy and embraced the temporal world, did he meet Phule. Prior to engaging in the activities of the Satyashodhak Samaj Krishnarao Bhalekar, a young associate of Phule, was thoroughly accultured in the warkari culture by his family. He developed an astute critique of Brahmanism by way of his conversations with Jangali Maharaj, who recited and interpreted Tukaram's *abhanga.* O'Hanlon, *Caste Conflict and Ideology*, 28-29.
175 Christian Novetzke, "Bhakti and Its Public." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 3 (2007): 255-72.
176 *Abhanga* is poetry composed in verse form by warkari saints for the deity Vitthala. *Abhanga* in Marathi literally means 'unbroken'. Christian Lee Novetzke. *Religion and Public Memory*, 275.

first published in Marathi by Parshuram Tatya Godbole, the chief translator of the British government in Bombay, as a part of School Anthology in 1854.[177]

Besides contextualizing a selection of Tukaram's *abhanga* in *Jatibhed Viveksar* and locating the seventeenth-century iconoclast-poet in the linear history of anti-caste past, in 1889, Padwal published a two-volume compilation of Sant Tukaram's work. Sadanand More, a scholar of the *warkari sampradaya* and Tukaram's opus, in particular, mentions that Padwal travelled across the villages of Maharashtra and compiled over eight thousand manuscripts that bore the signature "says Tuka."[178] Thus, heterodox devotional poetry made a segue into the world of print through the intertwined channels of reform and revivalism, and Padwal was a key figure in this process.

Padwal's construction of a literary canon by inlaying a mosaic of *warkari* poetry and popular oral forms such as the *lavani* was an act of careful curation. I call this "careful literary curation" because he selectively cited works of Brahman poet-saints such as the thirteenth-century saint Dnyaneshwar and Ramadas from the seventeenth century as voices of dissent against caste practices. They, too, criticized the "empty rituals" and rules of *Ovale-Sovale* (pure and mundane) that structured the Hindu social world. But these works constituted only one dimension of their immense corpus; they did not exclusively inhabit the subversive register.

177 Digambar Balkrishna Mokashi,, and Philip C. Engblom. *Palkhi, an Indian Pilgrimage.* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 46. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the seventeenth-century saint's work exploded in the publishing world. In the early 1860s, while Padwal contextualized a selection of Tukaram's *abhanga* in *Jatibhed Viveksar* and located the seventeenth century iconoclast-poet in the linear history of anti-caste Indian past, Madhav Chandroba Dukle included Tukaram's *abhanga* in his anthology of 'classical Marathi poetry' entitled *Sarvasangrahasara.*

178 Possibly all the *abhangas* were not authored by the seventeenth-century saint and were countersigned by later poets, but the urgency to embark onto the project underlines its centrality in Tukaram Padwal's historical context. Sadanand More, " Ekonisavya Shatakatil Warkari Sampradaya", 39.

C.L Novetzke refers to this curious division of the Brahman figure into one that is critical of caste orthodoxy, but simultaneously seeks to maintain his Brahman privilege as the "Brahman-double."[179] By selectively quoting compositions that deployed the voice of caste criticism from among the sea of diverse and often contradictory works of Brahman poets, Padwal splits off one portion of this Brahman double and constructs a seamless, uninterrupted anti-caste tradition.

Recasting a new Shudra identity

Padwal's inquiry is crucial to a genealogical mapping of the anti-caste discourse also because it is one of the first to turn the concept of *varna sankara* against the upper caste. This concept gained prominence after the emergence of the genre of *Shudra Dharma Nibandha* (essays on the duty of the Shudra) between the fourteenth and the seventeenth century. The genre dealt with various permutation-combinations of *varna sankara* parentage responsible for the birth of Shudra progeny, prescribed the appropriate ritual life and social conduct for the Shudra, and suggested occupations befitting them.[180]

Although an early discussion of *varna sankara* is found in *Manav dharma shastra*, a religio-juridical text composed in the first millennium CE, the concept entered wider orbits of circulation with Gopinatha's *Jativiveka* (Discernment of Castes), one of the earliest texts from the *Shudra Dharma Nibandha* genre. The authoritative framework of *varna sankara* allowed Gopinatha, a fourteenth-century Brahman scholar from western

179 Christian Lee Novetzke, "The Brahmin double: the Brahminical construction of anti-Brahminism and anti-caste sentiment in the religious cultures of precolonial Maharashtra." *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2011): 246-247.

180 Out of the forty-nine texts on *Shudra dharma* that we know of today, Sesakrishna's *Shudracharasiromani* dated to 1581 CE, Kamalakarabhatta's *Shudrakamalakara* approximately composed between 1610-1640 CE and Gagabhatta's *nibandha* titled, '*Sudradharmodyota*' attributed to the years between 1640 and 1700 CE are some of the prominent ones. See Theodore Benke "The Śūdrācāraśiromani of Krsna Sesa: A 16th. Manual of Dharma for Śūdras." and Ananya Vajpeyi, "The Shudra in History from Scripture to Segregation."

India, to make sense of local caste dynamics in the Maratha country. Disappointed by the fact that Sanskrit texts and the *Dharmashastra* provide only a schematic framework to understand the social world, he composed a detailed guide to the mixed castes in the Maratha country. While the author worked with dharmashastric categories, he simultaneously used vernacular equivalents for Sanskrit caste names, specified their parentage, and proper occupation and ritual practices befitting them.[181] With the writing of the *Jativiveka*, Gopinatha made local Shudra service communities legible in the dharmashastric discourse.

Jativiveka and key *Shudra Dharma* texts continued to be relevant well into the colonial period.[182] British administrators and missionaries keen on understanding Hindu law, and social organization in western India too turned to these texts.[183] Although Padwal did not mention Gopinatha's *Jativiveka*, the similarity of the titles suggests that the author could be implicitly situating his work as a counter-discourse to the *Shudra Dharma Nibandha* tradition.[184]

Why engage with the concept of *varna sankara*? Canonical religious texts characterized the 'Shudra' as a social status generated by a 'failing'—be it the moral failure of inter-varna marriages or the Shudra as originally *dwija* (upper-caste) varna, who fell to Shudradom failing to follow varna appropriate rituals. *Shudra dharma*

181 Rosalind O'Hanlon et al. "Discourses of caste over the longue durée: Gopīnātha and social classification in India, ca. 1400–1900."103-104.
182 Early modern texts produced by the scholarly Brahman households of Benares, such as the Sesa and the Bhatta family relied heavily on Gopinatha's interpretation of the social world. See Rosalind O'Hanlon et al. "Discourses of caste over the longue durée: Gopīnātha and social classification in India,"114-15.
183 Rosalind O'Hanlon et al. "Discourses of caste over the longue durée: Gopīnātha and social classification in India ca. 1400–1900." and Theodore Benke "The Śūdrācāraśiromani of Krsna Sesa.. A 16th. Manual of Dharma for Śūdras." (, 298. John Wilson, a prominent missionary from the Free Church of Scotland, too draws on *Jativiveka* in his 1877 text titled *Indian Caste.*
184 Rosalind O'Hanlon et al. "Discourses of caste over the longue durée: Gopīnātha and social classification in India ca. 1400–1900."116.

nibandha portrayed the Shudra as a figure saturated by negative meaning. The *Shudrasiromani*, the sixteenth-century *nibandha* detailing *Shudra Dharma*, referred to the Shudra as *apasada,* meaning low-born.[185] Krishnesana, the author of *Sudrasiromani*, cited the *Manusmriti* as he made this association. Similarly, historian Ananya Vajpeyi suggests that the word "Shudra" is constituted by the union of two Sanskrit verbal roots, namely *suc, soka* meaning grief, and *adravana,* which means running or falling. Grammatically put together, the Shudra, Vajpeyi argues, is a mournful figure that runs about in grief on hearing words of contempt against them (*anadarasravana*).[186]

Although negligence towards the ritual observations suitable to one's varna status could be classified as an act of *varna sankara*, inter-varna marriages and 'illicit' sexual unions were considered to be the foremost reasons for the confusion of the social order.[187] The confusion of the varnas was not an absolute rejection of inter-varna marriages and their progeny. *Anuloma* (with the grain) marriage alliances were reluctantly accepted in the varna order because they involved women marrying upwards, that is into varna that has a higher status. But, *pratiloma* (against the grain) marriages, in which women of higher varna marry into a varna lower than their own, were considered an absolute abomination.[188]

Padwal understood that if the figure of the Shudra was to be extracted from its textual saturation by negative meanings, then the dominant notion of *varna sankara* or intermixing of varna has to be upended. He argued that 'in the past' the meaning of *varna*

185 Theodore Benke "The Śūdrācāraśiromani of Krsna Sesa. A 16th. Manual of Dharma for Śūdras, " 93.
186 Ananya Vajpeyi, *The Shudra in History from Scripture to Segregation*, 337-338.
187 Rosalind O'Hanlon et al. "Discourses of caste over the longue durée: Gopīnātha and social classification in India, ca. 1400–1900." 104 and 105.
188 Ibid.,

sankara was vastly different from its present sense of the confusion or intermixing of the varna. Citing the *Bhagwat Purana,* Padwal posited that in the past, when the varna order was a benign four-fold division of occupation and conduct, *varna sankara* meant the failure of correspondence between varna status and its coterminous occupation. *Sankara*, or confusion, in the erstwhile idea of varna order, began to arise when those in the position of power, the Brahmans, increasingly practiced conduct that violated their varna status, and yet continued to enjoy a superior status. By contrast, despite their consistent virtuous behavior, the members of the fourth varna found themselves fixed to their 'lowly status.' The rigidity that the varna order acquired in the age of *Kali,* where the varna status remained static, despite the changes in the corresponding practice of occupation, conduct, and virtues, is called *varna sankara*.[189]

For Padwal, the search for the true meaning of *varna sankara* was a political project. He argued that the original meaning of *varna sankara* was deliberately modified over time by Brahmans, who distorted original religious texts that describe the true varna order and inserted fabricated statements in their successive versions. They changed the older meaning of *varna sankara* so that the privileges of the Brahman castes could be retained unconditionally. Padwal insinuated that the latter-day Brahmans buried their fabulations into new renditions of religio-legal texts and then claimed divine origins for these texts.

In other words, Padwal argued that in the past, varna status was not determined at birth and could be gained or lost by the practice of virtues, conduct, and occupations

189 Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd ed., 31.

proper to each varna status. This further allowed him to argue that since these three variables were not divinely ordained, they were amenable to change and could be modified through conscious self-fashioning. Through these moves, Padwal untangled caste from the idea of the community and located it also in the realm of the individual. He pushed the idea that, in the past, caste was a matter of choice and conscious decision-making; that it was only in the present that it had been transformed into a repressive, inflexible imposition through Brahman intervention.

Padwal's views on the flexibility of the varna order in the past were shared by his contemporary liberal polemicists, who too were unwilling to relinquish the moral code of the caste order but were committed to modernize the social hierarchy. They naturalized varna distinction by comparing it to a division based on labor and virtues. But the way Padwal went about it, by ascribing new meaning to *varna sankara*, was unnerving to his upper-caste interlocutors. By so interpreting *varna sankara*, he refused to recognize the middle castes' pursuit for a *dwija* status as an act of 'upward' mobility. Now the Shudra was not just a varna status associated with loss of virtue and ignorance. Instead, he spoke of Shudras in terms of their artisanal skills, productive labor, implements, and creativity.

In order to disengage varna order from the idea of lineage and birth, Padwal cites a conversation in the Mahabharata between Yudhishthira and Nahusha, a king cursed by a sage to live the life of a serpent. "Nahusha asks: 'is caste determined by birth or by conduct?' Yudhishthira clarifies that, 'caste can no longer be determined by birth or lineage because of varna sankara… because men from all varnas bear children from women of all other varnas. [And that] speech, sexual desire, birth and death are

experienced by people of all castes alike'."[190] This conversation allowed Padwal to assert that, "out of the four original varna that the shastras speak of … in the present, none of the varna exist. All of them are varna sankara".[191]

By asserting that not only the Shudra but people of all castes have *varna sankara* origins, Padwal emphasized that the purity of lineage cannot be a point of differentiation between the Shudra and the Brahman varna in the present. In fact, if anything, it is a point of equality between the two. Padwal explained his argument by offering a list of *rishi's* (sages) who were originally born into the Shudra or the Ati-shudra caste status, but by way of their excellent conduct, learning and scholarship achieved the superior status of Brahman ascetics. He gives some examples: "Valmiki rishi was born into the Koli (fisherman) caste, Sankya rishi, Kabilar and Parashar rishi were Ati-Shudra at birth, and Kaundinya and Dirghatam rishi were born out of wedlock."

The argument that most *rishis* were born out of a *varna sankara* union weakens the Brahman claim to purity of lineage because it upends the Brahmanical assumption that all Brahmans are descendants of the eight 'original men' or *rishis*. These families of descent or clans, named after the first rishis are called *gotras*. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* propounds that castes belonging to Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya varna could be traced back to one of these eight *rishis* by way of an unbroken patrilineal bond of descent. By implication, *Jatibhed Viveksar's* emphasis on the *varna sankara* birth of the sages highlights the mixed caste origin of Brahmans who claimed to be of pure descent. Padwal's argument that all men at birth are equal is significant because, in this

190 Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd ed., 15-16.
191 Ibid.,

case, the claim to equality between the Shudra and the Brahman are rooted in their equal failure to maintain purity of lineage. Thus, the figure of the Shudra and the Brahman are equal in their human condition of being 'flawed and fallible.'

Another way that Padwal argued for the equality of the Shudra and the Brahman was by drawing on the *Bhagwat Purana* to suggest that people across all varna, at birth, enter the world first as Shudra, but it is the rituals performed after the child's birth that order them into the varna of their parents. He argued: "the scriptures prescribe that for a newborn, caste rituals have to be performed before the umbilical cord is severed. Until then, according to the Vedas, the child is considered to be a Shudra."[192] Padwal used this justification in order to establish that in the past, neither was caste determined by birth nor did it get crystallized at the very instant a child was born. Padwal's emphasis on the equality at birth between the Shudra and the upper castes is significant because it offers a fitting counterpoint to the notion of hierarchy at birth espoused by the Brahmanical theory of varna. By emphasizing that caste status can be traced to rituals performed by human actors, i.e., the social and political processes that unfold in the material world, Padwal argued that the transformation of caste hierarchy, too, could be sought in the same this-worldly realm.

Nevertheless, the question remains: who were the Shudra if they were not born into the fourth varna? Padwal's answer to this question provides the template for later and more famous answers in the twentieth century, such as that associated with Ambedkar. Padwal places the origin within a story of political conflict: "when the Aryans (*arya loka*) took hold of this land from its original inhabitants (*mulche loka*), the conquerors kept the

192 Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd ed., 16.

vanquished people at a distance, regarded them as lowly, and prohibited their access to the Vedas and knowledge (*vidya*). With subsequent political depredation, the subordinated people, reduced to indigence and ignorance, finally surrendered to the Aryan people (the ancestors of Brahmans, Kshatriya, and the Vaishya) and resigned to a life of servitude. This was when the makers of the varna order began to call the vanquished people the "Shudra."[193]

If the Shudra were the vanquished original inhabitants, how did they get entangled into the concept of *varna sankara*? Padwal argued that the subordination of the Shudra, triggered by the event of the Aryan invasion, was further compounded by the Brahman's rendering of the event: "…what's more, the writers of the *Dharmshastra* made a dreadful move! They lumped both the vanquished original inhabitants and the progeny born out of illicit sexual relations into the category of the Shudra".[194] This, Padwal implied, led to the Shudra, the vanquished inhabitants, being falsely accused of having born out of "illicit" sexual relations.

Why mobilize the Aryan invasion narrative? The dominant meaning of *varna sankara*, encompasses the whole range of sexual unions that deviated from the 'ideal' conjugal practice of endogamy. In addition to inter-varna marriages, *varna sankara* also included progeny born out of 'illicit' and non-conjugal sexual unions. In this light, Padwal wrested the Shudra from the complex of *varna sankara*. He is concerned to offer readers a new figure of the Shudra, one that is untainted by origins in "dubious sexual morality." The narrative of Aryan conquest allowed Padwal to argue that the suffering of

193 Ibid., 24-25.
194 Ibid., 25.

the Shudra can be traced to a political conflict in the past, and not to the failure of their ancestors' morality.

Padwal would likely have encountered the Aryan invasion narrative through the vehement debates taking place around the time amongst European ethnologists on the question of what constituted the Aryan identity. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was accepted as incontrovertible truth that a collision between two opposed groups, the Aryans from central Asia and the original inhabitants of the subcontinent, was the precipitating event of Indian civilization.[195]

Working on translating the *Rig-veda* between 1849-1874, Max Muller concluded that the castes belonging to the first three varnas (the Brahmans, Kshatriya, and the Vaishya) are the descendants of Aryan tribes. But, the Shudra and the Ati-shudra castes belonged to the *anarya* (non-aryan) or the *dasa* (servant) varna and were the aborigines of the subcontinent.[196] The Aryan invasion theory, used by Max Muller to explain the caste order, offered nineteenth-century reformers objective information about the this-worldly origins of the varna order, which they, in turn, used to fortify their arguments against conservative social commentators.[197]

Among those inspired by the works of Wilson and Max Muller were missionaries like John Muir and John Wilson. Muir, a Sanskrit scholar and an Indologist, wrote a multivolume project entitled *Original Sanskrit Texts*. O'Hanlon suggests that Muir's work, written in a manner accessible to the curious educated layman, popularized the

195 Thomas R. Trautmann. *Aryans and British India.* (University of California: 1997), 197.
196 *Ibid.*, 196-197.
197 Rosalind O'Hanlon. *Caste, conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India,* 59.

Aryan invasion narrative.[198] John Wilson, the author of *India Three Thousand Years Ago* published in 1858, stated that the Brahmans were descendants of invaders, who seized resources from the original inhabitants, the Shudras, the missionaries offered a narrative of loss, deceit, and historical exploitation. The suggestion that the Aryans entered the subcontinent wielding Sanskrit texts implied three things: one, the Hindu religious texts are an alien imposition on the inhabitants—the lower-castes and the "untouchables"; two, the Shudras, historically, have nothing in common with the upper castes; three, the Hindus were never a homogenous religious community. Padwal, among other non-Brahman writers, was convinced by John Wilson's proposition. By representing Brahmans as outsiders, who seized what is not rightfully theirs, Padwal appropriated Wilson's argument for his own agenda—that of challenging the Brahman caste's legitimacy as social and religious leaders of the Hindu religion.

Padwal's endeavor to transform the meanings associated with the word Shudra is noteworthy. The saturation of the word Shudra with negative connotations, as the fallen people, defined by the lack of knowledge, and people with impure ancestry, was received as common sense until the nineteenth century. We see this infused in the caste critique of middle-class liberal reformists too. Although they secularized caste, they left the meanings corresponding to the four-varna categories untouched. Padwal too agreed that varna categories in the past could have been a flexible division based on occupation or

198 Ibid.,58, 79. One of the earliest references to the Aryan conquest theory appears in the March 15, 1855 issue of *Dnyanodaya*. The letter to the editor historically traces the domination of the Brahman and the disabilities experienced by the lower-caste in the present to the Aryan invasion in the past. The letter emphasizes that before the onslaught of the Aryans, the Mahars and the Mangs (two 'untouchable' castes in Maharashtra) were the dominant people of this land. The Aryans subjugated the original inhabitants by relegating to them a menial status in the caste order and excluding them from the realms of knowledge production.

virtue, but he refused to retain the slew of negative meanings attached to the Shudra figure. And he did so ingeniously. Making no claims to 'pure caste ancestry' for the Shudra, Padwal, instead, equated the Brahman and the Shudra for their mixed caste lineage.

Padwal's move to affirm the mixed caste ancestry of the Shudra castes was crucial because it departed from a version of caste conflict that involved upwardly-mobile artisan and scribal castes contesting their 'mixed' lineage. To my knowledge, Padwal was the first Shudra author to persuade these artisan and scribal castes to not only wholeheartedly embrace their Shudra status, but do so with pride.

The After-life of the Shudra

Padwal's reconstruction of the figure of the Shudra was not without contradictions. On the one hand, he traced the schism between the first three varnas and the Shudras to a difference of racial stock and culture. But on the other hand, he also complicated the *dwija*-Shudra binary by contending that the Sonars (goldsmith caste), Lohars (blacksmith caste) and Sutars (carpenter caste) were erstwhile Kshatriyas who turned to artisanship in a time of crisis and, as a result, lost their varna status.[199] This narrative from the *Sahyadri Khanda* allowed him to claim that the Sonars shared circumstances of their origin with the Sutars and Lohars—two artisan castes commonly known to belong to the Shudra varna. How can the Shudra-artisan belong to the non-Aryan aboriginal inhabitants and

199 The author draws on the *Sahyadri Khanda.* The Puranic myth traces the origin of artisan castes to clash between Parashurama, a Brahman and the Kshatriyas. Sworn to wipe out all the Kshatriya from the face of the earth, Parashurama begins his search for Kshatriya households. On hearing of his intentions, some Kshatriya families abandon their homes and take refuge in sage Vishwakarma's hermitage. The sage decides to protect the Kshatriya families by gathering all their weapons of war and recasting them into tools of workmanship. On arriving at the hermitage Parashusrama encounters a group of 'artisans' engrossed in working with their tools. Convinced that he has truly eliminated all the Kshatriyas, Parashurama leaves the hermitage and spares the lives of the Kshatriyas posturing as artisans.

also have Kshatriya lineage? This divergence is especially pronounced because, according to the Aryan migration narrative that is espoused by Padwal, too, the Kshatriya belong to the Aryan stock.

A possible resolution of this incongruity can be found in Jotirao Phule's conceptualization of the Shudra in his 1873 treatise titled *Gulamgiri* (Slavery). Phule, who had surely read Padwal's text, assigned a Kshatriya past to the Shudra and the Ati-shudra, but the Kshatriya in Phule's conception was not of the Aryan stock. In fact, although Phule, like Padwal, demonstrated the emergence of the Shudra from the conflict between Parashurama and the Kshatriya, he did not attribute an upper-caste status to the Kshatriya. Phule, instead, contended that the Kshatriya derived their name from the word *kshetria* meaning "the people of this land".[200]

While Phule drew on the Aryan invasion framework, he modified it to explain the social conditions that led to the formation of the Shudra and the Ati-Shudra castes. On emerging victorious in the battle, the Arya-Brahmans imposed rules of untouchability especially against the most valiant warriors among the *kshetria* people. While the warriors segregated as "untouchables" further went on to form the Ati-Shudra communities, the remaining *kshetria* consolidated themselves into the present-day Shudra castes. In his view the Brahmanical imposition of untouchability drove a wedge between the *kshetria* peoples. Phule laments that, unaware that 'all Shudras belong to the same fraternity,' the Shudra who 'proudly' call themselves Mali (gardener caste), Kunbi (cultivator caste) Sonar, Shimpi (tailor caste), Lohar (blacksmiths), and Sutar (carpenters)

200 Jotirao Phule. *Selected writings of Jotirao Phule*, (Ed.) by GP Deshpande. (*New Delhi, Leftword:* 2002), 28.

practice untouchability against the Mahars and Mangs 'under the influence of the Brahmans.'[201]

Doubtless, by historically tracing a fraternal relationship between the figure of the Shudra and the Ati-Shudra (ex-untouchables), Phule infused the non-Brahman anti-caste movement with a radical potential. But what is more significant is the imbrication of both—the figures of the Shudra and the Ati-Shudra—into the category of the Kshatriya. In a political climate rife with caste conflict between the Maratha royalty and the Brahmans over upper-caste Kshatriya status, Padwal's tracing of a Kshatriya past for the Shudra-artisan castes and Phule's reimagining of the Kshatriya not as an upper-caste Aryan varna but an aboriginal community, challenged the affluent Shudra castes' desire to acquire rights to Vedic rituals exclusively meant for the first three varna.

While Padwal's comprehensive category of the Shudra, a broad alliance of Shudra artisan and peasant castes, found wider routes of circulation in nineteenth-century anti-caste politics, Phule's engagement further broadened the repertoire of non-Brahman politics by bringing the categories of the Shudra and the Ati-Shudra together.

However, towards the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the emphatic use of the Shudra category was superseded by the categories of *bramhanetar* (all but the Brahmans) and Maratha, especially in newspapers that endorsed non-Brahman politics like the *Dina Bandhu* (Friend of the Poor). Narayan Meghaji Lokhande, a prominent lower-caste leader and the editor of *Dina Bandhu* (1877-1900), deployed the term Maratha to describe the numerous lower castes that were previously identified as Shudra by Padwal and Phule.

201 Jotirao Phule. *Selected writings of Jotirao Phule*, 45, 169.

Historically, the term Maratha has been resistant to a fixed meaning. Since the early-modern period, the category has come to be identified on the one hand, with a warrior heritage, a geographically rooted military ethos, a linguistic identity of Marathi speakers, and a precolonial political formation exemplified by the leadership of Shivaji; and on the other hand, it has also been identified with an elite, closely bound caste formation.[202]

Narayan Meghaji Lokhande's consistent efforts to identify the content of the term Maratha and who could be included in it was a recognition of the multiple ways in which the social category could be imagined. His articles in *Dina Bandhu* chastised both the Brahmans for identifying themselves as Marathas (because they belonged to the Marathi-speaking region of the subcontinent) as well as the aristocratic middle-castes who sought to include only those clans who could claim an upper-caste Kshatriya status. He insisted on including lower-caste Kunbi cultivators, artisan castes, and other agrarian lower-castes within the category.[203]

Lokhande's notion of the Maratha was shaped by an astute understanding of contemporary nationalist and anti-brahman politics. By excluding the Brahmans he wrested the Maratha identity from Brahman nationalists who claimed to be the rightful political heirs of the early modern Maratha exemplar—Shivaji. For instance, in 1890, Brahman conservative-nationalists like B.G Tilak likened contemporary anticolonial struggles against the British Empire to Shivaji's consolidation of the Maratha Empire in

202 Prachi Deshpande. "Caste as Maratha : Social Categories, Colonial Policy and Identity in Early." *The Indian Economic and Social History Review, Sage* 41 (1 (2004)): 7-9.
203 Ibid., 15 and Rosalind O'Hanlon. *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, 246. In the June 3, 1894 issue of *Dina Bandhu,* Lokhande contended that Brahmans cannot be included in the category of the Marathas because 'their surnames, ways and manners, habits and customs are different from the remaining (*itar*) castes'.

the face of Mughal power.[204] By including the lower-caste artisan, peasant, and laboring communities within the category of the Maratha, Lokhande demonstrated the awareness that the non-Brahman movement was divided between one that coalesced around the laboring castes and the other that asserted an Aryan-Kshatriya identity.[205]

At the turn of the twentieth century, an increasingly bitter confrontation between the aristocratic Maratha rulers and the Brahmans of the Kolhapur princely state further dynamized non-Brahman politics in western India. The discontent between the Kolhapur royalty, Chatrapati Shahu, and the Brahmans of Kolhapur had begun to brew before the acquisition of the throne in 1894, and it quickly turned acrimonious by 1900. Furious on finding out that the chief royal priest or the *Rajaopadhyaya* was performing rituals meant for the Shudra varna for the royal family, Shahu demanded that his lineage be recognized as one belonging to the Kshatriya varna.[206] The *Rajopadhyaya* refused. As a result, his *inam* lands (land grant) and the hereditary property of the Kolhapur Shankaracharya (who supported the former) were confiscated by the Kolhapur court.

This incident, which came to be known as the Vedokta controversy, set in motion the Kolhapur royalty's anti-Brahman tirade. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Shahu Maharaj made provisions for reserving at least half of the administrative posts for members of the non-Brahman castes and donated land and grants to encourage education

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204 Prachi Deshpande. "Caste as Maratha", 14.

205Rosalind O' Hanlon, " Issue of widowhood in colonial western India". In *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, ed. Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (University of California Press: 1992), 71.

206 The royal priest's refusal to undergo a self-purificatory bath in order to perform religious rites for the Kolhapur royalty caught the latter by surprise. The priest explained that the performance of puranic rituals, meant for the Shudra line of descendants, did not require the priest to undergo purification. Incensed by the insult, Shahu ordered for all rituals in the Kolhapur palace to follow Vedokta rite, meant for upper-caste Kshatriya lineages. See Ian Copland, "The Maharaja of Kolhapur and the Non-Brahmin Movement 1902-10." *Modern Asian Studies* 7, no. 2 (1973), 217.

among the non-Brahman castes.[207] Moreover, he also joined hands with the British government to suppress anticolonial activities in Kolhapur, which were predominantly spearheaded by Brahmans.[208] Shahu's policy invoked trenchant criticism both from the Brahmans in Kolhapur, as well as their caste brethren in Bombay and Pune who controlled the reigns of the vernacular publishing world.[209] But, this politically charged anti-Brahman environment galvanized a new demographic of non-aristocratic lower-caste youth that had found employment and education under Shahu's patronage.

The wandering activists of the Satyashodhak Samaj brought their own version of non-Brahman discourse in conversation with Shahu's Vedokta politics. The new generation of non-aristocratic Marathas now found a new vocabulary that was rooted in their own lifeworlds.[210] In 1911, non-Brahman employees of the Kolhapur state—Bhaskarrao Jadhav, A.B Latthe, and M.D Dongre, organized the first Satyashodhak Samaj Conference of Kolhapur. Influenced by the Samaj, several Kunbi and non-aristocratic Maratha families across the state performed curious ritual ceremonies that mixed satyashodhak tradition of officiating marriages without the Brahman priests and the Vedokta practice of wearing the sacred thread (a ritual dominantly meant only for the first three varnas). While Shahu Maharaj shrank from openly supporting the politics of

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207 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society : The Non Brahman Movement in Western India, 1873 to 1930*, (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976) ,128. Between 1901 to 1920 Chatrapati Shahu built hostels for non-Brahman students from communities such as: Jain, Maratha, Muslim, Lingayat, Namdev-shimpi, Sonar, Saraswat, Kayastha Prabhu and the 'untouchables'.

208 Ian Copland, "The Maharaja of Kolhapur and the Non-Brahmin Movement 1902-10," 221. Professor Bijapurkar of Rajaram college in Kolhapur was arrested for sedition. Shahu also targeted the Shivaji club, a youth outfit galvanized by the writings of Tilak and mostly enjoyed Brahman participation.

209 *Samartha*, a Brahman mouth-piece published in Kolhapur reported the Shahu's political move as a "reign of terror" and an attempt to " put a whole community under ban". *Samartha*, 8 August 1906, as cited in Copland, "The Maharaja of Kolhapur and the Non-Brahmin Movement 1902-10, "218.

210 Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society* ,128. Bhaskarrao Jadhav, named his newspaper *Maratha Dinabandhu*, perhaps after the popular Satyashodhak publication *Dina Bandhu*

the Satyashodhak Samaj, his patronage sheltered the flourishing of a radical non-Brahman politics inspired by the satyashodhak tradition.[211]

The Satyashodhak Samaj's ethical imperative, its notion of democracy in a caste society, coupled with the growing legitimacy of global egalitarian politics were responsible for the gradual infusion of liberal elements into Shahu's caste conservatism. The change in his politics was palpable. At the turn of the century, Shahu's anti-Brahman rhetoric was fueled by the need to avenge the insult of his lineage and the urgency to set the record straight that the royal family had Aryan-Kshatriya ancestry. His work in the field of education too was rooted in the culture of aristocratic patronage that encouraged social progress of distinct castes without questioning the hierarchical power structure.[212]

Towards the end of his life, Shahu Maharaj's non-Brahman politics became increasingly democratic and drew in the non-aristocratic Marathas in its pale. The Maharaj, who had till then closely guarded the category of Maratha for aristocratic Kshatriya families, now reached out to include those considered to be of "common Kunbi origins" as well as Maratha sub-castes accused of varying degrees of "illicit" mixing such as Kadu, Akkarmashi, and Kharchi Marathas. He also mingled with Maratha families who were accused of having 'impure origins,' treated them as kin, and encouraged marriages between aristocratic and *varna sankara* Maratha clans.[213]

211Ibid., 128. The Satyashodak Samaj's non-Brahman caste critique left a lasting imprint on Shahu's other programs too. For instance, in 1911 the Kolhapur royalty inaugurated a school for the Patil's of the village. The notion that although the Patils, who often belonged the Kunbi-maratha caste complex, were the headmen of the village, they were swindled by the Brahman accountant or the Kulkarni of the village guided this endeavor. And so Shahu Maharaj envisioned that an education would train the Patil's to hold their own. However, this vision of non-Brahman upliftment was undergirded by caste conservatism. The office of the Patil was a hereditary one and dominantly held by Marathas.

212 Ibid.,129. Chatrapati Shahu insisted that the women of his family follow gender norms that distinguished aristocratic Maratha women from those of the 'Kunbi common Maratha'.

213 Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society* , 133.

Conclusion

B.R Ambedkar's 1946 work *Who were the Shudras?* recentered the figure of the Shudra, albeit momentarily, in anti-caste discourse. While Ambedkar inscribed the book to the memory of Jotiba Phule and referred to him as 'the greatest Shudra of modern India', he departed significantly from Phule and Padwal's genealogy of the Shudra. Unlike Tukaram Padwal, who argued that the present-day Shudras were the descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of the subcontinent, Ambedkar contended that the Shudra were Aryan-Kshatriyas who were degraded by Brahman refusal to perform the *Upanayana.*[214] By asserting that the Shudra belonged to the Aryan stock, Ambedkar departed from Phule's contention that the Shudra and the Ati-Shudra both belonged to the same historical community of the indigenous inhabitants. This assertion further implied that the Shudra were historically and racially distinct people from the Ati-Shudra or the 'Untouchables.' This distinction between the non-Brahmans and the 'Untouchables' is made plain in the preface to *Who were the Shudras?* : "That I should be wanting in respect and reverence for the sacred literature of the Hindus should not surprise anyone if it is borne in mind that I am a non-Brahmin, not even a non-Brahman but an Untouchable."[215]

Ambedkar marks the 'Untouchable' past as a radically different one from that of the Shudra by tracing a 'Buddhist genealogy' exclusively for the 'Untouchables.'[216] He speculates that in ancient India 'Untouchables' were men broken away from aboriginal

214 B.R Ambedkar. *Who were the Shudra? (*Bombay: Thacker & Co: 1970), 117. The Upanayana, also called thread ceremony, is a rite of passage ritual performed on behalf of upper-caste boys. The ceremony denotes the inauguration of Vedic learning in the life of young men.
215 B.R Ambedkar. *Who were the Shudra?*, xxi.
216 Anupama Rao. *The Caste Question: Dalits and the politics of modern India* (Univ of California Press, 2009), 155.

tribes of the subcontinent as a result of tribal clashes and conflicts. These 'Broken Men' gravitated towards Buddhism and valiantly resisted the violent advances of Brahmanism. On emerging triumphant, Brahmins treated the 'Broken Men' with contempt and imposed rules of untouchability on them.[217] By seeking a different genealogy for the 'Untouchable', one that is rooted in Buddhism, Ambedkar reconfigures the 'Untouchable' both as a political and an ethical subject.[218]

With a more nuanced articulation of Dalit politics, the figure of the 'Dalit Buddhist' too developed and went on to galvanize the imagination of the Dalit public sphere. In addition to symbolizing an exit from the Hindu religion —and foregrounding its political implications for electoral politics—Ambedkar's politics of conversion to Buddhism was also shaped by the insistence on reconfiguring the lifeworld of the Dalit castes. With the emergence of Dalit politics, not only was a whole new public culture in store for the Dalit communities, but the new Ambedkarite-Buddhist culture also infused their intimate and quotidian lives.

While Ambedkar traced the genealogy of the Dalit subject to a Buddhist political past, Padwal drew on the intellectual legacy of the Buddhist tradition as an antecedent to anti-caste political discourse. Like Ambedkar, Padwal too recognized the insurgent potential of drawing on a Buddhist past—one that challenged a Brahmanical world-view. Because of the emphatic adoption of the Buddhist narrative by the Dalit movement and the increasing acceptance of the Maratha identity by the broader non-Brahman alliance, the historical memory of the Shudra as a possible heir to the Buddhist intellectual

217 B.R Ambedkar, *Untouchables: Who were they and why they became untouchables.* (New Delhi; Amrit Book Company: 1948)
218 Anupama Rao*, The Caste Question*,150.

tradition has faded away in mainstream politics in the present, except in the writings of a few Satyashodhak activists.

Chapter 3: Caste relations and the Politics of Knowledge in Tukaram Patil's *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* (An Exposition of Religious Falsehood)

Introduction

In the summer of 2016, as I looked for nineteenth-century anti-caste texts by lesser-known non-Brahman writers in the archives of Bombay and Pune, one afternoon, I stumbled upon an unassuming rare treatise. The text claimed to expose the Satyashodhak Samaj's fraudulence. With an eye-trained to scan titles for research-related keywords, a text entitled *Satyashodhakanche Asatyapralap athava Dharma Dhongaparisphotan hya pustakache sashastrakhandan* (The Untruthful rambling of the Satyashodhaks or A shastric refutation of Dharmadhongaparisphotan) caught my attention.[219] Despite my preliminary research on the genealogy of the caste question, this was the first time that I had come across both a text of criticism and its target—*Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* (An exposition of religious falsehood). After all, finding a contemporary critique of nineteenth-century anti-caste writings is as rare as finding the writing itself. I hoped that *Satyashodhakanche Asatya Pralap* (henceforth Asatyapralap) would lead me to *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan*, a text that allegedly belonged to the ideological tradition of the Satyashodhak Samaj—a nineteenth-century anti-caste organization with a predominantly lower-caste leadership.

Written in 1893, only a year after the publication of *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan*, *Satyashodhakanche Asatya Pralap* was a conservative text written by an author who chose to call himself *Ek Sanatanvaidikdharmabhimanigrihastha* (A

219 All translation in the chapter are mine, unless mentioned otherwise. All Marathi to English translation has been carried out in adherence to the Molesworth Marathi Dictionary. Molesworth, J. T. (James Thomas). *A dictionary, Marathi and English*. 2d ed., rev. and enl. Bombay: Printed for government at the Bombay Education Society's press, 1857.

Champion of Orthodox Vedic Religion). While the author, a defender of *Sanatana* Vedic Religion, aimed in general to counter the Satyashodhak Samaj's insolent tirade against Vedic knowledge, the book was specifically directed at the 1892 essay entitled *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* written by Tukaram Yadavrao Patil, also known by the name of Gopale.

Aching to read what Tukaram Patil had written about Vedic knowledge that so infuriated *Ek Sanatanvaidikdharmabhimanigrihastha* (henceforth Ek Santana), I fervently began to look for the book in local libraries, personal collections, and archives in western India. My impatience was further fueled by my hunch that Tukaram Patil belonged to the Kunbi caste (cultivator caste), a community assigned a Shudra status (lower-caste status) in the dominant caste ideology and traditionally not allowed to engage in textual knowledge production. Moreover, I had neither heard of the text, nor had come across Tukaram Patil before. A critique of Vedic knowledge practices from a lower-caste standpoint made the text an important one.

Tukaram Patil was clearly influential in his times. We do not know the size of the print run for his book. But ten thousand copies alone were printed in 1893 of its critique—*Asatyapralap,* and Ek Sanatana repeatedly referred to Tukaram Patil as the famous *Satyashodhaki upadeshak* (Satyashodhak exponent). Still, Tukaram Patil is a little-known figure today, and I could also find no copy of the book in archives in India.

Also, little mention of *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* can be found in the prominent scholarship on the anti-caste movement in the present. The only reference to *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* was found in Shriram Raosaheb Gundekar's 2010 volume entitled *Satyashodhaki Sahityacha Itihas* (The History of Satyashodak Literature).

Gudekar, a librarian in the Latur district of Maharashtra, has been collecting writings of anti-caste writers for a long. He, too, confessed that his only source of information about Tukaram Patil, and his known piece of writing, was from *Asatyapralap* and that there were no extant copies to his knowledge. Like him, I too made peace with reading *Asatyapralap* in order to distill Tukaram Patil's ideas from it.

One day, suddenly, long after giving up my desperate search for the text, I chanced upon a copy in the British Library, almost a year and a half after first coming across its critique. This chapter, surely, the first detailed analysis of Tukaram Patil's work, has a twofold aim.

One, I reconstruct the social world of Tukaram Yadavrao Patil and place the text in its social context. We know little directly about Tukaram Patil, the person, save from what we can surmise from his one piece of surviving writing. However, in his archival absence, this chapter reconstructs Patil's social world by piecing together information about the lives of other Satyashodhak activists like him, who not only inhabited a similar lifeworld, but also shared his caste location and social conditions.[220] In order to do so, I draw on testimonies of those who observed the anti-caste movement from up close, excerpts from autobiographies of lesser-known lower-caste *upadeshaks*, and later accounts in secondary literature.

Two, I closely read Tukaram Patil's *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* to examine how lower-caste activists problematized the complex relationship of caste subalterns to

220 I draw on the historical methods offered by critical scholarships such as Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe : A Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-14; Kim A. Wagner, *The Skull of Alum Bheg : The Life and Death of a Rebel of 1857*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018); Amy Stanley, *Stranger in the Shogun's City*. (New York: Scribner, 2020).

Brahmanical textual traditions and tools of knowledge production. Patil's work suggests that the symbolic hierarchy between intellectual labor and manual labor, which in itself is ingrained in the complex of caste meanings, is the very fulcrum of the Shudra question. This hierarchical principle is the source of the Shudra's disqualification from the realm of knowledge and their confinement to the practice of manual labor. Patil's caste criticism is rooted in his questioning of the symbolic hierarchy between intellectual activity and manual labor. Critical of Brahmanical caste ideology for attributing intellectual labor and learning to the Brahmans alone, Patil seeks to undo the divide between the body and the mind—manual and mental labor, by arguing for a regime of knowledge and learning that will help the peasants and artisans protect themselves from exploitation.

In this chapter, I show how Tukaram Patil, expanding on the Satyashodhak discourse, emphasized the deep connection between the Shudra community's exclusion from religious knowledge and their exploitation in the social world. Patil laid bare the religious, ideological framework undergirding lower-caste life of backbreaking manual labor and their embeddedness in a social relation of fraudulence and exploitation with the Brahmans. By refusing to accept the bifurcation of caste into its religious and social realms, which previously had allowed upper-caste reformers to continue practicing caste in its rationalized form, Patil takes a step towards a far more radical secularization of caste, Hindu religious texts, and its core principles.

Historiographical Context

With a close, granular reading of Patil's exposition of how Brahmanical monopoly of shastric knowledge is directly tied to the exploitation of the Shudra castes, my work contributes to the rich scholarship on the colonial remaking of caste as a religious

category, a question vehemently debated by historians of nineteenth-century South Asia. This historiographic scholarship reflects on the passionate discussion about the religious versus the social character of caste, a question that unfolded in the nineteenth century among British intellectuals, colonial administrators, orientalist scholars, and Indian reformers.

Nicholas Dirks maps the politics underlying the formulation of the question by focusing exactly on these colonial deliberations in the nineteenth century—a time when Indian forms of governance, knowledge practices, community relations, and public life were being categorized into religious, social, and political practices. Dirks argues that caste, or the diverse practices of social identification that were clubbed under the name of caste, was redefined as the fundamental axis of Indian social identity. However, this kind of classification overlooked other forms of social and political organizations by colonial ideological practices.[221]

Dirks emphasizes that James Mill's 1817 work *The History of British India* was one of the first canonical texts that attributed to caste, 'an Indian institution predicated on priestcraft', the function of organizing the totality of Indian religious and social life.[222] The *History of British India*, a text meant to train East India Company officials, was written keeping in mind the need to upend orientalist romanticization of the South Asian past as well as its knowledge and culture. Particularly, Mill's criticism was directed towards the Orientalist William Jones. Mill's attack on Jones was occasioned by the fear that the latter's work, exalting the 'high civilization' of the Asians, could significantly

221 Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India.*, 13-14.
222 Ibid., 34.

mold European minds and legal policies of the East India Company. The Company's commitment to continuity of social and legal policy was for all to see. Claiming political expediency, the company administration claimed to leave legal policy and matters of personal law untouched. [223]

Although Mill fiercely criticized the Orientalist approach of continuity and proposed a clear break in governance and legality from the Asian past mired in 'despotism,' he entirely relied on William Jones' textualist understanding of caste.[224] Jones' 1794 translation of the laws of Manu shaped not only Mill's but most nineteenth-century colonial scholars' and administrators' views on caste. Dirks demonstrates that the epistemic framework deployed by the orientalist was so persistent that the works of colonial civil servants such as Elphinstone, who distinguished his work from that of Mill for its roots in his Indian experiences, adhered to the textualist view on caste and the Hindu society.[225]

By the early nineteenth century, while the validity of orientalist arguments about the Indian social world was increasingly questioned by scholars and missionaries and was rapidly replaced by new forms of ethnographic and statistical knowledge, canonized shastric texts continued to be used to organize and make meaning of the empirical information collected on the ground.[226] The debates on the place of caste in organizing Indian lives grew more clamorous after the 1857 rebellion. Prompted by the political turbulence in the subcontinent, the German orientalist Max Muller redirected his concerns about the region by contributing to the discussion on Indian religion, caste, and

223 Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India.* 33.
224 Ibid., 34.
225 Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India.*, 36.
226 Ibid., 38.

sentiments by way of his 1868 essay *The Sepoy Rebellion*. Reiterating the centrality of canonical religious texts by suggesting that "by consulting to the very authorities that the Hindus appeal, we can form an opinion with greater impartiality than the Brahmans themselves."[227]

Notwithstanding the contention between the company and the missionaries, where the former accused the missionaries of stirring Indian sentiments by creating an impression that the Company intended to make Indians lose their caste, a consensus emerged among various debating groups that the crisis was caused by the incomprehensibility of how caste and Hindu religion operated in Indian lives. Both for the implementation of the *Queen's Proclamation*, which promised no "interference with religious belief or worship," and the British administration's pragmatic desire to stave off any further political expediency, it was imperative that a clear religious realm be identified.

But there were no easy answers. Both the missionaries and the administrators agreed that caste was both religious and social in its character. Colonial rulers perceived Hinduism as a perverse religion, unlike enlightened Christianity, which allowed for the separation of religious and social practices and spaces.[228] Max Muller expressed this succinctly: "Now if we ask a Hindu whether their laws of caste are a part of their religion some will answer that they are, others that they are not." Dirks argues that by 1858, emerging from these discussions was the assumption that caste was the key organizing principle of the Indian society and it was fundamental to the Hindu religion.[229]

227 Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*.39.
228 Ibid., 40-41.
229 Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*.41.

Dirks suggests that the nineteenth and twentieth-century colonial state's projection of caste as a religious phenomenon and a hierarchical model based on a ritual principle has historically had pertinent implications. This colonial reification of caste that empties religion of its political content has, since then, shaped Indian sociologists, anti-caste reformers, and nationalist leaders' perception of caste. It has also influenced the ways in which we understand it in the present.[230]

While Dirks' analysis of the colonial discourse of caste is largely persuasive, he ventures on more debatable ground when he assumes that Indian social groups entirely accepted this reductionist and canonized idea of caste. Because he operates with the presumption that the colonial discourse was seamlessly absorbed by the natives, Dirks presents a totalizing picture of the discourse of caste. Most crucially, his assumption that the colonial representation of caste became the lower caste's idea of caste refuses to engage with its experience at the margins.

Dirks argues that the valorization of Brahmins and a hierarchical model with the Brahmins on the top, a naturalized version of history led by colonial transformation, found its way into native social analysis. He suggests that these colonial ideas about caste further imbued the anti-caste discourse articulated by Ambedkar and Periyar. Though both the leaders located caste exploitation as a totalizing project of Hindu religion, their politics could not transcend Hindu religion and Brahmin conspiracy. Dirks points out that a contradiction in Ambedkar and Periyar's politics lies in their insistence that the upper caste majority needs to recognize the minority status of the lower caste.[231]

230 Ibid.,5.
231 Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. 253.

By highlighting the infusion of colonial categories and perspective on caste hierarchy in anti-caste politics, Dirks simplifies a complex discourse. A close reading of nineteenth-century caste commentaries reveals that categories such as Brahman versus non-Brahman, or socio-religious superiority of Brahman in the hierarchy, which Dirks suggests are colonial infusions in the anti-caste discourse, actually can be traced to premodern intellectual traditions. No doubt, nineteenth-century activist writers, as well as religious reformers, were influenced by colonial knowledge production, so also the power of the 'ethnographic state' surely was immense. Nevertheless, they were acutely cognizant of the fact that in their rapidly changing world, several aspects of their sociality were still being governed by textual traditions, social rules, and religio-juridical frameworks that could not be subsumed within colonial epistemologies.

We saw an instance of this in the last chapter. From Tukaram Padwal naming his treatise such that it invokes the memory of Gopinatha's ninth-century *Jativiveka* to his citations of *Shudrakamalakara,* all signal to his attempts to step into a debate on caste that owed little to colonial epistemologies. True, in doing so, he drew on a secularizing framework that was deeply shaped by a modern milieu, but it would be simplifying this milieu dramatically to describe it as only or even primarily colonial.

Let us also remember that much later, even in the colonial period, non-brahman castes with ambiguous caste status were still invoking early modern liturgical texts, summoning *dharma sabha* (religious meetings), and drawing on *shudradharmanibandha* (Texts on Shudra dharma) to seek an upper-caste status. And so, while texts of religious and liturgical import circulated among colonial administrators and orientalists, they were also being referenced and translated into Marathi for upwardly mobile non-brahman

castes. All of this suggests that while the Indian opinion on caste was surely to some extent shaped by the colonial mechanism of knowledge, their engagement with canonical texts on caste and rituals to a large extent was independent and longstanding.

By closely studying Tukaram Patil's writings, I depart from Dirks' proposition that anti-caste radicals seamlessly adopted the religious and civic bifurcation of caste. In fact, this chapter discusses how Patil's work highlighted the robust connection between foundational principles and texts in Hindu religion and the social exclusion and economic exploitation of the Shudra peasants and artisans.

Patil undoes the clear division between religion and the non-religious or the social realm, which the Brahman reformers had sought as a way of secularizing caste by secularizing Hinduism in another way. He ties Hindu religious texts to their social implications. He does so by invoking the mid-century *Kunbi* peasant's experience of indebtedness, confiscation of their land as collateral, usury, and exploitative interest rates, as an analogy for how Sanskrit religious texts were first used by Aryan Brahman invaders to occupy the subcontinent from indigenous ancestors of the present-day lower-castes.

Lamenting that his readers have forgotten that *aple loka* (our people) have been driven out of their ancestral homes by 'outsiders' who have forged '*khote kagadpatra'* (fake papers and contracts) such as the *Shastra, Purana,* and *Itihas* (religious texts, mythological stories, and history), Patil contended, "While the outsiders occupy the house, our people are banished into the courtyard!" In this instance, while the author mobilized the notion of duplicitous papers to denote Hindu religious texts, he leaves no room for doubt that the 'outsiders responsible for forging these papers' were the Brahman castes, who have traditionally held sway over ritual and elite forms of knowledge production.

Patil's reference to the Brahman castes as 'outsiders' is unsurprising. By 1892, the 'Aryan invasion narrative,' arguing that the Brahman castes in the present were descendants of Aryan marauders who invaded the subcontinent wielding Sanskrit texts, had infused nineteenth-century political common sense, and especially that of the Satyashodhak Samaj through the writings of Tukaram Tatya Padwal and Jotirao Phule. They drew on the works of orientalist scholars such as H.H Wilson and Max Muller and were also influenced by missionary Indologists like John Muir and John Wilson. Patil also quotes the work of Vishvanath Mandalik, a Brahman scholar and a contemporary social observer, to argue that Chitpawan Brahman (Brahmans local to the Konkan littoral) lineage can be traced back to a Berber Egyptian ancestry.[232]

Patil's comparison between the papers of legal property agreements and the *shastras, puranas* and *itihas* is telling because it highlights the juridical character of religious texts.[233] While on the one hand, he acknowledged that the material world is governed by legal contracts concerning property rights, on the other hand, he pointed out that the *Shastras* govern both the other-worldly and this-worldly activities. The author mentions them in the same breath to argue that both—this-worldly and religious legal discourses shape actions and structure social relationships.[234] While religio-legal *shastras*, akin to the law of the state, prescribe retributive violence, the *Puranas,* and *ithasa* consolidate social mores. Just as the violation of the legal contract of property rights results in punishment, so can the non-compliance with religio-juridical rules. By metaphorically tying the two-

[232] Tukaram Patil, Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan,12.
[233] As also the centrality of the written word in the life of the Shudra.
[234] I draw on Stanley Fish's idea of interpretive communities in Stanley Eugene Fish, *Is there a text in this class?: The authority of interpretive communities.* (Harvard University Press, 1980).

legal discourses together, the author marks the marginalization and subordination of the lower-caste in both realms.

The author's use of 'duplicitous papers' (*khote kagad patra*) as a metonym for both legal contracts and the *shastras* (religious texts) draws attention to the forms of authoritative textuality used to structure the lives of the lower-caste and seek their subordination. By comparing religious texts and legal agreements, the author highlighted the power of authoritative knowledge. The analogy allowed him to articulate the ways in which texts—legal and religious—are embodiments of official ideology, and how by their very design, they guard the interests of the dominant and persecute the subordinate. Thus, by underscoring the linkages between religious texts and their juridical character, Tukaram Patil highlighted the political character of Hindu religious principles.

The awareness that legal texts dealing with worldly and other-worldly matters possess the power to contest and overwrite truth claims and that they command the ability to discipline and dispossess those that come in its purview runs clear in this instance. By way of this example, Patil emphasized that in the world of legal documents, historically non-literate communities are excluded from the realm of textual reproduction.

Patil's emphasis on highlighting the lower-caste's discomfort with legal documents reflects the distribution of literal skills and educational training in his immediate social milieu of the late nineteenth century. In the 1880s, a decade before Patil penned his thoughts, the Satyashodhak Samaj's advocacy for the educational uplift of the lower-caste cultivator and artisan communities was whetted by the accompanying argument that Brahman presence in the modern bureaucracy of the British government

was linked to their preponderance in the field of religious knowledge.[235] By demonstrating that Brahman monopoly of traditional religious and ritual knowledge translated, almost seamlessly, into their predominance in the symbolic economy constituted by the rational bureaucratic order of colonial administration, the Satyashodhak Samaj foregrounded two crucial conclusions. First, despite the monumental change of political regimes from the seventeenth-century Peshwa rule to the "benevolent British administration", the Brahmans retained the reigns of local administration. Second, by virtue of traditionally controlling religious knowledge, the Brahmans had extended their dominion over related fields of power such as laicized literary skills and modern education. Patil implied that unless this generational reproduction of monopoly of knowledge among the Brahmans is intercepted by lower-caste access to education, knowledge, and literary skills, the Brahmans will continue to control the field of administration, knowledge, and decision making.

Within the anti-caste tradition, Patil's work emerges as one of the most systematic analyses of the epistemological basis of Brahmanical knowledge. While the imposition of Brahmanical textual knowledge and ritual culture on the Shudra castes has been a running theme in social commentaries critical of caste in the nineteenth century, *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* is one of the most comprehensive and sustained discussions that historicized Brahmanical ways of knowing.[236] Befitting a text published towards the end

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[235] Rosalind O'Hanlon*, Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* 288.

236 In early and mid-nineteenth century the first generation of English-educated reformers in Bombay and Pune such as Balshastri Jambhekar, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, Dadoba Pandurang and Jotirao Phule directed their ire towards Brahmanical monopoly of knowledge. See Bal Shastri Jambhekar, "Dig-durshan. (Direction)" in *Memoirs and Writings of Ācharya Bāl Gangādhar Shāstri Jāmbhekar 1812-1846*, ed. G.G Jambhekar, (Pune: G.G.Jambhekar, 1950) Vol. 1; Gopal Hari Deshmukh, "Jati Vishayi Vichar", in *Lokahitawadinchi Shatapatre*, ed. Narayan Raghunath Inamdar (Pune: S.R Deshmukh, 1962); Anant Kakba Priolkar. *Paramahansa sasabha Va Tice Adhyaksha Ramacandra Bąlakrishna,* (Mumbai: Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya*,* 1966) and Jotirao Phule, *Selected writings of Jotirao Phule*, (Ed.) by GP Deshpande. (*New Delhi, Leftword:* 2002).

of the century, Patil's work brings together several strands of ideas from the non-Brahman intellectual universe and fastens loose ends.

Tukaram Patil's work is significant also because his ideas stood out from the milieu of non-Brahman activist-writers active in the last decade of the nineteenth century. We have already seen in the previous chapter how, on the one hand, the trade union leader and *satyasamajian* Narayan Meghaji Lokhande foregrounded the category of the Maratha to include all cultivating and laboring castes. On the other hand, the dominant section of the broader non-Brahman alliance advocated for an upper-caste status. Amidst the diverse non-Brahman voices, which were distancing themselves from the figure of the Shudra (the lower-caste), Tukaram Patil steadfastly foregrounded the Shudra as the subject of his anti-caste politics. Ridiculing the Maratha claims to Kshatriya status, Patil reprimanded his readers: "You might say you are a Kshatriya and that your sword is your Dharmashastra, but you have to forget that now. The Hindu Dharamshastra that you use to call yourself a Kshatriya, clearly [mention] that in the present, there is no way to prove the difference between the Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, Atishudra… Whom should we call a Kshatriya? These days everyone claims Kshatriyahood. In that case, either everyone is a Shudra, or everyone is a Kshatriya."[237]

Tukaram Patil's intellectual milieu

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a time when Tukaram Patil wrote and circulated his work, the fissures within the non-Brahman movement, among other issues, appeared around the question of who was the subject of non-Brahman politics? As

[237] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan* (Falsehood of religion exposed). (Mumbai: Dinavatsalya Printing Press,1892),7.

mentioned in the previous chapter, while Phule in the mid-nineteenth century, uninhibitedly used the category of the Shudra, towards the end of the century, as new leaders emerged not only were new non-Brahman categories shaped, but organizations that coalesced their politics around these categories proliferated. For instance, in the 1880s, the editor of *Dina Bandhu* N. M Lokhande fervently advocated for the use of the category 'Maratha', as well as the symbolism attached to it, for all non-Brahman laboring and cultivator castes. After furiously disputing both the nationalist-Brahmans like Lokmanya Tilak and the elite-non-Brahmans and aristocratic Marathas, who sought to appropriate the category Maratha for their exclusive political purpose, in 1887 Lokhande founded the *Maratha Aikyaecchu Sabha* (the Society for Maratha Unity). The society stressed the inclusion of all lower-castes under the Maratha category. Another exclusionary organization that Lokhande disapproved of was the Decca Maratha Education Society. Established in 1883 by Gangaram Bhau Mhaske, while the society proposed the dissemination of higher education among the historically non-literate castes, it sought to include only the relatively affluent and elite castes among the lower-castes.[238]

As the debates on who constituted the Maratha grew increasingly clamorous by the end of the nineteenth century, non-Brahman voices coveting the Kshatriya status too grew louder.[239] The 1882 "The society of the Maratha caste for putting forward the dharma of Kshatriya and for the raising of funds for that dharma" was one such

238 Rosalind O'Hanlon*, Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 298.
239 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society : The Non Brahman Movement in Western India, 1873 to 1930*, (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976), 132 and Rosalind O'Hanlon,. *Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* 298.

organization.[240] By the turn of the century, and especially after the Vedokta controversy around the Kolhapur royalty's coronation in 1894, smaller princely families and elite Marathas surreptitiously performed Vedic rights to renew their aristocratic status. Ironically, the Kshatriya ideology was formally articulated not by an author from the aristocratic Maratha clan but by Vasodeorao Birje, a former Satyashodhak activist from the non-Maratha Dhangar (Shephard) caste. Perhaps, Birje's 1912 essay entitled *Kshatriya ani tyanche Astitva* (Kshatriya and their Existence) was an attempt to help the Dhangar Royalty of Baroda, Brije's caste kin, an aristocratic Kshatriya Status .[241]

By the late nineteenth century, non-Brahman politics was a network of multivocal, diverse, and nuanced articulations. While some Satyashodhak activists like Birje found divergent political platforms in the twentieth century, others, although disagreeing politically with Phule and the Satyashodhak Samaj, did not completely sever ties and begrudgingly shared platforms with them. In this increasingly diffused and multipronged field of non-Brahman politics, Tukaram Patil retained fidelity both politically and ideologically to Phule's line of anti-caste discourse.

Most certainly, Patil's discussion on the epistemic foundations of Brahmanical knowledge bears an imprint of Phule's 1855 play entitled *Trutiya Ratna* (The Third-Jewel). By interchangeably using the phrase *trutiya ratna* for knowledge, not only does Tukaram Patil firmly situate himself in the early-satyashodhak intellectual genealogy, but he also seeks out an audience well-versed with the satyashodhak vocabulary.

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240 Rosalind O'Hanlon*, Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 298.

241 Later Birje played a crucial role in the founding of the Maratha Education Conference and then moved to Baroda to become the Gaikwad royalty's librarian. Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society : The Non Brahman Movement in Western India, 1873 to 1930*, (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976) , 132.

The satyashodhak perspective on the entanglement of caste and knowledge was a path-breaking one. By stipulating that the Brahmanical religious culture lay at the heart of lower-caste exploitation in *Trutiya Ratna*, Phule parted ways from contemporary upper-caste social observers. The latter argued that the deplorable conditions of the lower-castes could not be decisively traced to the actions of a particular caste group and that the roots of the caste, especially for the lower-castes and untouchables, emerged from the social system. While prominent upper-caste reformers like Dadoba Pandurang identified the corrupt practices among the Brahman castes, their historical excavations to unearth the roots of the caste order yielded nothing but ambiguity. In fact, Dadoba let the Brahman writers of religio-legal texts off the hook by claiming that their only offence in the matter of institutionalizing caste was that they codified the social practice, which was regularized by all castes in the hierarchy.[242]

Unlike liberal upper-caste reformers, anti-caste radicals like Phule and Patil worked with the implicit recognition that not only was textual representation its own truth, but that it also shaped the conditions of the lower-castes' existence. Emphasizing the power embedded in knowledge production, Phule, in *Trutiya Ratna*, responded to the liberal upper-caste position by emphasizing that the lower-caste exclusion from religious knowledge was a deliberate Brahmanical ruse, which was reproduced across several generations, encoded in the religious texts, and was not the consequence of wayward behavior of a few cunning people. Phule showed that it was in the Brahman caste's interest to retain the Shudra and the Ati-shudra ('untouchable' castes) in the state of

242 Anant Kakba Priolkar, *Paramahansa sasabha Va Tice Adhyaksha Ramacandra Bąlakrishna,* (Mumbai: Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya, 1966).

ignorance so that the falsehood codified in religious knowledge continued to legitimize the authority both of the Brahmans, and the rituals led by them into peasant households.[243] It is in this context that Patil's work stands out. While Phule lays the foundational framework, Patil develops it into an exhaustive critique of assumptions that undergird Brahmanical knowledge economy.

The *Trutiya Ratna* and Phule's 1869 set of ballads entitled *Bramhanache Kasab* (Priest-craft Exposed) situated politics at the heart of religious knowledge. Satyashodak *upadeshaks* (exponents) wandered across villages of Maharashtra to give the laboring castes a basis of 'religious truth' (*satya*) that endorsed the use of 'judgement' and sought to instill in them the capability of making decisions for themselves. Alongside their efforts at conscientization, making formal education accessible for the Shudra and Atishudra (untouchable) castes was the Samaj's most important program. While Phule set up schools for children of the 'untouchable' castes in the 1850s, the Samaj's educational endeavors continued up until the last decades of the century with anti-caste activists of the later generations such as Krishnarao Bhalekar, offering free schools for the children of the poor.[244]

The Satyashodhak activists worked with a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of knowledge. They argued that in addition to encouraging the peasant and artisan castes to deploy critical faculties of thinking, training in basic literacy skills would prove to be immensely helpful in carrying out their everyday business of life. Moreover, with the deeper penetration of colonial institutions in the native world, modern education,

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[243] Rosalind O'Hanlon*, Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 122-124.
[244] Ibid., 283. Also see Jana Tschurenev, Empire, Civil Society, and the Beginnings of Colonial Education in India.(New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

and literacy skills had increasingly become the means of upward social mobility in the nineteenth century. And so, the Satyashodhak Samaj emphasized the spread of education among the Shudra castes so that with enhanced occupational literacy and fluency in English, they could claim a representative share in colonial bureaucracies, which were thus far dominated by traditionally literate castes such as the Brahmans and the scribal castes like the Kayastha and the Shenvi.[245] These efforts and programs of the anti-caste organization were accompanied by, and in turn shaped, the discursive engagements of activist-writers like Tukaram Patil, who asked: how does the politics of knowledge operate in a society predominantly divided on the lines of caste?

"Varna" in two senses

In a world where the production of knowledge was still determined by one's caste status, not only did Patil's adversaries criticize the content of his writing, but the very act of writing by a lower-caste figure like Patil was seen as going against the grain. What made Tukaram Patil's intervention so offensive to Brahmanical sensibilities of his critics like the Ek Sanatana was its assault on varna in two senses. Sheldon Pollock illuminates the association between grammatical refinement and social order in the Sanskrit linguistic culture, most strongly expressed at the beginning of the Common Era, by drawing attention to the two meanings of varna—one, language sounds, and two: the caste order. He argues that "If preservation of language sounds (varna) that grammar achieves was linked essentially to the preservation of the social order (varna), and so to that of the polity at large, the obligation to maintain the order of language was no less than, and

[245] Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* 233-235.

perhaps no different from, the obligation to maintain the political and spiritual order."[246] The sovereign of the Yadav empire, a twelfth-century dynasty in western India, sought legitimacy for his kingship by both patronizing Sanskrit knowledge and maintaining the Brahmanical version of varna hierarchy—with the Brahman on the top and the Shudra at the bottom of the four-fold classification. On the ground, this move to maintain order both in the grammatical and the social sense executed a disciplinary framework that kept the Shudra away from Sanskrit, rewarded the Brahman for his engagement with the latter, and disallowed the muddling of the two norms.[247]

Ek Sanatana chose to train his guns on Tukaram Patil because the latter had violated these two senses of varna that Pollock identifies—language sounds and caste propriety. Tukaram Patil's shaft went home. Ek Sanatana rested his criticism of *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* on the premise that, "When those who have lagged behind in the realm of knowledge suddenly begin to possess it, they soon scale the mountains of arrogance. Unsurprisingly, they are negligent and inaccurate (in their utterances about *sanatana dharma*)."[248] Although the author does not openly attribute Patil's literary 'oversights' to his lower-caste status, his signals are amply clear. For instance, Ek Sanatana's reference to 'those who have been outside the realm of knowledge' is a clear allusion to Patil's lower-caste position. Moreover, in other places, he explicitly refers to the Satyashodak Samaj as an organization of the Marathas and the *Bramhanetars* (All except the Brahmans). Further, the author sieves out the Shudra castes from the looming ambiguity

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[246] Sheldon Pollock et al, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men : Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. ACLS Fellows' Publications. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 183.
[247] Christian Lee Novetzke, *The Quotidian Revolution: Vernacularization, religion, and the premodern public sphere in India* (Columbia University Press, 2016).
[248] Ek Sanatanvaidikdharmabhimanigrihastha, *Satyashodhakanche Asatyapralap*, (Baroda: Fatteh Singh Printing Press), 1-2.

around the category of the Maratha by stating, "My aim is to prevent the *kulin* (well-born) Marathas from falling prey to this discourse (the Satyashodhak criticism of *sanatanvaidikdharma*)."[249]

By highlighting Patil's grammatical deficiencies, Ek Sanatana reveals his allegiance to Brahmanical propriety concerning the two senses of the varna. The author's distress could be traced to Patil's caste location. Patil, who belonged to the Kunbi caste, a community that was traditionally disallowed from studying Canonical Hindu religious texts, had dared not only to comment on them, but also had written about them, not to mention, in 'depraved' unstandardized Marathi. *Dharma dhonga*, Ek Sanatana pointed out, was replete with errors of *gana* (conjugation), *matra* (power of the vowel), and *swara* (sound or vowels). "Is the title (of the text) accurate (*shuddha*—also meaning pure)? I don't think this question crossed the famous *upadeshak's* mind. If it had, he would have never written परिस्फोटण instead of परिस्फोटन (Parisphotan). [250] Also, why break Dharmadhongaparisphotan (a compound word) into Dharma-Dhonga-Parisphotan? How will a text with a false (*khote*) title in the first place embark on the search for the truth (*satya*)?"[251]

Ek Sanatana's correlation between the grammatical accuracy of the utterances and the veracity of its content is also reflected in the seventh-century philosopher Kumarila's criticism of Buddhist thought: "Only by using a language whose form is true (*sat*), can one possibly speak the truth (*satya*)."

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[249] Ek Sanatanvaidikdharmabhimanigrihastha, *Satyashodhakanche Asatyapralap*, Prologue.

250 While Ek Sanatana points out to Patil's incorrect spelling, the difference between the two styles of writing is that of standardization of the Marathi Language.

[251] Ek Sanatanvaidikdharmabhimanigrihastha, *Satyashodhakanche Asatyapralap,* 2.

While Ek Santana's criticism of Tukaram Patil claimed to defend "timeless Vedic culture," his critique of Patil's grammar was starkly modern. The author's insinuation that Patil flouted grammatical conventions by breaking the word Dharmadhongaparisphotan into three parts and by the erroneous use of ṇa (ण) instead of na (न) have roots in the nineteenth-century. Prachi Deshpande illuminates how in the 1820s-30s, sixty years before the publication of *Satyashodhakanche Asatya Pralap*, colonial interest in stabilizing Indian languages led to the explosion of texts, dictionaries, and manuals on Marathi grammar. While Major Candy, the translator to the Bombay government, took a keen interest in structuring Marathi by drawing on both Sanskrit and English grammar, Dadoba Pandurang's 1836 work *Maharashtra Bhasheche Vyakrana* (A Grammar of the Marathi Language) emerged as the primary reference text for students.[252]

In the 1840s and 1850s, as the Marathi literary world was transitioning out of a manuscript culture and stepping into the realm of print, grammatical conventions too were changing and, in this process, Dadoba Pandurang's manual on grammar and Candy's translation played an authoritative role. For one, the mid-nineteenth century witnessed a greater alignment of ways in which Marathi was written and how it was read. In the 1850 revised edition of the grammatical text, Dadoba's rules moved away from continuous block writing of the manuscript convention, and instead, emphasized the separation of individual words with spaces, as well as using punctuation to signal pauses and accents in order to better communicate the author's intentions to the reader.[253]

252 Prachi Deshpande, "Shuddhalekhan: Orthography, community and the Marathi public sphere." *Economic and Political Weekly* 51, no. 6 (2016), 73.
253 Prachi Deshpande, "Shuddhalekhan", 74.

While in the premodern manuscript cultur, orthographic conventions were stabilized within specific textual communities, orthography and phonology remained distinct domains. And so, in the case of manuscripts where words were squeezed together in blocks of continuous writing without punctuation, the task of surmising the pronunciation of words and deciphering the meaning of the text was left to the reader. Deshpande argues that this relationship between the text and the reader allowed for greater orthographic variability and made more space for a variety of spellings and permutations in the arrangement of letters in a word.[254] The modern notion that an authoritative grammatical regime could determine the relationship between the sound and visual representation of the word is best reflected in Ek Sanatana's criticism of Patil's writing. His disapproval of Patil breaking the integrity of the single word " Dharmadhongaparisphotan" into three distinct parts, as well as the latter's disregard for the difference between ṇa (ण) and na (न)— two distinct nasal sounds, is an invocation of a much recent grammatical convention.

As Ek Sanatana chastised Patil for his *ashuddha* (meaning incorrect, but also impure) usage, his concerns reflected Dadoba's emphasis on the prescriptive function of grammar. For him, grammar not only differentiated *shuddha* (correct or pure) from *ashuddha* (incorrect or impure) usage, but it also 'enabled one to systematically point this out to others.' Ek Sanatana has clearly stepped up to this pedantic role.[255]

Ek Sanatana also drew extensively from nineteenth-century literary revivalists like Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar (1850-1882) who, with the rapid dissemination of print

254 Ibid., 73.
255 Prachi Deshpande, "Shuddhalekhan", 74.

technology in the vernacular world, invoked grammatical rules prevalent in the Sanskrit literary culture to standardize the newly consolidating prose-style of writing in Marathi. Ek Sanatana held Chiplunkar in high regard. He signals his appreciation for Chiplunkar by mentioning the latter's trenchant criticism of Phule in the periodical *Nibandhamala* (A Garland of Essays).[256] Chiplunkar's criticism of Phule, a contemporary, too was aimed at his language, grammar, and style of writing. In the 1877 issue of his Marathi periodical *Nibandhamala*, Chiplunkar, who worked towards stabilizing a modern high-literary style for Marathi, attacked an annual report of the Satyashodhak Samaj as well as Phule's works—*Slavery* and *Priestcraft exposed*. He derided Phule's work for flouting established literary norms and mocked him for grammatical errors, poor linguistic aesthetic, and for his use of erroneous historical tropes.[257] Inspired by Chiplunkar's commentary on the Satyashodhak Samaj, Ek Sanatana too followed suit.

Ek Sanatana was not wrong about two things:

First, Patil indeed belonged to the Kunbi lower-caste. The title "Patil" in Tukaram Patil's name indicates that he belonged to a family of village headmen. Since, *Patilki* rights, which included collecting revenue, local policing and meting out justice, were mostly conferred on members of the Kunbi caste (a Shudra cultivator caste) in early modern India, it can be inferred that Tukaram Patil, too, belonged to the Kunbi caste.

It is no surprise that Patil was attracted to the Satyashodhak Samaj, for the Samaj's ideology had deeply infused the Kunbi caste network around Bombay and Pune region. Moreover, in rural areas, the Satyashodhak Samaj rarely inducted individual members

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[256] Ek Sanatanvaidikdharmabhimanigrihastha, *Satyashodhakanche Asatyapralap*, Prologue.
[257] Veena Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere.* Permanent Black Monographs. Opus 1 Series. (New Delhi: Permanent Black : Distributed by Orient Longman, 2001), 256; Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley: Father of the Indian Social Revolution.* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1974),146.

and often roped in families, villages, and clan networks.[258] Hari Chaphekar, an anticolonial extremist, commented on the Samaj's popularity among the Kunbi in the Pune district. Chaphekar narrated that his attempts to galvanize the Kunbi soldiers in the British military cantonments near Pune met with failure because they refused to participate in the insurrections on Phule's council. [259]

And two, Ek Sanatana recognized, and rightly so, the importance of the *upadeshak* to the diffusion of Satyashodhak Samaj's message. The *upadeshaks*, Tukaram Patil being one of them, were the backbone of the movement. From the time of its inception in 1873 to the middle of the 1890s, the Satyashodhak Samaj established a stronghold in urban centers of Bombay and Pune. While in the 1870s, the organization reached out to the rural areas adjacent to Pune, it was only by the late 1880s that it took root in the northern and southern towns of Pune: Junnar, Purandhar, Indapur, and Saswad. *Satyasamajians upadeshaks* from Pune or those local to the tehsils in the Pune district were instrumental in the diffusion of the Satyashodhak ideology in these districts. They wandered across rural areas, carrying the message of the Samaj and establishing its branches in villages.

The fact that Satyashodhak Samaj nurtured activists both in the urban and rural areas meant that if the organization's activity dwindled in the hinterland, it did not necessarily turn towards the urban leadership for reinvigoration. In fact, around the mid-1890s, while the activities of the centrally organized Satyashodhak Samaj in Pune and Bombay had slowed down, it showed immense dynamism in the villages. Gail Omvedt observes that

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258 Rosalind O'Hanlon*, Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, 229.

[259] Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society,* 141. Phule was of the opinion that the Rebellion of 1857 and other anticolonial efforts were nothing but a brahmanical ploy to induct the lower-caste into the anticolonial struggle against the colonial government that actually worked for the betterment of the latter. The British administration was seen as the embodiment of liberalism, fairness, and freedom.

the word of the Samaj reached the farthest during this period. Semi-literate peasant activists travelled tirelessly across the warp and weft of rural Marathi-speaking regions propagating the message of the Samaj.[260] Perhaps, Tukaram Patil, too, who called himself an *upadeshak* of the Satyashodhak Samaj, wandered across villages of western Maharashtra carrying its word.

Bhaskarrao Jadhav, a non-Brahman leader from the late nineteenth-century, who was later appointed as the first non-Brahman minister in the Kolhapur Royalty, Chatrapati Shahu's court notes in his autobiography entitled *How I became a Satyashodhak* that the activists of the Samaj roamed across rural areas performing *kirtans* (musical performances)[261] about priest-craft and the Brahman castes' exploitation of the peasant. This approach, adopted by Satyashodhak Samaj to disseminate their message, was perhaps influenced by Christian missionary activities that the Samaj and its activists had observed from close quarters.[262]

Besides performing *kirtans* and skits, the *upadeshak* often distributed key texts identified as intellectual resources by the anti-caste movement. In the earlier chapter, we have seen how contemporary reformist texts like Padwal' *Jatibhed Viveksar* (Reflections on the Institution of Caste), Dadoba's *Dharma Vivechana* (Discernment of Religion), and Phule's *Shetkaryache Asud* (The Cultivator's Whipcord) were distributed in the Bhambhurde village of Ahmednagar district by the activists of the Samaj. Perhaps the *upadeshaks* read out these texts to their predominantly illiterate peasant and artisan

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[260] Ibid.,

261 A genre of public performance practiced among the Hindus and Sikhs. In Maharashtra it is a performance that brings together theatre, singing, dance, and exposition. See Christian Lee Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory : A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India*. Book. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 278.

262 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*,142.

audience. Not only did the itinerant *upadeshaks* circulate ideas and writings of canonical reformists such as Jotirao Phule and Dadoba Pandurang, some even took this opportunity to pen their thoughts in the form of essays and verses (*abhangas*). Most likely, Tukaram Yadavrao Patil was one such *satyasamajian upadeshak*, but his *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* shot to prominence in ways that his other writings did not.

Satyashodhak Samaj's Politics

The Samaj drew its strongest support from agricultural regions of the Pune district: the Junnar tehsil in the northwest and the southern tehsils of Purandar and Indapur. To reach its intended audience from the rural artisan and peasant communities, who primarily belonged to the Shudra castes, the Samaj shaped its discourse and political rhetoric by drawing on the life-world of the peasant and cultivating castes such as the Maratha-kunbi and allied castes such as the Mali (gardener caste) as well as other artisan and service castes that supported the agrarian village economy.[263]

The Maratha-kunbi caste complex was a cluster with immense internal diversity. On the one hand, it included aristocratic Maratha families that considered themselves upper-caste Kshatriyas and owned huge tracts of land that they did not cultivate; they sought support for their exclusive status by claiming Vedic rituals and maintained a distance from Kunbi peasant families and caste networks. On the other hand, the Maratha-kunbi caste complex was also comprised of middle-class landowners who continued to maintain social and marital relations with poor peasants' families. And finally, it also included a vast sea of impoverished Kunbi cultivators.

263 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society : The Non Brahman Movement in Western India, 1873 to 1930*. 1st ed. (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976), 140.

To a large extent, the Kunbi community's impoverishment that Tukaram Patil and Phule talk about extensively in their work was caused by them being roped into the cash economy. The new colonial revenue system that expected land revenue in cash and the increasing pressure to cultivate cash crops for the global agrarian market wrung the peasant dry.[264] Although rural indebtedness was common before the administrative control of the British regime, the credit system's oppressive character was heightened after the Kunbis were catapulted into the capitalist economy. With the expansion in trade and global circulation of cash crops, Marathi-speaking agrarian hinterlands emerged as fertile markets for credit and lending, as a result it witnessed a sudden spike in the influx of Marwadi and Gujarati moneylenders.[265] The credit economy endorsed by the new Marwadi and Gujarati moneylenders, who migrated to Maratha country from Northwestern India, stood in stark opposition to that of the *vani* or the local village shopkeeper, who also doubled as a moneylender.

While, the *vani* was more interested in gaining control of the peasants' produce, which he sold in towns and cities, the new moneylenders forwarded credit to the peasant that he in turn borrowed from a bigger money-lender in the city. The village Kunbi, now always in need of cash to pay land revenue, was roped into a wider circuit of debt that had its one end in the city. With the introduction of the colonial legal system, unlike the pre-British era, the defaulter was left with no space for negotiation and often lost his land in a civil suit to the money-lender. Uninterested in agrarian production, the new money-

264 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*, 74.
265 While some Gujrati and Marwari business communities had migrated to Maratha country in the seventeenth century, their movement in the early-nineteenth century was unprecedented. Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society,* 74.

lender either rented out the land or put it out for sale.[266] And so, in addition to bad years, the precarity of the small and the mid-level Kunbi steepened with increased ups and downs of the international market, indebtedness, litigations, and famines.[267]

The transformation of the economic and political structures were accompanied by new forms of legality, contracts, and a bureaucratic order of the colonial justice system. In this new order of things, the colonial regime of legal papers and written contracts loaded the dice against the non-literate Kunbi. Between 1835 and 1839, Ahmednagar district alone witnessed a 100% increase (from 2,900 to 5,900) in civil suits involving peasants. Most cases culminated in the transfer of land from the Kunbi to the moneylender.[268]

The relations between the Patil (village headman), usually from the Kunbi caste, and the Kulkarni (the village accountant) — who often belonged to the Brahman or other literate upper or middle castes, were further strained by the colonial administration's move to retain both village functionaries. While the Patil, the erstwhile village-headmen, lost his judicial and paternal decision making power and was reduced to a mere police functionary, under the colonial empire of paper, the Kulkarni's literate skills and his ability to maintain accounts and land records found new value. This shifted the nucleus of power in the village from the Patil to the accountant. The colonial administration's point of contact in the village, the Kulkarni—the keeper of land records and accounts, gathered more power than the often non-literate Patil.[269]

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266 Ravinder Kumar, *Western India in the Nineteenth Century : A Study in the Social History of Maharashtra.* Studies in Social History. (London : Toronto: Routledge & K. Paul, University of Toronto P., 1968), 153; Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*, 74-75.
267 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society, 80.*
268 Ravinder Kumar, *Western India in the Nineteenth Century*, 156-157.
269 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*, 80.

In this environment, the Samaj's political vocabulary of antagonism towards the *Bhatji* (the Brahman) and the *Shetji* (the Money-lender) resonated among the cultivators and artisans. Evidently, the Satyashodhak Samaj's influence spread along the lines of the irrigation canals in the Deccan regions. Built in the 1870s, as the network of canals in southern Pune district made way for water to quench large tracts of rural agricultural land, it simultaneously carried the message of the anti-caste movement and galvanized far-flung villages and agrarian communities. According to Marutrao Nawale, a Satyasamajian active in the later decades of the nineteenth century: "We feel very happy … that the 'Satyasamaj' is the principal cause of progress in our peasant agriculture that occurred with the renting and purchasing of land in many places on the Mutha and Nira Canals of Poona district and the Godavari canals of Nagar district."[270]

The influence of the Samaj and its network of *samajians* grew along the canal lines for two reasons. One, in the rural areas the Samaj primarily found support among the Maratha-kunbi castes and other cultivating castes like the Mali who grew fruits, vegetables, and flowers on their newly irrigated land. While it claimed to articulate the question of the impoverished and laboring members of these castes, the Samaj also attracted the attention of Kunbi cultivators who owned fertile plots of land and were economically well-off; many of the families were the Patil or the village headmen.[271] Although some Kunbi families were moderately wealthy and the irrigation projects further enhanced their material prospects, they were socially and ritually identified as Shudra and treated as such by the village Brahmans. The Satyashodhak Samaj's trenchant

[270] Ibid., Translation by Gail Omvedt.
[271] Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society,*148.

criticism of Brahmanical knowledge and ritual economy resonated with the humiliation experienced by the non-Brahman peasants and the erstwhile village headmen.[272]

Two, the key leadership of the Pune Satyashodhak Samaj worked as contractors and *mestre* or civil contractors on the construction of canals that doused the rain-shadow lands of southern Pune. For instance, Jotirao Phule, was also a renowned civil contractor in the region and provided building material for large construction projects. In 1879, Phule contributed to the construction of the Khadakwasala dam built on the Mutha River in southern Pune. He not only employed laborers from the region to work on these projects, but he also viewed the construction project as an opportunity to conscientize the toiling rural masses, who inevitably belonged to the 'untouchable' and the lower castes.

Gyanoba Sasane, Phule's business associate, caste-kin, and also a *mestre*[273]on the Khadakwasala dam project mentions, how Phule opened a night school for the two thousand laborers employed on the construction site.[274] Similarly, Krishnarao Bhalekar, a non-Brahman leader from the Mali caste, worked as the supervisor on the construction of the Nira Canal at Viravadi in Western Maharashtra between 1880 and 1884.[275] The Satyashodhak Samaj was so deeply embedded among the agrarian communities, and drew its activists and *upadeshaks* from the peasant castes to such an extent, that the momentum of the movement and the ebbs and flows of its activities were closely affected by the vagaries of harvest failure, famines, and locust attacks on crops.[276]

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[272] Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* 280-281.
[273] A supervisor of laborers.
[274] Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* 256.
[275] Ibid., 281.
[276] Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*,141-42.

The Satyashodhak Samaj's criticism of the undemocratic character of Brahmanical religious knowledge systems must have found resonance with Tukaram Patil's immediate intellectual context. From what we know about satyashodhak activists of the Mali and Kunbi castes, such as Krishnarao Bhalekar, Gyanoba Krishnaji Sasane, Gangaram Bhau Mhaske, Madhavrao Raghoji Rokade, all of them received primary education in missionary schools, and proceeded to join the clerical staff of the local British administration.[277] Additionally, by the time *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* saw print in 1892, the notion that the Hindu religion in the present-day was corrupt was widely propagated by the missionaries and reformist social observers such as Lokhahitawadi and religio-social organizations like the Prarthana Samaj and the Arya Samaj.

Before coming in contact with the criticism about dominant Hindu religion in missionary schools and revivalist social organizations, members of the lower-caste were, very often, introduced to similar criticisms of Brahmanical Hindu religion by their families and clan networks who participated in heterodox devotional traditions such as the *Kabir Panth*[278] and the *warkari sampradaya* in Marathi-speaking western India. While the culture of the *warkari sampradaya* was an integral aspect of the peasant lifeworld, lesser-known gurus and local *kirtankars* (Kirtan performers), with a sizable lower-caste following, too foregrounded a critique of Brahmanical Hindu religion, liturgical knowledge, and meaningless ritual regimes. For instance, before meeting

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[277] Ibid.,

[278] Kabir Panth is a denominational group that follows the teachings of Kabir, a fifteenth-century Bhakti saint. Kabir, a weaver, was born into a Muslim family but was deeply influenced by the heterodox Bhakti tradition propounded by Ramananda. While Kabir was originally from Varanasi, a town in North-Eastern India known best for its religious import for Hindu religion, his Beejaks (seed thoughts) travelled all around the subcontinent.

Jotirao Phule, Krishnarao Bhalekar was involved in anti-Brahman activities in his village and was a keen follower of Jangali Maharaj, a mystic-poet who sermoned on the futility of ritual life. Similarly, Tukaram Hanmant Pinjan, who witnessed the inception of the Satyashodhak Samaj, recounted that before the Samaj was established, Phule and his friends would gather at Pinjan's shop where Dnyanagiri Buva, a *Kabeer Panthi* (A follower of Kabir's Path) guru would read out from Kabir's anthology and translate it in Marathi for those gathered.[279]

Caste relations and the politics of knowledge

For Tukaram Patil, the inequality in the Brahman-Shudra relationship turned on the axis of politics of knowledge and ignorance. In a bid to explain the inequality in the relationship of the Shudra and the Brahman, Tukaram Patil drew on parables and metaphors rooted in quotidian life. As I show below, Patil perceived the social relation of the Shudra and the Brahman as one characterized by loss, trickery, and extraction of labor and material wealth. While the many instances of comparison allowed the author to sift through the divergent versions of the relationship, the Brahman's ability to monopolize routes of circulation of knowledge and, as a result forbidding the Shudra from accessing knowledge and education emerges as a common thread across all instances.

He begins by likening social relations between the Brahmans and the laboring castes to that between the cat and its master. He notes, "The cat wishes blindness on its master in the hope of a little bit of milk. But the master pays a heavy price in return for these few droplets of milk. Blindness destroys the master's life and that of his family. In the same

[279] Rosalind O'Hanlon*, Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, 229. Kabir was an iconoclast poet-saint from fifteenth-century Northern India.

way, these people (the Brahmans) in order to score small gains have led the entire country to detriment."[280]

Patil immediately rolls out another allegory for the Brahman and laboring castes, "(we are like the) Blind horse, that anyone can catch hold of, ride it to a distance, and once the journey is over, abandon it. The ways in which our people have been used like animals are slowly but surely coming to light."[281]

And finally, the author takes recourse to the relationship between an adult and a child to highlight the asymmetry in the Shudra-Brahman social relations. He suggests, "The sly act of offering sweets to an unassuming one (*adnyana*) in exchange of his jewelry can continue only until the child comes of age. After that, even if the thief claims a right to the child's wealth, the latter is not only sure to reject the thief's specious talk (*bramhajnyan)*, but will also strike him a few blows in return. Fearing such retribution, castes that have for generations profited from their superior status, have been resistant to passing on knowledge to our people."[282] Tukaram Patil's use of multiple allegories is symptomatic of the recognition that the inequality in their relationship is multifarious, composed of many layers—each distinctly represented in his many examples.

In the first instance, the relationship between the cat and its master is used by the author to represent the intricate power-dynamic of the Shudra and the Brahman. In the ritual iteration of this relationship, the Shudra, although ritually inferior to the Brahman, occupies the position of the *Yajamana*—the patron who orders the sacrifice and offers donations to the Brahman. A Shudra, no matter how impecunious, is the donor while the

[280] Tukaram Patil, *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan*, 1.
[281] Tukaram Patil, *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan*,1-2.
[282] Ibid.,2.

Brahman, possibly of better means and definitely of a higher ritual status, is fixed into the position of the receiver. Thus, it is the *dharma* or the duty of the Shudra *Yajamana*, like the master who protects the cat, to patronize and support the Brahman. However, just like the cat, the Brahman wishes blindness in the form of ignorance only to profit from marginal material gains.

Patil's use of blindness (*andhala*) as a metaphor for ignorance and lack of knowledge is consistent. He also deploys it to describe how for the Brahman, the Shudra is nothing but a blind horse. Patil uses this analogy to show how laboring castes, constituted of peasants and artisans, are woven into an exploitative relationship with the Brahman that is, in turn, aided by the dehumanization and lack of knowledge of the Shudra. In addition to marking the subservience of the Shudra by using the analogy of the animal—a subhuman state, the author uses the metaphor of the child to circumscribe a temporary lack of maturity on the continuum of full mental and physical development.

The author upends the Brahmanical justification of the incongruity between the Shudra and the Brahman in terms of the constitutively unequal relationship between the mother and the child. He argues: "They often invoke the maternal figure to say that 'never judge a mother's virtues.. No matter what her actions, she is, after all, your mother.' Do these crafty (*matlabi*) people even measure up to our mothers? Our mothers are immeasurably kind to us. Have you ever see a mother (like the Brahmans) contemptuous (*tiraskar*) of her children, practices untouchability with them, who wishes her children well, but only from afar, never lovingly bathes or feeds her young ones, never lovingly touching and caressing her children, on the contrary, tricks the child into stealing his food from his hands, never cares for or nurtures her offspring. Can these

mothers openly acknowledge us as their children? No, and on growing up, the children too will refuse to call her their mother. Such a cold-hearted mother is not to be found even among animals. Who are these Brahmans? From where do they come? What sect do they belong to? What caste are they of? What actions and thoughts do they profess? How can we treat them as our mothers? These Brahmans feign geniality only as long as they enjoy the Shudra's hospitality and extract a hefty sum in return. In a time of crisis, they will be of no use." [283] Like the Brahmans, Patil too claimed that the relationship between the Shudra and the Brahman might resemble that of an adult and a child. However, it is full of duplicity, detachment, and humiliation. And so, he refuses to accept humiliation and unfairness draped in the garb of affectionate banter.

Tukaram Patil explained the imbalance in the Brahman and the Shudra relationship by drawing on everyday common sense instances. This kind of reasoning is the hallmark of the Satyashodhak anti-caste tradition. The Satyashodhak Samaj commonly drew on the dichotomy of the productive versus the parasitic castes, a trope ubiquitous in the *warkari* tradition in western India, to delegitimize the Brahman's social position. Patil argued that on the one hand, the unproductive and selfish Brahmans and the *Marwadi* (money-lenders) who earn their living not by physical labor, but only through usury and monopoly of knowledge contribute the least to the country's wealth. Nevertheless, they accumulate most of the country's resources and wealth. On the other hand, the laboring castes, who actually produced the wealth of the country, in return, receive only a fraction of what they produce. [284]

[283] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan,* 16.
[284] Rosalind O'Hanlon*, Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* 257.

The polemic of 'producers versus parasites' was crucial to the discourse of the lower-caste reformist movement. For instance, in 1889, an advertisement in a newspaper entitled *Sholapur Samachar* for the Dina Bandhu Sarvajanik Sabha Free School in Pune started by Krishnarao Bhalekar and Ganpat Sakharam Patil for the children of the cultivators illuminates just this. "Those who do office work get their education all right, and just sit contentedly in their jobs as clerks. How long must the cultivators, the laborers, the tradesmen and the workers, who actually increase the wealth of the country, just sit around waiting to be given the agricultural techniques, the skills and the trade that are enjoyed by their opposite numbers in advanced countries?"[285]

The activists of the Satyashodhak Samaj translated into action their understanding of the Brahman-Shudra conflict over religious knowledge. They did this by travelling across the villages of Pune to persuade the lower-castes to boycott local Brahmans and money-lenders who jointly impoverished them by holding them hostage to their rising *dakshina* (donation) charges and rate of interests.[286] And this pedagogical imperative was made all the more persuasive by the use of the producers versus parasite polemic, which creatively captured the everyday struggle of the peasants' life.

The campaign led by the Satyashodhak Samaj to boycott the priestly services of the Brahmans culminated in a landmark court case between the priests of Otur, a village in the Junnar Taluka, and one Balaji Kesaji Patil. As a mark of resistance to the oppressive priestcraft of the Brahmans, Balaji Patil, with the support of Jotirao Phule, officiated his daughter's wedding without the presence of a Brahman priest and instead

[285] Translation by Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* 287.
[286] Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, 259.

appointed a priest from the non-Brahman Maratha caste to officiate the ceremony. The Brahmans in the village retaliated by laying a claim to their 'rightful' *dakshina* of six rupees fifty *paisa* from Balaji Patil despite their absence at the ceremony. Frustrated that the district court had ruled in favor of Balaji Patil and Phule, who refused to pay for a service that was not performed, the Brahmans held a meeting and collectively appealed to the Bombay High Court in 1887. Finally, in January 1890, the Bombay High Court upheld Balaji Patil's position.[287]

This decisive victory of the non-Brahmans, who claimed the right to perform their rituals and reject the Brahmanical entitlement to the service and its fee, left an indelible mark on Tukaram Patil whose *Dharma Dhong Pariphotan* saw print two years after the High Court judgement. In a chapter entitled, "Brahmans have no right, says the High court" and dedicated to the Otur incident, Patil appealed to his audience "To not fear the Brahmans anymore." He declared, "Everywhere our people have dispensed off with the services of the Brahmans and instead have begun performing rituals on their own. The Brahmans feared that just like the Sutars (carpenters), Sonars (goldsmiths), Kasars (coppersmiths), Lohars (blacksmiths), and the Patharwats (masons), they too (the Marath-kunbis) will not request their services any more…(nevertheless) If the members of a caste resolve to perform religious rituals (*dharma vidhi*), wedding rituals (*lagna vidhi*) by men from their own castes, the Brahmans cannot claim a penny for the ritual performances in return…On hearing this judgment of the High Court, the Brahmans turned pale… My brothers! Do not be deceived by the Brahman's theatrics…teach your children to read

287 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society,* 141.

and write and usher them into humanity (*manushyat ana*) … Give your children the gift of virtue and not that of wealth and riches."[288]

The Brahman's exclusive claim to religious knowledge

The Brahman castes' claim to an exclusive and special relationship to Hindu ritual knowledge lay at the heart of the 1884 controversy that played out between Balaji Dumbre-Patil of Otur and the Brahmans. In Brahmanical religious ideology, during the performance of a ritual, while uttering the appropriate incantations is crucial for the validation of the rites, the *source* of these liturgical words is of utmost importance too. For instance, in the Otur case, although non-Brahmans priests officiated the marriage ceremony, the Brahmans demanded their fair share in lieu of the 'services' they would have possibly performed.

Why did the Brahmans in Otur see themselves indispensable to the performance of ritual meditation? Why did they argue that a ceremony mediated by the non-Brahman priests did not sanctify the ritual in the same way that the physical presence of a Brahman would? The answer to this dilemma lies in the Brahmanical assumption that the Brahman is the physical vessel that holds the Vedas in his memory and the physical utterance of sounds.[289] The Vedic religious framework that gained strength in the last century of the first millennium BCE, invested the Brahman with the exclusive possession of Vedic knowledge. And so, for about a millennium, when the Vedas were not written down, they were memorized and orally transmitted within a narrow community of Brahman scholars

[288] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan,* 9-10.
[289]Patrick Olivelle, "Orality, Memory, and Power: Vedic Scriptures and Brahmanical Hegemony in India." In *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon* , edited by Vincent Wimbush (Rutgers University Press, 2008), 215.

known as the *sista* (a special cultural elite).[290] Therefore, the prestige of the Brahman and the sanctity that his physical presence brings to a religious ceremony can be traced to the notion that the Brahman body is the carrier of the knowledge of the world—i.e., the Vedas.

In the Brahmanical constellation of meanings, *vidya* (knowledge) is intrinsically tied to the reading and understanding of the Vedas. Both words, *vidya* and Veda, can be traced to a common Sanskrit root *vida*, meaning to know. However, *vidya* in this constellation of meaning is not an external truth that is accessible to all those who are willing to deploy appropriate ways of knowing. On the contrary, in the Brahmanical ideological framework, the social location of the receiving subject of knowledge is central to its transmission. The law book of Manu, written in the second century CE, makes clear this exclusivity ingrained in the processes of knowledge production and transmission. The text suggests that *vidya*, the reading and comprehension of the Vedic texts, should not be taught to those who 'bring no benefit' from its learning. Since lower-castes and women were not allowed to teach or transmit Vedic knowledge, it could be passed down only to Brahman-male students who had received proper ritual initiation.

Moreover, the text of Manu also prohibited the Vedas from being uttered publicly, except during rituals and sacrifices. In this case too, the lower-caste and the 'untouchable' castes could not be exposed to the Vedic verses.[291] The law-book of Manu best illustrates the exclusive relationship between Veda, *vidya,* and the Brahman: "Vidya came up to the Brahman and said, I am your treasure. Guard me!"[292]

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[290] Patrick Olivelle, "Orality, Memory, and Power", 215.
[291] Patrick, Olivelle, "Orality, Memory, and Power: Vedic Scriptures and Brahmanical Hegemony in India," 215.
[292] Ibid., Olivelle quotes Manu 2.114.

While the relationship between the Vedas, knowledge, and the Brahman was elevated as the official ideology by the law-book of Manu, locally in Western India, the Brahman monopoly of literary skills and their greater control of elite forms of knowledge was tempered during the reign of the Yadav Empire in the thirteenth-century. The social value of Brahminic knowledge and learning was augmented when the Yadava Empire resolved to weave literary activities in its system of royal patronage. The scope of Brahmanical practices was not limited to the domain of the religious and philosophical knowledge alone, such as teaching the Vedas, the codification of liturgical texts, theorizing, and writing commentaries on the *Dharmashastras* (religio-juridical texts). It also included the running of monasteries and centers of Vedic education as well as transmission of technocratic literary skills: training of scribes, clerks, accountants, genealogists, and chroniclers. The dual role played by the Yadava state in officiating the relationship between Brahminism and corresponding literary activities, as well as ensuring financial support to institutions of Brahminic learning ensured that Brahman educators and technocrats exercised their role as gate-keepers of knowledge. As a result, both the knowledge of literate skills and that of Sanskrit were closely guarded and perpetuated only within a small caste-based interpretive community.[293]

Thus the extension of an elaborate system of state funding to Brahmanical practices made necessary a clear and a practical definition of what activities can be included within its scope. But it also strengthened the abstraction of 'Brahmin-ness' from Brahman, the person. For instance, although a Brahman played a decisive role in the

293 Christian Lee Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory : A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India.*(New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 23.

royal military, officially, his award (usually an endowment of an *Agrahara* —a village or land assigned to the Brahmans) would be made in lieu of his scholarly merit, an activity deemed as befitting a Brahman.[294]

This abstraction of varna status is evident also in how the relationship between the donor and the receiver was strictly circumscribed onto the relationship between non-Brahman and the Brahman castes. Within this constellation of meaning, the gifts and wealth donated, also called the performance of *dharma*, had to be necessarily produced out of non-Brahmanical activities such as war and trade, even if the donor belonged to the Brahman caste. The Brahman donor's stature in the relationship is determined by the means by which the wealth is produced—either by performing the role of a Kshatriya or that of a Vaishya. And so while a Brahman could perform functions and labor meant for members of other three varnas, inversely, the function of a Brahman—literary skills, performance of ritual, and Sanskrit scholarship—could not be performed by any other varna, but the Brahmans.[295]

The principle of abstraction of Bramhan-ness, fortified into practice by Yadav state patronage, was invoked six centuries later by the Brahmans of Otur by claiming *dakshina* (fees) despite their absence at the wedding. Reminding Balaji Patil, a Maratha, that the Brahmans were always already the receivers in the donor-receiver caste relationship, they staked a claim to a *dakshina* that, they argued, 'rightfully' belonged to them.

294 Christian Lee Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory*, 23.
295 Christian Lee Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory*, 23.

The Satyashodhak Samaj tirelessly worked to shatter the religious merit and morality attached to this donor-receiver relationship, where often the *Yajaman* —the patron or the donor was an impecunious peasant pressed into donating gifts to the Brahman. For the Samaj the paradox in the situation did not stop at the inequality of means between the giver and the receiver of *dakshina*. They viewed the imbalance in the donor-receiver relationship through the prism of the incommensurability of productive and unproductive labor: how can the Brahman demand a share of the peasants' productive labor in exchange for his empty unproductive labor of ritualism?

Tukaram Patil, as well as the Satyashodhak Samaj, recognized that Brahman exclusivity to religious knowledge laid at the heart of the lopsided social relationship of the Shudra donor (*yajman*) and the Brahman receiver. And in order to transform the unfair social relationship, its root, the Brahman's exclusive access to ritual knowledge, had to be first secularized.

Secularizing religious texts, authors, and their authority

Tukaram Patil illuminated the underlying reasons for the Brahman's prestige and the Shudra's unequal access to Vedic knowledge and shastric texts by highlighting the historical character of the elite Hindu religious tradition. Patil argued that the Shudra's exclusion from Vedic knowledge and their subsequent 'ignorance' had its roots in the deliberate socio-political arrangements in the past. These arrangements were responsible for the reproduction of inequality of access to knowledge across generations.

The prominence of Patil's argument that the "Shudra's ignorance is a socio-political fact" stands out all the more when compared to the orthodox assumption that the Shudra exclusion from knowledge is a divine injunction or the nineteenth-century conservative

assertion that distinct varna and castes are groups of people with distinct essential qualities naturally ingrained in them. The conservative opinion argued that while intellectual capacity and proclivity to learning were essential to the Brahman varna, the Shudra varna was inclined to perform manual labor.

Patil explained that the ignorance of the Shudra is not a 'matter-of-fact' consequence of their restrained capability. On the contrary, it is a deliberate political move by the Brahmans. He explained that the Brahmans controlled the field of knowledge first by establishing their dominance in the social realm. Having secured their footing in social relations, they further stabilized their preponderance by codifying partisan textual knowledge laced with falsehood about the divine character of the discourse. He contended, "Like the mendicant who keeps the innocent villagers under his thumb by establishing his precedence, the Brahman castes too, have maintained their preponderance in this country. To bolster their preeminence, they wrote an assortment of texts and palmed them off as the works of the divine and great sages from the past. It is based on these texts that the Brahmans command a level of worship meant only for the divine—the one who made this world and parents who gave us the gift of life. In the garb of this artificial preeminence, the Brahmans have tricked us in many ways. They have ground our human rights (*manavi adhikar*) and reduced us to slaves. Since this arrangement has continued for generations, our people have been left ignorant, without an opportunity to question or turn things around. And this is why they have imposed ignorance (*adnyana*) onto our people."

Besides arguing that the ignorance of the Shudra is the outcome of Brahmanical politics of knowledge, Patil emphasized that because the Shudra's condition of ignorance

has been historically reproduced over several generations, the Brahmans have constituted themselves into a narrow and tightly bound interpretive community. With no one outside the Brahman castes to challenge the dominant interpretation of religious texts or corroborate the truth of 'divine' propositions, Brahman readers and writers were able to stabilize arbitrary propositions as the truth. He emphasized that the Brahman castes for generations have carried out this practice of writing and codifying propositions that either served their partisan interest and maintained lower-caste subordination or have no correlation to the natural world. Concurrently, prohibiting lower-caste access to the function of reading allowed the Brahmans to masquerade this "web of lies" as high-knowledge.[296]

Tukaram Patil's refusal to protect the sacral authority of the Vedas sets him apart from his nineteenth-century contemporaries. While, socio-religious reformist organizations like the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj of Maharashtra as well as its radical precursor—the Paramhansa Mandali, reshaped Hindu religion by claiming to sieve out 'superstition,' 'myths,' and 'irrational principles,' they insisted on retaining Vedic principles as the immutable core of the reformed Hindu religion.[297] Instead, Patil questioned the divinity of the "seers who first wrote the religious texts" in the Vedic period by demonstrating the similarities between men in the past and those in the present.

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[296] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan*, 30-35.

297 Kenneth W. Jones, "Communalism in the Punjab: The Arya Samaj Contribution." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 28, no. 1 (1968): 39-54; Aravind Ganachari,"Keshub Chandra Sen's Bombay Visit (1864) and the Response of 'Young Bombay': Contours of Reform Movement in Western India." *Indian Historical Review* 35, no. 1 (2008): 49-83; C. S. Adcock, *The Limits of Tolerance : Indian Secularism and the Politics of Religious Freedom.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

He argued: "In the Vedic period men, just like those in the present, built houses and lived in them with their wives and children, they too, like us, feared death, like us they too made offerings to the gods and prayed for their help. Like the people of today, they ate, drank, laughed, cried, and slept. In the *Vedic* times too, men stole, looted, murdered, fought, and committed burglaries. Like people in the present, they too were punished, hanged, exiled and performed atonement for their misdeeds. That is to say, the claim by the Brahmans that their ancestors in the past were divine and different from us, is nothing but dishonest."[298] By demonstrating that the men in the past, who codified religious texts, were as mortal and fallible as the men in the present, Patil found the authors of the *shastras* a place in human history. By inferring about the lives of the people in the Vedic past from that of the present society, Patil constructed a linear historical connection between the Vedic period and the present. This connection, I argue, is a crucial step in the direction of secularizing the authors of Vedic texts and the product of their labor: the Vedas.

Convinced that the Brahman authors of the religious texts are rooted in the this-worldly realm, Patil historicized religious texts as knowledge produced by men in the past, but only as a response to the material world surrounding them at a given point in time. Patil argues, "Sacred texts are nothing but reflections by human authors who engage with the question: how can happiness (*sukha*) be attained? As they thought right, and at a given point in time."[299] These propositions, he suggested, came to be known as '*Ishwar datta dharma'* (revealed religions). The author further illuminates the secular

[298] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan*, 3.
[299] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan,* 17.

character of religious doctrines by emphasizing that religious texts, which claim to establish eternal truths, emerge from the vagaries of the human mind that in turn respond to the changing circumstances in the world at a given point in time. Thus, he demonstrated that the religious doctrines are both shaped by and respond to their historical context.[300]

Besides secularizing Hindu religious texts and practices, Patil extends his historical analysis to other religious doctrines to underline that religions all around the world are essentially cultural artifacts. For a brief moment, Patil takes a comparative view by juxtaposing the Hindu religion with Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. He argues that if religious doctrines truly were divine revelations, the need for multiple religious texts would not have been felt. The existence of numerous and conflicting religions and their sacred texts stand proof of the fact that mortal agents have authored them. Thus, various sacred texts trying to lay norms for human conduct are nothing but varied human responses at different times and circumstances.[301]

Patil reinforced his argument that religious texts are historical artifacts by asking the question: "Do any of the revealed religions claim to have a Prophet who has witnessed and experienced life from the beginning of time?" He continues, "If there was a man like that, who has lived for a thousand years, his assumptions, experiences, understanding of the world should be accepted as the truth. But there is no man who has walked the earth for this long a stretch of time…how is it that the rules made by mere mortals who have not lived to see even a hundred years, who are born in a minuscule

[300] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan*, 17.
[301] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan,* 7.

nation of a handful of people, claim to set in stone rules and norms for millions of people and for thousands of years to come?"[302] Patil draws the reader's attention to the this-worldly character of religious doctrines by arguing that they bear the imprints of time and context. They are the results of a thought process generated by human beings with finite biological lives, and therefore, their experience and knowledge of the world, too, is finite. He argues that religious rules and norms written in the sacred texts are not timeless. They are historical in that the contingencies of human thought processes produce them.

Brahman domination in the realm of secular knowledge

The July 24, 1884 issue of *Dnyanodaya* (The Rise of Knowledge), a Marathi missionary journal, summarized Jotirao Phule's addresses to one of his many meetings, which were attended by several thousand members of the Marathas, Mali (gardener), Sonars (goldsmith), and Shimpi (tailor) castes among other middling and lower peasant and artisan castes. The letter to *Dnyanodaya* reported, "Mr. Phule showed in his lecture that wherever one turned these days, there was a Brahman. Take whatever Government Department you like, he said—the Justice Department, the Police Department, the Revenue Department, the Educational Department, the Medical Department —all offices, courts, and places of business were packed with Brahmans. These Priest-beggars have forgotten the code of behaviour proper to Brahmans, have learned the language of mlecchas,[303] have thrust aside their ancient titles of Shastri, Pandit, and Vaidic and have

302 Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan,* 17, 18.

303 *Mleccha*, a word used to denote a foreigner, in Sanskrit literally meant 'one whose language is unintelligible'. But by the nineteenth-century it was used as a short-hand for Muslims. Source: The Molesworth Marathi and English Dictionary.

replaced them with BA, MA, BD, LLB and so on. They have monopolized all education for themselves, and have refused other castes all access to their office and courts."[304]

Patil's disquiet about elite control of knowledge production is kindled by the extension of Brahman castes' influence well beyond their 'traditional' domain of 'sacred knowledge' and into the sphere of secular knowledge. The author was aware that the colonial administration's increasing 'will to know' about the native population, and the subsequent compilation, ordering, and categorization of knowledge, both textual and empirical, had enabled the Brahmans to renew their ties with knowledge production, but this time as 'native informants' to European administrators, anthropologists, and historians.[305] Thus, the author acknowledged the intellectual dominance of the modern liberal Brahman, who was closely allied to the colonial administration, as also the preponderance of the traditional Brahman, who held his fort in the realm of ritual and religious knowledge.

Patil discussed how European historians who sought to write the history of the Indian subcontinent exclusively drew on the writings, accounts, and stories spun by the Brahmans. He argued: "Writing and recording was the Brahman's forte, all the information that the (European) historians recorded up until now was given to them by the Brahmans. The Brahmans painted a glorious picture of their own exploits."[306] Patil suggests that the European historians' access to an incomplete, biased, and an overstated account of the past by the Brahmans led to a version of history that lacked both objectivity and accuracy.[307] He argued that not only have the Brahmans written and

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[304] Trasnaltion by O'Hanlon see Rosalind O'Hanlon*, Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* 278.
305 Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan*, 3.
[306] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan,* 3.
[307] Ibid., 25-27.

composed the *Vedas* and *Smritis*; they have also translated these texts. "But, our ignorant people do not have the wherewithal to understand this," he decried.[308] By controlling composition, codification, as well as translation, the Brahman castes have mediated both the production and dissemination of religious knowledge.

The thoroughness of Patil's critique is reflected in his careful unfolding of the many facets of Brahmanical knowledge culture. In the discussion above, we first saw how he secularized religious ways of knowing as well as the rules and prescriptions associated with the corpus and practices of Brahmanical knowledge. This was then followed by his uncovering of the continuities between premodern knowledge practices and modern literary assumptions in a caste society under British colonialism. Finally, Tukaram Patil takes on the seemingly 'secular' and rational ways of justifying a caste-wise division of mental and manual labor. The question, "If everyone learns to read and write, who will till the land?" was, according to Tukaram Patil, one of the numerous ways devised by the *dhurta* Brahman (the wily Brahman) and their disciples to dissuade the '*loka*' (people) from the pursuit of knowledge.[309]

Taking this question as his starting point, Patil squarely refuted the premise forwarded by liberal Brahmans that caste is an organizing principle of the Indian society and that it is an indigenous equivalent to the social division of labor in the West. He identified two loopholes in this argument: One, He asked, "How is it that in many European countries where a ninety-seven percent of the people can read and write, education is not only free, but in some cases also compulsory? On the contrary, why is

[308] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan*, 3.
[309] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan* (Falsehood of Religion Exposed). (Mumbai: Dinavatsalya Printing Press, 1892),4.

the spread of knowledge among our peasant friends discouraged when not one among a hundred can read and write? What would you call this if not fraudulence?"[310] He further added, "... [H]ow is it that European and American nations... have never experienced a dearth of cultivators and artisans. They have easily found people with skills equivalent to the nhavi (barber caste), chambhar (tanners and cobblers), mang (village servants), burud, (both rope-maker castes) sonar (goldsmith caste), lohar (black-smith caste), shimpi (tailor caste), kumbhar (potter caste), parit (washer-men caste), sali and koshti (both weaver castes)." In the same vein, he suggests, that 'European nations' have never experienced a 'shortage of porters, *bigari* (laborers), *pankya* (water-carrier), cooks or coachmen."[311]

He reasoned that in societies with high literacy and the absence of caste order, cultivators, peasants, and artisans thrive alongside scholars, clerks, and servicemen.[312] The author explains that people in European societies pursue skills and occupations that best suit their intellect, physical capacity, and economic resources. As a result, in highly literate societies, it is inevitable that skills required for the cultivation of grains, production of cloth, and other goods crucial for consumption and the maintenance of life are produced without deliberate allocation of occupations.[313]

Further, Patil criticizes the creation of the false division between mental and manual labor that has its roots and justifications in caste ideology. He foregrounds the idea that the pursuit of knowledge does not have to be motivated by the singular goal of nurturing professional intellectuals and scholars. The author implies that formal

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[310]Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan*,4-5.
[311] According to the Molesworth Marathi-English Dictionary *Pankya* is also a term used to identify an illiterate and a crude person. Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan*, 5.
[312] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan*, 5.
[313] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan*,6.

knowledge is crucial for those engaged in artisanal and agrarian occupations as it is for educationists and scholars. Knowledge and education help artisans and cultivators to efficiently conduct their everyday business of life.[314]

Patil argues that the elite assumption that all those who attain knowledge by way of learning to read and write necessarily seek a purely scholarly life is an erroneous one and that not all those who acquire an education become *purna vidwana* (true or complete intellectuals). Scholarship, he argued: "Requires patience, time, labor, and intellect and is an exercise like no other; thus only a few seek to tread this arduous path. Typically one receives an education only for twelve to fifteen years, which is a small period of one's life. But to be a *purna vidvana* (a true or a complete intellectual), one is required to engage in the pursuit of knowledge and intellect (*buddhi*) for a long period. Despite receiving an education, only a few will take up scholarly professions, and the rest may continue to perform artisanal and agricultural professions." This allowed Patil to argue against the idea that the spread of education will deprive the society of its peasants and artisans and leave it dysfunctional. He is critical of this 'functionalist' view of Indian society. He contends that "In comparison to other nations where work is spontaneously distributed in the society, in this country occupation and work is deliberately allocated, almost like child's play."[315]

Patil's imagination of a decent society is one that is flexible, especially about the division between mental and manual labor. Although the artisan and the peasant might choose to retain their occupations that predominantly require manual labor, it is

[314] Ibid.,
[315] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan,*5.

imperative that they have access to formal education. While literacy may open new avenues for upward mobility for the artisan and the peasants, for Patil, it is also important that it helps them stave off the manipulations by the priests and money-lenders. Moreover, comparing the imposition of occupation in caste societies to the relative spontaneity of western societies, Patil yearns for an alternative social arrangement where occupation is a choice, determined by the interplay of physical capacity, wealth, and training.

The Shudra exclusion from the realm of knowledge

Patil's critique of Shudra exclusion from Brahmanical knowledge allows him to problematize the social function of religious scriptures. Working with the assumption that the reading of religious texts is foundational to belonging to the corresponding religious community, the author draws attention to more than one way in which the Shudra is marginalized in Hindu society. He puzzles over the fact that while, on the one hand, members of the lower-castes perceive themselves as belonging to the Hindu fold, on the other hand, the study of the *shastra* bypasses them completely.[316] He asked: "when you are asked "to which religion (*dharmache lok*) do you belong?" our people (*aple lok*) instinctively answer we are of the Hindu religion. When followed up with the question, 'the Brahman have the Vedas, the Christians have the Bible, the Muslims read the Quran and the Parsi (Zoroastrians) have the *Zendagosta* (Zend Avesta). People of these religions have their own *dharma pusktak* (religious books). They have the right (*adhikar)* to see, read and learn from them. But what do you have?' [In that case] what do you say?"[317]

[316] Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan*, 8.
[317]Tukaram Patil, *Dharmadhonga Parisphotan,* 7.

By asking these pertinent questions, Patil invoked the relationship between scripture and the religious community. William Graham, in his work on scriptures in the *Encyclopedia of Religion,* argues that scripture can never stand in isolation and that the elevated status of a scripture is acquired by a text only when it is recognized as sacred and authoritative by a group of people. Moreover, it attains legitimacy only in the context of a community that reads, transmits, and celebrates it.[318] The notion that a text achieves sacredness when mediated by the act of reading by a group of people, upheld both by Patil and Graham, has its roots in the study of Semitic religious traditions. However, the easy correspondence between a religious community and its access to the scriptures cannot be extended to the Hindu religion.[319] This is because the lower-castes and the 'untouchables' are embedded in a social relation where the possession of religious scriptural knowledge is a privilege and controlled only by a few elites from the Brahman castes. In the Hindu caste society, the production, transmission, and preservation of religious scriptures is closely tied to social prestige and ritual power that are enjoyed by the Brahman castes alone.[320]

Theologically, while the Brahman's prestige and superiority are located in his exclusive access to religious knowledge, the figure of the Shudra too is constitutively entangled with Brahmanical ideology of knowledge, but contrary to the Brahman, by their exclusion from the realm of knowledge. The roots of Shudra exclusion from Vedic

[318] William Graham, "Scriptures", in the Encyclopedia of Religions, ed. Mircea Eliade,13. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 134. As quoted in Patrick, Olivelle, "Orality, Memory, and Power,"214.
[319] Patrick Olivelle, "Orality, Memory, and Power,"214.
[320] Ibid., 214, 215.

learning can be better understood in the light of the Shankaracharya's eighth-century commentary on the *Bramhasutra,* originally written by Badaraya.[321]

The *Chandogya Upanishada*[322] narrates the story of a king called Janasruti Pautryana. One night Jansruti overhears a conversation between two geese flying over him as he lays below a starry sky. On spotting Janasruti, the geese begin to laud his virtue and compare him to Raikva, a mangy hermit. On much discussion, they arrive at the conclusion that Raikva's superior radiance emerges from his possession of Vedic knowledge that no one else has. Distressed on hearing this, Janasruti runs in grief to Raikva, begging him to teach him the *vidya* that he possesses. On seeing Janasruti's desperate countenance, Raikva calls him, "O shudra!" After much cajoling and enticing Raikva with gifts, the latter agrees to impart Vedic knowledge to Janasruti.

However, later renditions of this story by Badaraya and Shankaracharya, which was originally narrated in the fourth chapter of *Chandogya Upanishada*, seek to drive home the point about the Shudra's disqualification from access to Vedic rituals as well as Vedic education. Theodore Benke, a scholar of the early-modern genre of writing on duties of the Shudra, argues that the original story in the *Chandogya Upanishada* was vastly different from its later renditions. The *Upanishada*, by narrating Janasruti and Raikva's story, actually signals the possibility of Shudra learning the Vedas.

These 'apostate' possibilities, of the Shudra learning Vedic knowledge, were foreclosed by the later canonical texts of the Vedanta school of philosophy such as the *Bramhasutra*, written by Badrayana in second century BCE, as well as its ensuing

321 The Shankaracharya is the prominent leader of the non-dualist school of Hinduism. His commentary on the *Bramhasutra* written by Badarayana, was originally written in Sanskrit approximately between 400-450 CE. It went on to become is a canonical text in mainstream Hinduism.

322 The *Chandogya Upanishada* features in the Samaveda, which was composed between the 8th-6th century BCE.

commentaries titled *Bramhasutrabhasya* by Shankarachaya, Ramanujan, and Madhavacharya written between the eighth and thirteenth century CE. Both the *Bramhasutra* and its Vedantic commentators sought to align the Janasruti and Raikva story from *Chandogya Upanishada* with the Brahmanical ideology that was not only uncompromising about the Shudra's prohibition from Vedic knowledge, but seized every opportunity to reinforce the norm. For instance, the Sutra 34 of *Chandogya Upanishada* cryptically mentions the grief *(suc, soka*) experienced by Janasruti on hearing the insulting remarks (*anadarasravana*) made by the geese and, as a result Janasruti running away and falling (*adravana*). But the Shankaracharya, in his commentary, grammatically fuses the two separate elements namely grief (*suc)* and running away and falling (*adravana*), to construct a new meaning of the word 'Shu-dra' as 'one who runs aggrieved by his lack of Vedic knowledge.'[323]

And so Shankaracharya and his followers 'rescue' the Brahmanical norm from the ambiguity embedded in the *Chandogya Upanishada*. Shankaracharya, the pioneering scholar of non-dualist Hindu philosophy, interprets Raikva's reference to Janasruti as Shudra, not as a reference to his varna status (for how can a Shudra learn the Vedas!), but a mere description of this desperate countenance. Janasruti, after all a king, cannot be anything but a Kshatriya in the later Vedantic rendition of the story.[324] Theodore Benke argues that while later canonical texts like *Mimansa* and *Bramhasutra* unequivocally foreground Shudra exclusion, they do so by overwriting onto earlier strains of thought

[323] Ananya Vajpeyi, "The Sudra in History: From Scripture to Segregation." In *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*. Ed. by Bronner, McCrea and Cox. (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2015), 343, 344.
[324] Ibid.,345.

like those from the *Chandogya Upanishada,* which kept the possibility of Shudra learning religious texts open, or at most ambiguous.

Nevertheless, these alternative agnostic propositions leave a trace in the form of *purvapaksha* — a premise used as a foil against which the authors posit their argument and move to upend it.[325] Both S.G Kane, a scholar of Dharmashastra (a canonical religio-legal text) and Benke agree that Shankaracharya and his ilk's etymology of the word Shudra is farfetched. They argue that the etymological deconstruction of the Shudra is a forced ideological move by the Vedanta philosophers deployed to circumvent the prospects of a Shudra accessing Vedic knowledge.[326]

And so a closer look at the works emerging from the Vedanta school of philosophy is crucial for three reasons: First, the 'innovative' etymology of the Shudra is unequivocally upheld and reiterated by the exemplary Vedanta philosophers such as Shankaracharya, Ramanuja (active in the mid-twelfth century) and Madhavacharya (active in the mid-thirteenth century) whose works later go on to becoming canonical philosophical texts. As we saw earlier in the dissertation, the Advaita School of Vedanta was lauded as the truest form of Hindu religion by nineteenth-century revivalist and reformist thinkers such as Dayananda Saraswati of the Arya Samaj.

Two, the Vedantic texts are perceived as an important source of authority on matters related to caste dharma and propriety by the genre of *shudra dharma nibandha* (Essays on the duties of the Shudra castes), which were composed in the early modern period. Ananya Vajpeyi, a scholar of the *shudra dharma nibandha,* demonstrates that

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[325] Theodore Benke, *The Sudracarasiromani of Krsna Sesa: A 16th. Manual of Dharma for Śudras.* (PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2010), 260.
[326] Theodore Benke, *The Sudracarasiromani of Krsna Sesa.,* 262.

Sesakrisna's *Shudracharashiromani* and Kamalakarabhatta's *Shudrakamalakara,* two Sanskrit texts that played a decisive role in the adjudication of the caste disputes from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century in present-day Maharashtra, turned towards the Vedanta text —*Bramhabashya,* for normative precedence about the Shudra's disqualification from Vedic knowledge.

Three, Questions about Shudra's relationship to Vedic knowledge, unequivocally settled by the authoritative Vedantic philosophy, have infused into 'folk etymology' and hegemonized religious textual interpretations in the present. For instance, Vajpeyi recounts how in the 2000s, the Sanskrit Pandits in Maharashtra and Karnataka with whom she learnt to read the *Shudra dharma nibandha,* interpreted the word Shudra as "one who is far from the *sruti*s (Vedas)".[327]

The Shudra's exclusion from Vedic learning is a tautological knot. Benke in his reading of the sixteenth-century text *Sudracharasiromani*, a manual of dharma for the Shudra, discusses the circularity of the dharmic logic: "This is a tautology of power. The Sudra cannot sacrifice because he has no sacred fire or *upanayana*. He has no sacred fire or *upanayana* because the purpose of it is Vedic study, and the Shudra is barred from studying the Vedas. Because he has no Vedic knowledge, he cannot sacrifice. The ideological function of such a circular justification is to sacralize the subjection of the Śūdra through his enforced ignorance and deprivation and preserve upper-caste privilege."[328]

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[327] Ananya Vajpeyi, "The Sudra in History: From Scripture to Segregation," 355.
328 Theodore Benke, *The Sudracarasiromani of Krsna Sesa*, 262.

Conclusion

This chapter closely studies Tukaram Patil *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* to understand how the anti-caste movement explained the entanglement of caste and knowledge to its mostly lower-caste audience.

I argue that Tukaram Patil in his work goes against the two dominant assumptions of his time about the Indian social world, which were endorsed by the colonial government and elite social reformers: first, that Indian society can be bifurcated into a religious realm, and social and political realms; and second, that the caste order, in its present form, is essentially a religious phenomenon.[329]Patil goes against the grain to argue Hindu religious norms, rituals, and rules play a crucial role in organizing caste relations. He demonstrated this by drawing a connection between Brahman domination of religious texts and lower-caste social dispossession. Patil argued that the lower-caste peasant's ignorance in everyday life can be traced to the Brahmanical injunction against the shudra learning Sanskrit Hindu shastras.

This chapter explores how in engaging with the ideas of exclusivity of knowledge embedded in Hindu religious texts and the Brahman's exclusive access to rituals, Patil draws our attention to dominant Brahmanical principles deeply rooted in premodern intellectual traditions. It is his engagement with these premodern intellectual traditions

329 Both the colonial state and elite reformers assumed that caste was primarily a religious phenomenon. On the one hand, by essentializing caste only religious institution, the colonial government and its administrators emptied both caste and Indian religious institutions of its political potential. On the other hand, liberal social observers argued that while in the present, caste as we know it, is a set of irrational religious rules and rituals. It has overstepped its place in the religious realm and seeped into peoples' social lives. To absolve Hindu religion from missionary attacks, upper-caste reformers argued that in the past, in the golden vedic age, caste was not a religious order, but a benign division of society based on labor and virtues. For many upper-caste reformers like Dadoba Pandurang, the likely author of *Dharma Vivechana*, and G. H Deshmukh too, like the Madras Missionaries, believed that while caste had the potential of being a benign social hierarchy, its reproduction was ensured by a false religious ideology of divinity and irrational belief in inheriting the status at birth.

that allow Patil to escape the bifurcation of caste into its religious and social aspects. By drawing on Patrick Olivelle, Theodore Benke, and Ananya Vajpayee's scholarship I argue that while lower-caste writers engaged with the immediate circumstances of their time, like the Otur case, a close reading of their works suggests that they were also entering into millennial long debates on caste and knowledge.

We saw this in many instances. Patil collapsed the diversion between religious and social aspects of caste by invoking the social and ritual relationship between the shudra *Yajman and the Brahman* or the donor and the receiver. By highlighting the lack of reciprocity, and institutionalized exploitation of the Shudra in this relationship, Patil sought to reinstate politics and conflict back at the heart of Hindu religion, which was emptied by the colonial discourse.

Similarly, Patil's engagement with both liberal justifications for keeping artisans and peasants out of formal and secular education as well as conducting their own rituals, invokes the memory of thirteenth century, vedantic meaning of the word Shudra, as one who cannot read the Vedas. And hence we see why Patil's secularization of the Vedas and their authors immensely infuriated his critics like the Ek Sanatna. Patil, a Shudra not only dared to write, but demonstrates the courage to strip the Vedas off their divine status.

Patil's secularization of Hindu religious texts, principles, and the caste order had immense implications, especially for anti-caste politics in the twentieth century. On December 25, 1927, B.R Ambedkar burned the law book of Manu and sharpened his antagonism to elite Hindu tradition. Ambedkar was of the staunch belief that Hindu religious texts validated the practice of untouchability and caste hierarchy. He

consistently engaged with Hindu religious texts, but most notable is his controversial treatise entitled *Riddles in Hinduism*. Ambedkar worked with canonical Hindu religious texts to highlight their unjust character and absurdity by putting them to the test of reason. The burning of the *Manusmirti* accrued enormous political significance within the Dalit movement. Even today, the act of burning the text is recurrently performed and has acquired a special place in the repertoire of Dalit politics. As it happens, December 25 is celebrated as the '*Manusmriti dahan divas'* (Manusmriti burning day) by Dalit activists and allied social movements. This act of burning the *Manusmriti* and rejecting its authority has its genealogical roots in the secularization of scriptures undertaken by Patil. Although Tukaram Patil is not canonized as an anti-caste leader in the present, his work—*Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan,* expanded on the anti-caste movement's position on the entanglement of caste and knowledge. In this dissertation, as I map how lower-caste activists secularized caste, his work gifts us a vernacular vocabulary to articulate a politics of knowledge that is grounded in the lifeworld of laboring communities and their ethical universe. By producing knowledge from a Shudra standpoint and also for an audience that shares the author's social location, *Dharma Dhonga Parisphotan* is the very embodiment of a politics seeking to dismantle the symbolic economy of intellectual and manual labor.

Chapter 4: *Din Bandhu* (Friend of the Poor): Carving out a Shudra Public Sphere: 1880s-1890s.

Introduction

A letter to the editor published in the May 24, 1896 issue of *Din Bandhu* argued, "The betterment of a nation can be achieved only by improving the conditions of the *bahujans* (majority). And our *bahusamaj* (majority of the society) is predominantly made up of peasants and artisan class, they are a large number, and all of them are uneducated and ignorant. And as wise men say, 'ignorance is one of the biggest reasons for poverty'… Dear editor, if the condition of our penniless *bahusamaj* peasant and artisan class is hampered, how will this Hindustan nation improve (*sudharel*)? Of what use will the Congress be? *Rashtriya melave* (national conferences), Shivaji Smarak (Shivaji's cenotaphs), lunches, *Mahabharat Parishad,* how will these augment the unity of the nation? How will this resolve the problems of the poor peasants and the artisans? It won't! On the contrary, these organizations will join the thirteen *balutedar* sand fourteen *alutedars* to further ground down the peasant."[330]

Tired of lurking on the peripheries of the mainstream Brahman-dominated public sphere, Krishnarao Bhalekar, an anti-caste leader of the Satyashodhak Samaj, decided to start *Din Bandhu* (friend of the poor) in 1877. He envisioned that the newspaper would meaningfully foreground concerns of the peasants, workers, and artisans. The first prominent 'national' political institution, the Indian National Congress, emerged only a decade later. But it quickly shot to prominence. By the time the 1896 article was published, the Indian National Congress claimed to speak for the nation as a whole.

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The *Din Bandhu* took issue with this claim. For the newspaper, the problem with the Congress was not its narrow representation. Of course, the Indian National Congress was populated by elite English-educated urban professionals, who, barring a few exceptions, were uninterested in peasant question; they even opposed the government's efforts at improving the condition of the rural cultivators.[331] Also, the Congress predominantly comprised of upper-caste Hindu men, most of whom in western India belonged to the Brahman castes. But for the *Din Bandhu*, the Brahmanism of the Congress was revealed not just by the caste composition of its members, but also by its political strategies.

The extract from the 1896 letter did just this. The paper asked: what good is the Congress, a national institution that sought dynamic political change, if it left old social relations untouched? The letter argued that the Congress is nothing more than just one other *alutedar-balutedar*, from the traditional system of village service caste4s, who turns up at the peasants' house in order claim a right to a part of the peasants' produce in return for their services.

This charge was a direct attack on upper-caste reformers' limited attempts at secularizing caste. Upper-caste reformers, who dominated the Indian National Congress at the time, perceived caste as an irrational religious principle that had spilled into the social realm. This meant that they sought to resolve the problem by emptying social spaces of caste ritualism. However, their inability to see how caste permeated social

[331] Sanjay Seth, "Rewriting Histories of Nationalism: The Politics of" Moderate Nationalism" in India, 1870-1905," *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (1999).104.

relations, and structured a lopsided economic relation, also led them to ignore old caste-based social relations, and leave them unchanged.

The letter explicitly challenged both the abstract 'national community' of the Indian National Congress, as well as the cultural nationalists' aggressive imbrication of Brahmanical Hindu religion and the nation. The letter recognized that Brahman nationalists of the Congress were first and foremost Brahmans and worked under the cloak of nationalism. But its critique signaled much more than that.

First, it foregrounded that the nation is predominantly composed of peasants and artisans and that a change in their conditions should be the nationalists' primary concern. The *Din Bandhu* stands out in its milieu for the ways in which it mobilized 'peasant and artisans', two identities with specific meaning in the Marathi anti-caste tradition. In their writings and speeches, anti-caste writers spoke of peasants and artisans as the backbone of the society. The Satyashodhak Samaj valued their work as 'productive,' and as labor that fed and sustained life.

Second, the article's use of the word '*Bahujan*' or '*Bahu Samaj,'* meaning the majority, for the peasants and artisans is striking. The term *Bahujan* can be traced to a Buddhist dictum in the Pali-language, *Bahujana Hitaya Bahujana Sukhaya* or 'for the joy of many and the prosperity of many,' a phrase commonly attributed to the Buddha. By invoking the *Bahujan* category to refer to the peasants and the artisans, *Din Bandhu* located its critique of elite nationalist politics in an anti-brahmanical intellectual tradition and began the process of making the word into a modern political concept. The word has gone on to become a powerful signifier. In recent times, Bahujan Samaj Party in north India and the Bhartiya Republican Bahujan Party in Western India are formidable forces

in Parliamentary politics. In political discourse, *Bahujan* has emerged as a category encompassing minority or peripheral social groups in Indian politics: Dalits, tribal, Shudra castes, and in recent times the Muslims. *Din Bandhu's* use of the political category of the *Bahujan* is salient because the term circulates widely only after 1906.[332] This chapter narrates the history of how in the last two decades of the nineteenth century lower-caste activists decided to take a leap of faith and explore the possibility of carving out a non-Brahman public realm, and mobilized a Shudra audience for it.

I do so by continuing my engagement with Tukaram Patil's writings from the last chapter to illuminate the discussions behind anti-caste writer-activists' attempts to persuade the lower-castes to disengage themselves from older forms of public realms that were populated by the non-literate sections of the society. Patil insisted that the Shudras train themselves in modern education, literate skills and become a part of a reading and writing modern public realm: a public that is founded on literacy.

As I narrate the troubled emergence of the *Din Bandhu*, the lower-caste newspaper, I will also explore the many possibilities it opened up for an animated modern non-Brahman public sphere. *Din Bandhu* soon became a point of intersection of lower-caste organizations, non-Brahman social life, public meetings, and political discourse.

In addition to the newspaper, the consolidation of caste associations of Shudra castes played a significant role in shaping the Shudra public sphere. As the chapter progresses, we will see how non-brahman caste associations, not untouched by the

[332] Gail Omvedt, *Cultural revolt in a colonial society: the non Brahman movement in western India, 1873 to 1930* (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976)., 4.

egalitarian discourse of the anti-caste movement, struggled with balancing the discourse of 'backwardness,' caste equality, and the idea of caste pride. They also found themselves in a bind trying to explain how a particularistic caste identity was coherent with the emergent imagination of a nation that, at least theoretically, claimed to rest on horizontal connections.

The anti-caste movement did not take a backseat as the nationalist discourse developed in the subcontinent. As anti-colonial forces began to shape a nationalist ideology, this process also led to the extension of the category of the 'outsider,' forces external to the nation, to include both Indian Muslims and Christians. In western India, B.G Tilak aggressively identified the nation as first and foremost Hindu in character. Tilak's Hindu nationalist discourse and the various cultural innovations he spearheaded in the 1890s were vehemently disputed and resisted by *Din Bandhu.*

Lokhande and Bhalekar's dream of carving out an exclusively non-brahman public sphere to write about and for the toiling masses was realized in the newspaper's criticism of Tilak and the Indian National Congress. The paper's editorials refused to concede that the Hindu culture and its people were a homogenous cultural identity whose existence could be traced to the Vedic times. The editorials asserted the contrary: on the one hand, the Brahmans and the Shudra were a completely distinct stock with diverging and antagonistic cultures; on the other hand, the Shudra and the Muslims shared in common both non-brahman cultural spaces in the form of Moharram celebrations, as well as, a common adversary in the form of the upper-caste Hindu.

The last two decades of the nineteenth century were momentous. They witnessed the consolidation of the nation as a bounded territorial category with its own history,

economy, culture, and people. At the same time, the increased participation of women and the lower-castes in the Marathi print world subverted or at least undercut the dominance of the nationalist discourse. Around the same time as the lower-castes, upper-caste women too had begun to receive formal modern education by the second half of the century. By the 1880s, they articulated their interests by organizing women's associations and using the print media to explore the possibilities of a *bhaginivarga* (sisterhood). Women also started approaching the judiciary and using legal means to claim their rights to property, livelihood, custody of their children, and remarriage. Strikingly, 2, 784 women had filed a criminal complaint against their husband for ill-treatment in the court of law between 1880-1885.[333]

Also, during these decades, a conservative nationalist opinion was consolidated, especially around the Age of Consent Bill. In 1891 the law member of India introduced a bill in the legislative council raising the age of consent for sexual intercourse for young girls from ten to twelve years. The bill was drafted keeping in mind child marriages in India and the resultant sexual violence against young women. The bill was controversial. In western India, it created massive debates about Indian tradition, the role of women, the emasculation of Indian men, and the colonial state's intervention in the private realm: domestic and religious questions.[334] One among these conservative oppositional voices was that of B.G Tilak.

The debate around the Age of Consent was a watershed moment for conservative politics. Nationalists and conservatives alike were successful in sequestering the

[333] Ishita Banerjee-Dube, *A History of Modern India* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).203.
[334] Ibid., 201-202.

women's question in the sacred, interior domain protected from colonial intervention. As a result, women's question stopped being a part of nationalist discourse. By 1892, with the consolidation of conservative voices, the concern for Hindu tradition and society transformed into a concern for the Hindu nation. 1892 onwards, the Bombay Presidency and large parts of northern India also witnessed multiple instances of Hindus-Muslim riots. These incidences of violence and Tilak's public celebration of Hindu festivals both played an important role in marking the Muslim community as the outsider to a 'traditionally' and predominantly 'Hindu nation'.

Not much has been written about *Din Bandhu*, a lower-caste newspaper that emerged as a trenchant critique of B.G. Tilak's cultural nationalism during these tumultuous decades. While Marathi-language biographies of N.M Lokhande briefly mention the newspaper and its opposition to Tilak's exclusionary politics, histories of Indian nationalism in English completely overlook lower-caste critique of nationalism.[335] We find a few references to *Din Bandhu* in historical works that focus on language politics and print culture in western India, especially the Maratha country. However, the newspaper is only peripherally mentioned and is not the focus of their work.[336] This chapter closely reads the articles, advertisements, editorials, and letters to the editor published in the *Din Bandhu* in order to explore the unique non-brahman public realm carved out by anti-caste activists. Also, it illuminates a Shudra perspective on the national

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[335] Manohar Kadam, *Narayan Meghaji Lokhande: Bharatiya Kamgar calvalliche janak [Narayan Meghaji Lokhande: The founder of the Indian labour movement]* (Bombay: Akshar Prakashan, 1995).; Rajaram Suryavamshi, *Satyashodhak Kamgar Nete Narayan Meghaji Lokhande Yanche Charitra* (Pune: Mavlai Prakashan, 2016); M.G Mali, *Bhartiya Kamgar Chalvaliche Adya Janak Ravbahadur Narayan Meghaji Lokhande Jeevan Karya* (Mumbai: Maharashtra rajya Sahitya ani Samskriti Mandal, 2012).

[336] Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: historical memory and identity in western India, 1700-1960* (Columbia University Press, 2007); Veena Naregal, *Language, politics, elites and the public sphere: Western India under colonialism* (Anthem Press, 2002).

community and an anti-caste critique of nationalist politics which has not received much attention in historical writings thus far.

Before we proceed, a caveat about the archives. Not much is written about *Din Bandhu* also because very few copies of the newspaper have survived. The Kolhapur University Library is the only institution that houses a few copies of *Din Bandhu*, but only from the years 1893-1898. And so, for this chapter, in addition to drawing on the limited issues in the Kolhapur archives, I have referred to excerpts from secondary sources and colonial reports on Native newspapers.

Replacing the 'old' with the 'new.'

The close study of Padwal's *Jatibhed Viveksar* in the second chapter discussed how rare it was to find printed works of lower-caste Shudra writers. While, Padwal was possibly a man of means and also had the help of friends like Phule and Navrange, not all lower-caste voices could publish privately like him. In some cases, lower-caste writings that were critical of Hindu religion often found space in Marathi missionary journals like *Dnyanodaya* (The Rise of Knowledge) and *Satyadeepika* (The Light of Truth). At times they also amplified Phule's educational work, which included opening schools for untouchable children.[337] However, the marginalization of lower-caste writings in the mainstream vernacular print public is evident from the *Dakshina* prize committee's refusal to admit Phule's 1855 play entitled *trutya ratna* in its open competition. This was despite the fact that Phule and his associates had played a significant role in making the *dakshina* prize available for non-religious texts and vernacular writings.[338]

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[337] Naregal, *Language, politics, elites and the public sphere: Western India under colonialism*., 160.

[338] . The *dakshina* prize was originally a tradition of donation instituted by the Peshwa regime, the early modern rulers of western India, meant only to be distributed among Brahman families for the exclusive production and practice of Sanskrit scholarship. While the colonial administration continued the tradition, only with a much

The public realm was not unknown to Shudra communities. In fact, devotional publics, including the *Bhakti* public culture of the *wakari sampradaya* was primarily composed of non-literate sections of which women and the members of the Shudra artisan and peasant castes constituted a majority. The heterodox popular religious culture of *Bhakti,* which invokes the memory of poet-saints at least from the twelfth-century in the Deccan region of present-day Maharashtra, is, in C.L Novetzke's words, publics of reception. This means that the *warkari* devotional culture is consolidated around public performances—music, skits, storytelling, or even the observance of vows, puja (worship), and pilgrimage. These performances always assume the presence of a receptive audience. Novetzke, in his notable work on medieval religious traditions, emphasizes the centrality of an audience in the *Bhakti* tradition by noting that in all the hagiographic anecdotes of poet-saints of the *warkari sampradaya*, both the miracles performed by the poet-saint, as well as the atrocities committed on the poet-saint by a temporal authority always had an audience in witness; accompanying the temporal audience was also the deity.

The Shudra castes' overwhelming participation in the *Bhakti* publics was also mediated on caste lines. The reasons for lower-caste participation in the popular religious tradition of *Bhakti* can, again, be traced to the Shudra not being allowed to learn Sanskrit and high-brow religious texts written in the cosmopolitan language of Brahman

smaller sum of money to distribute, in 1849 a few English educated Brahman youth requested the British administration to include the production of 'non-religious' scholarship and vernacular texts in their patronage. Their petition created a massive furor among the Brahman castes, endangering the lives and safety of the signatories. Phule and his lower-caste network were the only visible social support that stood steadfastly by the signatories in virulent upper-caste opposition. See Pandit Bhavani Shankar Shridhar. Ed. Raosaheb Keshav Shivram Bhavalkaryanche Atmavritta, Vidharbha Samshodhan Mandal, Nagpur, 1961.

scholarship.[339] However, by the thirteenth century, with the hardening of caste rules, especially around Sanskrit literary culture and knowledge production, Marathi-speaking regions of western India witnessed the rise of a vernacular literary culture.[340]

Unlike other parts of the subcontinent, where vernacular literary traditions emerged out of court writings, in Maharashtra, sermons, poetry, and performances of poet-saints contributed to the production of vernacular literary culture. Non-literate sections of the thirteenth-century Marathi society, women and the lower-castes, were drawn to these poets, who sermonized the meaning of human life, the salvation of the soul, devotion to a deity—themes that, in the present, we would label as 'religious.' They did so not in Sanskrit but in the language of the field and the market.[341] This new vernacular literary idioms also made space for the emergence of a discursive tradition that allowed for debates on excessive emphasis on rituals, everyday practices that reiterate social differences like touch/untouch, restrictions on lower-caste access to Sanskrit texts, and women's sorrows in domestic life.[342]

While Bhakti publics emerged as spaces of vibrant debates on caste practices and the limits they imposed on pursuing a moral life, Shudra writer-activists such as Tukaram Patil disapproved of how the lower-castes eagerly surrendered to the role of receptive, attentive listeners. Patil did not specifically disapprove of the *warkari sampradaya*, but

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[339] Novetzke, *The Quotidian Revolution: Vernacularization, religion, and the premodern public sphere in India.* 1.
[340] Ibid.,
[341] In no way was this tradition democratic in the present sense; in fact many of these early poet-saints of the Warkari Sampradaya like Chakradhar and Dnyaneshwari were Brahmans who either abandoned their caste community or were excommunicated from it. Novetzke, *The Quotidian Revolution: Vernacularization, religion, and the premodern public sphere in India.* 2.
[342] Ibid.,2-3.

he criticized the lower-caste for offering themselves as guileless audiences to the 'stories of wayward travelers.'

Patil decried, "The wise castes (*shahnya jati)* do not have to perform physically arduous work. They can fulfill their needs by doing 'wise' work, (work) that does not require them to move from their place. And so, men and women (from these castes)…every eight to ten days observe fasts. Such people may wander around on pilgrimages. They may prostrate and circumambulate the shrine until they are completely drained. But our people have no reason to do this. Those who toil day and night with their families, whose bellies are seldom full, whose work leaves them weary and exhausted, why do we need the trappings of hunger and exhaustion? … Similarly, those who spend all their time scheming and arguing, find ways to evade the law, those who siphon off from the sweat of the poor and ignorant's brow, not only do they amass wealth, but they also gather people's ill-will and curses. It is to get rid of this ill-will that they perform *puja-archa, path, bhajan,* build temples and donate temple bells, worship, chant, read the puranas, sing devotional songs. Those who earn their living honestly and through the grit of their own hard labor… unlike the scoundrels mentioned above, you do not need to perform *puja archa*, fasts, and pilgrimages. If your hands are not dirty, why wash them with a scented soap."[343]

Why disapprove lower-caste engagement with Bhakti tradition's devotional expressions? Perhaps, anti-caste writers like Patil, whose world-view was shaped by the satyashodhak tradition, and who advocated for a modern liberal education as a means of

[343] Tukaram Patil, *, Dharmadhonga Parisphotan (Falsehood of religion exposed)* (Mumbai: Dinavatsalya Printing Press, 1892).23-25.

escaping the generational perpetuation of caste relations, were perturbed by the Bhakti tradition's insistence on relinquishing individual sovereignty. After all, both the theme of unintentionality and immersion lay at the very heart of Bhakti. Now, for anti-caste activists who have often attributed the Shudra castes' exploitation to them being reduced to a captive audience, to the sophistry spun by the Brahman, and the spurious ledgers concocted by the money-lender, a discursive tradition that hinges on surrender and relinquishing control is not only a dangerous path, but also one that the Shudras were *compelled* to tread by the virtue of their social position.

Walking away from a public assembled around the uninhibited expression of emotions, anti-caste activist writers envisioned a public realm guided not by religious surrender but by judgement and clear thought for the lower-castes. From the writings of Tukaram Patil and articles published by the *Dinabandhu,* we can surmise that writers from the satyashodhaki tradition imagined the Shudras partaking in a modern public realm that was constituted by literate, reading and writing subjects.

However, we must remember that in a social world where cultural authority and knowledge are organized along caste lines, the lower-castes' insistence on inhabiting an authorial subject position exceeds the question of access to literacy and education.[344] This is especially so in the case of the Shudra castes whose social location in the caste hierarchy is determined by their exclusion from traditional knowledge practices. And so, in the nineteenth century, during a time of immense transition, acquiring literate skills and entering the world of print to inhabit the modern authorial role was not a neutral

[344] Michael Warner, *The letters of the republic: Publication and the public sphere in eighteenth-century America* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

unfolding. It was to step into a position that was thus far inhabited only by the Brahmans and other scribal castes, who produced knowledge that was valued in a caste society.

In the early nineteenth century, the traditional literate groups used their cultural capital to populate colonial schools, colleges, and the administration. The Shudra activists sought to make space in the world of writing by deposing the Brahman from their 'authorial' position. Shudra writers did so by arguing that the disposition of the traditional knowledge-producing figure of the *Bhatt* (a colloquial and also a disparaging word for the Brahman) was antithetical to the civic and democratic ethics required by modern forms of knowledge such as transparency, knowledge as truth, and critical understanding. The *Bhatt*, Shudra writers argued, had for generations been channeling his reading and writing skills to limit the dissemination of knowledge, and had been actively composing fraudulent religious texts.

An article published in an issue of the *Dina Bandhu* in 1896 maintained, "The Brahman's original disposition (*mul vritti*) is that of *Bhikshuki* (mendicancy or begging for alms), but many of the Brahmans have abandoned this *bhikshuki vritti* for better education. The superior education that has been received, ideally should shape their attitude (*vritti*) and temperament (*mann*) into a liberal (*udara*) one. But, it appears that the Brahmans show no evidence of a training received by knowledge (*vidya*), and western liberal education (*paschimatta udara shikshan*)...[with an attitude] of learning by rote so as to promptly pass exams, the Brahman is bereft of an intellect shaped by good western liberal education." Through such arguments, Satyashodak activists discredited the disposition of the Brahman: the dominant authorial subject of their time. By suggesting that the disposition of the Brahman writers were antithetical to the secular ethic of the

modern public sphere, and more so of the print media, non-brahman writers perceived their stepping into the world of print as another channel of exposing the truth of religious texts and the true character of the social world.

A room of one's own: *Din Bandhu* and lower-caste civil society organizations.

Shudra articulacy

Lower-caste activists were certain that the Shudra castes had to be weaned away from the publics of popular religious traditions; they also sought to clear the ground for the members of the Shudra community by discrediting the authority of Brahmans. They argued that although the Brahmans have engaged in knowledge-producing occupations for generations, their epistemic authority is founded on exclusion, fraudulence, and fabrication of texts. The new modern culture of knowledge, and participation in the public sphere—the site of knowledge production and circulation, demands a new figure who is committed to its democratic goals.

While the activists of the Satyashodhak Samaj wholeheartedly wished that more members of the Shudra communities enter the world of print, they also recognized that the mostly non-literate castes' lacked the skill of public articulacy. There was an increasing concern among the leaders of the Samaj that, barring a select few activists, both its members, and the Shudra community, in general, were not accultured in ways of the literate public world. They were not adept at giving public speeches, writing articles in newspapers, writing letters to the editors, or even drafting petitions to the colonial

administration. Moreover, their negligible presence in the colonial bureaucracy further withheld their public presence.[345]

To address this problem, in the 1870s, activists of the Samaj decided to conduct essay and debating competitions. This exercise had previously been tried and tested by urban reformist and knowledge societies such as The Student's Scientific and Literacy Society of Bombay and its vernacular counterpart *Maratha Dnyana Prasarak Mandali*, which was set up in 1854.

On May 22, 1876 the Samaj held its first competition where the participants were asked to write and read their essays aloud at the meetings. 'The advantages and disadvantages brought upon the country by the worship of idols, and the institution of caste' were its topics.[346] In the 1877 competition the theme allotted was, 'conditions of the untouchables, and why the Shudras were the first to die whenever famines occurred in India.' The essays were being written exactly two years after the 1875 Deccan riots and the prolonged agrarian distress in the regions of Pune and Ahmednagar.

The following year, Krishnarao Bhalekar, Tukaram Pinjan, and Ramshet Urvane, leaders of the Samaj organized a competition, where the participants were asked to discuss, 'Some people of the Shudra caste, into which were born the hero Chatrapati Maharaj Shivaji, and the great rulers of the states, Shinde, Holkar, Gayakvad and others, do not feel it a humiliation when they perform tasks such as looking after the shoes of Brahmans. When, however, some of the Brahman castes go from house to house begging

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[345] O'hanlon, *Caste, conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India.*235. 236.

[346] Dnyanodaya, June 1, 1876. See O'hanlon, *Caste, conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India.*, 236.

for alms, they would scorn even to touch the shawls of Shudra Rajas and princes, let alone their shoes.' [347] Through such essay prompts the Satyashodhak Samaj sought to provoke its members to puzzle over the paradoxical social relationship between the *Yajman* and the *Brahman* (donor and the receiver). This was possibly also one of the ways in which they made sure that their message was synthesized and found wider circles of circulation. By publishing these essay prompts in the widely circulated missionary papers such as *Dnyanodaya,* the Samaj made sure that it was publicized that the Shudra too were discussing and writing their own stories and reflecting on their own questions.

In an 1876 announcement of a public debate, Dr. Gholay, a member of the Samaj, explained that the Samaj worked towards cultivating a discipline of thinking, writing, and discussing among Shudra communities so that they could stake a claim in the public space that *Poona Sarvajanik Sabha* (1870) had cornered. Although the Sarvajanik Sabha had been organizing its own debate competitions, members of the Shudra castes were hesitant to participate. The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha was dominated by the Brahmans of the Poona City. And so, the Satyashodhak Samaj worked hard to train Shudra youth to compete in open debates and arguments.[348]

Starting one's own newspaper

Dr. Vishram Gholay was right in his impression that lower-caste polemicists' struggled to make their voices heard among the clamor of Brahman and European journalists. And perhaps he was not the only one who felt this way. For, in 1874, a printing press arrived in Pune for the Satyashodhak Samaj. It was supposed to be used 'to publish before the

[347] Dnyanodaya, 28 Feb 1878. O'hanlon, *Caste, conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India.* 236.
[348] Rosalind O'hanlon, *Caste, conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India.* 236,

compassionate English Government what the aims of the society are, and what difficulties and troubles the Shudra people suffer from the Brahman servants of the Government.'[349] The printing press had arrived from Bombay on the insistence of two prominent, and without doubt, wealthy members of the Bombay branch of the Samaj: Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru and Vyanku Baloji Kalevar.

But Phule neither shared their enthusiasm for the printing press nor did he express the excitement that exuded through the report of the Satyashodhak Samaj. Not much is known about what transpired between Phule, the Samaj stalwart, and Krishnarao Bhalekar—the Samaj's youth leader who wished to use the press to publish the first non-Brahman newspaper. But as a result of the impasse between these actors, the press remained idle for two years in Pune until it was sold off at a loss.[350]

While Phule remained silent about the entire issue, in a private letter, Bhalekar wrote: "For two years no one could muster the courage until I stepped up and asked that the press be rented out to me so that I can start a newspaper. But I was undone by my own kind! It was Jotiba Phule who refused! All others agreed to handover the printing press to me. Finally, the Mumbaikars (those from Bombay) took back the printing press with them and sold it at a loss."[351]

Bhalekar insinuated that Phule lacked the courage to face the opposition and possible libel suits that often accompanied the publication of a newspaper. He wrote, "There were many who talk about belling the cat. But very few were willing to sacrifice

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[349] Rosalind O'hanlon, *Caste, conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India*. 243,

[350]YD Phadke, *Vyakti ani Vichar*, Pune: Shrividya Prakashan, (1985).50.

[351] Ibid., 8 Phadke draws on Bhakelars papers, a personal correspondence from Krishna ra Bhalekar to Ramrao Parashrao Patil. Dated: March 4, 1909.

themselves doing it …caught in the chaos of their cowardice the Satyashodhaks would have still been wrapped up in the Bhatts ritual cloak, if not for those who started the newspaper Din Bandhu in 1877 in Pune the city of Brahmans, on his own terms, with his own writing, but these people who hid in their homes terrified, began to envy him and tried to bring Bhalekar down and [themselves] emerged as the messiah."[352]

Despite intense opposition, Bhalekar did not budge. In 1877 with help from his brother Ramchandra Bhalekar he bought a lithographic press from Bombay and began publishing *Din Bandhu* in Pune. Jaya Karadi Lingu, a satyashodhakite from the Telugu Mali community, and a contractor by profession, helped Bhalekar to set type. Six months later *Din Bandhu* was in circulation.

Bhalekar recounted how he was enthralled by the idea of publishing a newspaper. He ran a modest library in the complex of a Vitthal temple in his village.[353] On reading the two newspapers to which the library subscribed, Bhalekar was convinced that he 'too could write something like this. And yet stick to his purpose and intentions.'[354] However, in reality, the situation was not as straightforward as Bhalekar had imagined it to be. For one, in the 1870s, publishing a newspaper that amplified lower-caste concerns without a strong pillar of funding, and seeking an audience among communities that were predominantly nonliterate was already a precarious project to undertake.

The time was also not propitious. While the agrarian distress of 1877 must have impelled Bhalekar to publish a newspaper that raised concerns on behalf of the peasants, ironically, that very drought almost finished the newspaper. He wrote, "The famine of

[352] Y.D Phadke, *Vyakti ani Vichar*, 48.
[353] Vitthal is the deity of the warkari samaj.
[354] Y.D Phadke, *Vyakti ani Vichar*,47.

1877 almost devoured Din Bandhu! In the beginning those who persuaded us to start the newspapers were our first subscribers— eight from Pune, five from Bombay thirteen in total! These thirteen subscribers encouraged others, gave them the courage and by the end of 1877 we had 82 subscribers, later by the end of 1878 we had 192, by the end of 1879 260 and by the May of 1880 we had 320 subscribers… Every issue had to be affixed with a half *anna* postage stamp. We were miserable running from pillar to post collecting subscriptions! Cultivating the joy of reading among people and spreading the word of the Satyashodhak Samaj completely ground us down." Finally, in the quest to keep *Din Bandhu* circulating, Bhalekar lost his house, his land and was deep in debt.[355]

Lokhande steps in

Unable to keep *Din Bandhu* afloat anymore, Krishnarao Bhalekar handed over its reins to Naranyan Meghaji Lokhande in 1880 and left to supervise the construction of a canal on the Nira River in Pune until his economic condition stabilized.[356] Like Phule and Bhalekar, Lokhande too belonged to the Mali caste, and like them, he too was one of the better-known polemicists of the Samaj between the 1870s and 1890s. However, Lokhande's concerns, unlike Phule and Bhalekar's, were mostly urban.

Born into a poor Mali family in Thane district in 1848, Lokhande received a secondary school education and worked as a clerk in the post office and the railways before he took up the position as a storekeeper in a Bombay mill. He joined the Satyashodak Samaj a year after its founding, and by the late 1870s, emerged as a dynamic activist. Carrying his leadership skills into his workplace, Lokhande organized

[355] Y D Phadke, *Vyakti ani Vichar*.5
[356] O'hanlon, *Caste, conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India.* 281.

the workers in the cotton mills of Bombay and formed the Mill-hands association in the 1880s.[357]

Lokhande apprehended the difficulties of running a newspaper for an audience with limited literary skills. In the May 9, 1880 issue of *Din Bandhu*, his first issue as an editor, he wrote: "our people neither have the fondness nor the enthusiasm to read the paper, even if it was offered free of cost… Chasing eminent subscribers to pay for the postage cost of sending the paper out of town drove Bhalekar into the ground… To prevent the Din Bandhu from shutting down some people from Mumbai have taken up the responsibility and have moved the paper from Pune to Mumbai. And henceforth to keep Din Bandhu circulating we appeal for support from the non-brahman castes both from Bombay and other cities as well as from sensible and scholarly members of other castes."[358]

Lokhande was not too off the mark. Unlike mainstream newspapers that had an educated middle-class waiting to consume printed material, *Din Bandhu* was saddled with the herculean task of constituting an audience in the first place. For instance, in 1881, only a year after Lokhande assumed the editorship of *Din Bandhu*, V.K Chiplunkar, B.G Tilak, and G.A Agarkar started the virulently Brahmanical (and nationalist) Marathi newspaper out of Poona : *Kesari* (the Lion). Within five years, by 1885, the *Kesari* circulated about 4,350 copies. By comparison, *Din Bandhu* circulated 1,650 copies, without doubt, a very high number for a peasants and workers' newspaper, but nowhere close to the massive circulation of *Kesari.*[359]

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[357] Ibid., 247.
[358] Phadke, *Vyakti ani Vichar*.51
[359] Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency: Poona (3 pts.).(India: Government Central Press, 1885), 65.

Nevertheless, *Din Bandhu's* subscribers took pride in its unique character. In a letter to the editor of *Din Bandhu* published in its January 14, 1894 issue, the author — one "*Ya- Satyashodhak Samajian*," hoped that the readers of the paper continue to take pride in 'our one and only (*ekultaek*) paper and also in the work of the satyashodhak samaj.' Elsewhere, more clearly, another letter to the editor mentioned how the paper is the only non-Brahman (*bramhanetar*) newspaper standing tall in a 'sea of five-hundred Brahman papers.'

How does one create a sense of fondness to read among its potential audience? The *Din Bandhu*, was faced with the challenge of writing for a peoples who were not particularly accultured into reading. Furthermore, by the end of the nineteenth century, while a generation of the upper-caste middle class was socialized in the culture of print media, only a few leading members of lower-caste communities had made a deliberate attempt to enter the world of print. And so, newspapers and journals were far from being a part of the Shudra community's mundane life.

The newspapers' forthright allegiance to raising concerns of the laboring communities was possibly the first step in drawing its audience. On its title page was inscribed, "Dina Bandhu: Journal dedicated to the interest of the working classes." Under the title, in fine-print, was a couplet by Thomas Carlyle in English, "Hardly-entreated Brother! For us was thy back so bent, for us were thy straight limbs and fingers so deformed: thou wert our Conscript, on whom the lot fell, and fighting our battles wert so Marred…If the poor and humble toil that we have Food, must not the high and glorious toil for him in return, that he have Light, have Guidance, Freedom,

Immortality?" Followed by the words of W.W. Hunter, "The remaining fifth or 40 million (people of British India) go through life on insufficient food."

Dina Bandhu's affinity to the artisan and peasants is evident not only in its espousal of Carlyle's description of the toiling body, but in the way it made Shudra lives—death, marriage, work, and social world—a part of its columns. It asked: what would a literate lower-caste like look like? For instance, in the year 1896, the journal offered space on its title page to a "matrimonial agency" that sought alliance exclusively for the members of non-Brahman (*bramhnetar*) castes. The proprietor, Narsinghrao Lakshmanrao Ghorpade from Pune, advertised that an information booklet about marriageable boys and girls of non-Brahman castes would be provided to those who sent their address and were willing to bear the postage cost.

The paper also reported the death of prominent members of the non-Brahman castes or those who were closely tied into the Satyashodhak network. The February 4, 1894 issue of the paper announced the death of Madhavrao Krushnai Pawar, a well-known contractor from Baroda, Vitthalrao Sable a former clerk at the secretariat in Bombay, and R.S Shridhar Narayan Shet, a *Mamledar* (revenue officer) by profession. The journal lamented that "among the non-Brahmans, we already have such few government employees, their passing away is unfortunate."

Third, the pages of *Din Bandhu* reflected the contours of the emerging non-Brahman public sphere. In the 1890s, the paper regularly reported activities of non-Brahman caste organizations. The organizations, too, in turn, sought the columns of the paper in order to keep its members informed about the venue of their meetings and the possible changes in the timings.

But the question is, why use *Din Bandhu* as an instrument of communication? After all, for castes that were newly literate, or had significantly low literacy among its members, publishing their activities in *Din Bandhu* might not have been the only way to keep their members informed. In fact, writers from the non-Brahman castes who, in some instances, exclusively addressed members of their own community complained that their printed notices and requests for information were not reciprocated by their caste brethren. Vithoba Sonji Chavan, the author of *Bhandari Lokancha Vrittanta* (an account of the Bhandari people) published in 1887, complained about just this. In the preface of the book, he mentioned that in 1883, as he prepared to write the manual, he commissioned advertisements in *Din Bandhu* asking for readers to send information and details about the Bhandari caste and its prominent members. Despite advertising five times in the newspaper, and printing six thousand copies of the same notice and circulating them in North and South Konkan, the author's requests were ignored.[360]

Caste associations

However, it is possible that these caste organizations, which recognized themselves as part of the non-Brahman collective, sought to participate in a network of mutual recognition with *Dina Bandhu*, which was emerging as a nodal point for the wider modern non-Brahman public assemblage. This new modern public was being shaped by the circulation of discourse and practices in an intertextual world, which included publications, travelling pulpit activists, reading anti-caste texts aloud, the forming of caste organizations, conducting events, and performing marriage and funeral rituals according to the new Satyashodhak traditions.

[360] Vithoba Sonji Chavan, *Bhandari Lokhanche Vrittanta*, (Mumbai The Joint stock printing press,1887), 28-29.

In addition to invoking literacy, a central ethic of the modern public sphere, non-Brahman caste organizations were shaping themselves as modern bureaucratic bodies. Although coalesced around an ascriptive identity of caste, from their correspondence to the *Din Bandhu,* it is clear that caste organizations valued transparency, held themselves to high standards of accountability, and sought clear communication with their members. The issues discussed, essays read, and lectures given at their meetings were similar to the proceedings of societies for the diffusion of useful knowledge, the Student's Scientific and Literary Society, and other social reformist organizations. Shudra caste organizations perceived the emerging lower-caste public realm as a site that had the potential to shape the modern Shudra subjects.

Besides keeping the audience of the newspaper informed and inviting them to their conventions, caste organizations wrote to the *Dina Bandhu* in order to demonstrate transparency in the operation of the organization. For instance, the February 4, 1894 issues of *Dina Bandhu* published a letter from Mahadev Pandurang More, who claimed to be a member of the *Kitte Bhandari Samaj*. The letter informed about the collection of funds and their deposit in the savings bank. The article made sure it mentioned that the collected sum was not privately held, but instead belonged to the organization and can be used and spent only by the members of the organizational committee. In his letter, More emphasized that by writing to the newspaper, he intends to keep his 'caste brethren' (*Dnyati Bandhav*) informed about the workings of the organization.

Non-Brahman caste associations which had begun consolidating themselves in the last decades of the nineteenth century viewed *Din Bandhu* as their own. Association of castes that explicitly identified themselves as non-Brahman, recognized and validated the

social character of the paper by regularly sending correspondences to *Din Bandhu*. Prominent among these were non-Brahman castes that had some connection with anti-caste activists and the Satyashodhak Samaj. The Bhandari were one such caste. Historically located in the Konkan littoral region, the Bhandari are often considered as one of the oldest inhabitants of Bombay.[361] Attributed the caste profession of 'palm juice drawers' or toddy-tappers and distillers, Bhandari were also cultivators and are said to have brought large swaths of the Bombay islands under cultivation. According to Stephen Meredyth Edwardes, colonial historians and one of the writers of the Indian gazetteers, parts of modern Bombay owed their names to Bhandari occupants of the city.

As Bombay transformed from a cluster of fishing villages to an industrial metropolis, the Bhandaris of the city were hardly untouched by colonial modernity. Moreover, they were surrounded by instances of wealthy urban castes such as the Parsi, Khojas, and Bhatia, who formed their own caste organizations in the mid-nineteenth century for the promotion of education, business, internal caste reforms, and also in order to lay down internal rules governing its caste members. Additionally, Tukaram Tatya Padwal, the exemplary anti-caste writer of *Jatibhed Viveksar* and a close associate of Phule, belonged to the Bhandari caste.[362] Although we do not have evidence of the caste association explicitly exalting Padwal as one of their own, Vithoba Chavan quotes *Jatibhed Viveksar* at length in his manual about the Bhandari castes entitled *Bhandari Lokhanche Vittanta* (An account of the Bhandari People) published in 1887. And the 1899 *Bhandari Lokhanche Sankshipta Varnan (A Brief description of the Bhandari People)* was

[362] Later in the twentieth century S.K Bole a Bhandari by caste strongly takes up the mill workers cause in Bombay. He also worked closely with the B.R Ambedkar.

published by the Tatvavivechak Printing Press, which was owned by Padwal. All of this could hardly be coincidental.

Organizations such as the *Bhandari Ekyavardhaka Sabha* (Society for the Unity of Bhandari caste) announced in the January 14, 1894, issue of the *Din Bandhu* that in their upcoming meeting, one of their members, Tukaram Hanmant Kasulwar was going to read out an essay on the topics of 'business and industry'(*udyog*). Similarly, the paper mentioned that on January 14, 1894 the sixth anniversary of the *Telugu Dnyana Uttejak Sabha* was to be celebrated at the Telugu girls' school located in Kamathipura in Bombay. Justice Ranade was invited as the chief guest who would then felicitate Telugu Mali students for passing their exams, particularly those qualifying their matriculation exams.

The Telugu Malis, like the Bhandaris, were a bilingual community closely involved in the life of Bombay as it underwent urbanization. Members of this community, who spoke both Marathi and the Telugu language, had migrated to Bombay in the early nineteenth century from the Southern Deccan region, parts of Hyderabad and Madras in South India. Like the Malis (gardeners) in Maratha country, the Telugu Malis too dabbled in professions such as: horticulture, laboring, trading, and construction contracting. Prominent members of the Telugu Mali caste were involved in the Satyashodhak Samaj. In fact, Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru and Vyanku Baloji Kalevar, both polemicists and social reformers, took the lead in establishing the Bombay branch of Satyashodhak Samaj.[363] Telugu Mali proximity to the Satyashodhak Samaj was

[363] Rosalind O'hanlon, *Caste, conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India*. 247.

also on the account that both Ayyavaru and Phule belonged to the Mali caste, and both contractors had similar business interests.

The new network of publics that the non-Brahman castes were weaving was primarily constituted around the question of literacy. Organizational meetings often involved reading essays aloud and discussing the importance of education for lower-caste children. For instance, in its "letters to the editor" section, *Din Bandhu* published a piece authored by one '*Ya*' (I suspect author of the letter in question is Yashwant Phule, Jotirao Phule's son) that gave an account of a meeting conducted by the Satyashodhak Samaj. At the meeting, Gyanu Malharji Zagade, the presiding chief guest, encouraged the audience to send their children to the Satyashodak Samaj's free school. The school, specially meant for the children of backward castes (magaslelya *jati*), had made a provision for evening classes for the children of the 'artisan Shudra' who were required to work in the day in their workshops.

Similarly, the February 2, 1896 issue discussed how funds for the promotion of higher education of Maratha youth needed to be raised in regions outside the city of Pune, which was an urban center and also a Satyashodhak Samaj stronghold. The article mentions that some members of the Maratha caste have successfully raised funds for Maratha higher education. Their efforts have yielded results too. Many Maratha youth have received university degrees, and some have even gone on to secure government employment of high-standing. "While this endeavor has been fruitful in and around Pune... how long will we keep looking towards Pune with hopeful eyes?" The letter writer Tatyarao Sawant from Dharward encouraged the Marathas of Dharwad (a smaller town in southern Maharashtra) to borrow a page from the city-dwellers of Pune. Bhimrao

Mohite of Dharward too echoed these sentiments and called on members of the Maratha caste to raise funds. The article mentioned that while the first meeting of the Marathas of Dharward was organized in 1894, after two, years they had solicited funds from three-hundred donors and had raised rupees 165,984, a very large sum for its time. The deliberate efforts made by the Marathas of Dharward only reinforces the fact that voluntary organizations and civil society networks in the nineteenth century were initially an urban phenomenon, but their influence was soon seen in smaller towns too.

The first few civil society organizations that emerged in Bombay at the beginning of the nineteenth century were, ironically, steered by the colonial administration. In order to mark out the true realm of the state and its sovereign power, The East India Company administration eagerly worked towards demarcating clear boundaries between the state and society. It did so in part by ensuring that the mercantile community that had recently moved to Bombay from north-western regions of the subcontinent had the civil rights to buy property, land, build houses, and carry out free trade while enjoying military protection by the state. This allowed the East India Company administration to demonstrate its commitment to a laissez-faire market economy. In addition, it carved out a separate social domain by encouraging communities to set up bodies that adjudicated their internal affairs. By doing so, practice and adjudication around caste and religion were relegated to the civic realm.[364]

In the first half of the nineteenth century, elite associational life was dominated by Europeans who set out to establish learned societies. Soon similar societies for the

[364] Prashant Kidambi, *The making of an Indian metropolis: Colonial governance and public culture in Bombay, 1890-1920* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007).159.

diffusion of knowledge were patronized by wealthy merchants or *Shetias* and were set up by the students and alumni of Elphinstone College. Wealthy caste and community clusters who were experiencing an upturn in their fortunes as a result of their collaboration with the East India Company too set out to form their own associations. Active among them were the Parsis, Bhatias, and the Khojas. Trying to cope with their new urban life, they organized themselves in associations to discuss and adjudicate matters internal to their castes. Emulating these upwardly mobile new elites, the Pathare Prabhu Caste—a scribal middling caste from Bombay formed the first Hindu caste association, which was formulated on the lines of a modern civil society organization.

The Pathare Prabhu Reform Association, established in 1863, took up the question of widow remarriage. Their move towards introspection and the admission that their own caste community direly needed reformist 'improvement' was a part of the larger trend towards self-reflection ushered in by colonial modernity. In addition to providing material and educational support to the poorer members of their caste, with its various recreational and social activities, the association sought to shape an urban modern life for its caste members. Between 1887 and 1912, the Pathare Prabhu Association organized social clubs, debating societies, relief funds, fever hospitals, knowledge improvement society, ladies clubs, and a cricket club.[365]

The Gazetteer of Bombay noted that " The Pathare Prabhu Social club is a popular place of resort where men gather every evening after the toil of the day's work, take tea and discuss the news, some play cards, and some take part in music… These

[365] Kidambi, *The making of an Indian metropolis: Colonial governance and public culture in Bombay, 1890-1920*.168.

people also have their debating clubs where they discuss their social questions…". [366] While the roots of the Pathare Prabhu caste were for long had been anchored to the city, the aggressive industrialization of Bombay was new. And so, the Pathare Prabhu, a scribal caste who constituted the clerical and the lower-bureaucracy of Bombay, cultivated leisure and non-professional activities for their members who were also emerging as the new middle-class.

However, these seemingly secular activities of these caste organizations were accompanied by the assertion of a higher ritual status. The Pathare Reform Association made it a point to highlight in all their publications that they were an upper-caste and belonged to the Kshatriya Varna category. Like the Pathare Prabhu, intermediate castes with an ambiguous caste status were often relegated to the Shudra Varna by dominant caste ideology in the early modern periods as also in the early nineteenth century. Middling castes like the Pathares often used their caste associations as a platform to reiterate their 'upper-caste' status. For instance, the Pachkalshi—another scribal caste, which too had taken up clerical occupations in the city, reiterated their 'Somvanshi Kshatriya' status.[367]

The reconstitution of community associational life on the lines of a modern bureaucratic organization also provided middle castes with ambiguous ritual status with an efficient organizational machinery that ensured that their 'upper-caste status' was correctly reproduced. For instance, the affluent artisan Sonar caste (goldsmith caste) has been laying claim to a Brahman status at least since the eighteenth century. In the

[366] The Gazetteer of Bombay City And Island, Volume(Bombay, The Times Press, 1909)
[367]Kidambi, *The making of an Indian metropolis: Colonial governance and public culture in Bombay, 1890-1920*.168

nineteenth century, they devised an ingenious way of using their caste association for asserting an upward ritual status. Like all other caste associations, the Sonars, too, set up a charitable fund. But they used the fund not only to help the economically vulnerable members of their community to seek education, but they also used it to ensure that the weaker sections among them performed correct rituals, befitting their 'Brahman status.' Funds were often allocated to weaker families to carry out rituals like marriages, thread ceremonies, and funerals.[368] By providing charity for ritual performances, the Sonar caste ensured that the poor among them did not skip the thread ceremonies of their sons (a ritual meant only for the upper-castes) due to lack of funds or, worse, succumb to the Brahman's pressure and perform rituals meant for non-Brahman castes.

Caste and the Rise of a National Imaginary

Besides caste organizations and writing to newspapers, non-Brahmans castes carved out a space of their own in the world of print by publishing manuals and booklets furnishing information about their own castes and sub-castes.

In the early 1870s, we see the publication of a few texts by writers of the artisan castes such as the *Samastha Konkanastha Namdev Shimpi Jatis Patra* (Or a letter addressed to the Namdev Shimpi of the Konkan littoral region)[369] in 1871 and *Panchal Jatiche Mul* (Origins of the Panchal caste) in 1873. But by the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century, many more such caste writings were published, and from then onwards, their numbers only kept increasing.

[368] Kidambi, *The making of an Indian metropolis: Colonial governance and public culture in Bombay, 1890-1920*., 168-169
[369] Translation by the British Library catalogue.

Most of the caste manuals followed a set pattern. They briefly expounded the histories of their particular caste, discussed their present geographical location or narrated accounts of their migration from another region. Further, most of them dedicated a large section of their writing to origin stories and finding a place for their caste in religious texts, puranas, and mythical stories. These textual references allowed them to do two things: one, explain how they came to perform their present caste occupation or artisanal professions, and two, more importantly, it helped them to draw out a narrative that argued for an upper-caste status. For instance, in the *Bhandari Lokanche Vrittanta* (*An Account of the Bhandari People*,) the author drew on legends, mythical and puranic stories to explain the Kshatriya origins of the Bhandari people. The Bhandari people, he argued, are descendants of the Rajputs from the northwestern region of the subcontinent who chased mutineers down to the peninsular region of western and southern India. These men who clamped down revolts or *Banda* came to be called B*anda-hari* (destroyers of revolts) and later came to be known as Bhandari.[370]

Caste writings from lower-caste non-Brahman social locations, and written towards the end of the century, especially in the late 1880s and 1890s, were full of contradictions. They were troubled by the question: how does one write about one's own particular caste group while at the same time affirming the horizontal ties of the national community?

While the social reformist discourse gained strength in the mid-nineteenth century, towards the end of the century, an explicit expression of a national imaginary

[370]Vithoba Sonji Chavan, *Bhandari Lokhanche Vrittanta* (Mumbai: The Joint stock Printing Press. , 1887); *Bhandari Lokhanche Vrittanta* , 36-37.

emerged. Unlike the social reformist thought, which had received intense opposition from the orthodox, conservatives, and the revivalists' voices, the national question was welcomed with open arms. By this time the figure of the nation also had global legitimacy. By 1880s, natives could not negate the nation for an alternative community, and that too a 'traditional' and ascriptive one like caste. By end of the 1880s, the nation had begun to emerge as the sacred iteration of a modern community, and caste had to only be second to it.

Vithoba Chavan, the author of *An Account of the Bhandari People*, tried to walk this fine line. The author argued that the distinctive character of caste division (*jatibhed*) has led to a condition where discrete castes have become distant and appeared foreign to each other. And so, to acquaint these castes with each other, the author had set out to write in detail about the Bhandari caste.

The author imagined the nation as a collective of distinct castes, and castes, in turn, were collectives of unitary persons. He argued, "A person, as a unit, his powers and faculty are limited. But when many such people or units come together in a collective, their faculties strengthen and their work gains importance… a nation is filled by people, between every member (*avayava*) and groups or classes of members there must be sense of affection. It is only when these distinct appendages (members) work in unison that an excellent condition of the nation can be achieved."[371]

The author established a linear relationship between the divine power, nation, caste communities, and the person as a unit by mobilizing the Vedic myth of the *purusha sukta* (myth of the cosmic man). Extrapolating the conception that the four original varna

[371] Ibid.,6-8.

emerged from different parts of the supreme being's body, the author proposed that "the unit or the person is a limb (*avayava*) of the community's body (*varga purusha*), the community in turn is a limb of the national man (*desha purusha*), he further is an appendage of the universal man (virata *purusha*), and finally the *virata purusha* is a limb of the supreme man (*parama purusha*)."[372]

By finding a hierarchical order among the divine, the national body, and caste communities, the author opens doors for two implications: one, that the nation is a sovereign body, second to no one but the divine men—the *virata purusha* and the *param purusha*. And two, by establishing that the relationship between the Supreme Being and caste body is mediated by the nation, the author, on the one hand, disengages caste from its direct connection to divinity and makes it subservient to the nation.

By establishing that the horizontal community of the nation prevailed over caste communities—an arrangement with vertical social relations, the author reveals that the true purpose of the caste order is to subordinate themselves in the service of the nation; to bring about its advancement. The author explains, "The way in which *jatibhed* (typology/classification) in the natural world is self-evident, the *jatibhed* among humans is not axiomatic (in the same way). They are artificial distinctions based on *karma* (work or actions), varna, *ranga* (color), *dharma*, nation, etc. But the way in which the several self-evident distinctions in the natural world work towards creating a favorable (auspicious) state of the world, these artificial divisions too should be put to use such that they augment the condition of the nation."[373]

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[372] Chavan, *Bhandari Lokhanche Vrittanta* 5.
[373] Ibid.,2.

How does Chavan resolve the tension between the national community, seemingly predicated on the equality of its members, and the caste order: that inherently assumes a hierarchy of people? For the author, the national community precedes castes, both in its significance (caste is reduced to an instrumental function to attain the well-being of the national community) and chronology. He argued that keeping the advancement of the nation in mind, the Supreme Being distributed varied *karma* (work, skills, and function) and endowed the people of the nation with favorable capacities to perform them. However, he argued that these '*karma*' should not be misunderstood for *karma* also meaning ritual sacrifices.[374]Chavan clarifies that here he meant non-religious, 'useful deeds' that people of the nation perform for sustenance, and acts without which the business of the nation many not proceed. He suggests, "By *karma* here, I mean deeds that bring prosperity to the nation."[375]

The author asked the readers to imagine the nation as a workshop (*udyog shala*) where various *karma* (work and deeds) could be learned. The groups or communities of people who perform these distinct *karma* constitute the different classes within this workshop. The pupils who study in these classes need to have the right bent of mind, study diligently, retain a favorable environment, interest, will, etc. However, if one believes that by honing the above virtues they can climb up into the higher class, and help augment the honor of their nation, they should be allowed to do so. Thus, movement within these classes should be made possible on the basis of one's knowledge and ability and not by birth and lineage.[376]

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[374] Here the author refers to the karma marga or the ritual path in Hinduism. Karma marga (the ritual path), bhakti (the devotional path) marga, and dnyana marga (knowledge path) – three paths of attaining salvation.
[375] Chavan, *Bhandari Lokhanche Vrittanta* 9.
[376] Ibid.,10.

The author acknowledges that the present caste order, which was originally ordained by the divine to be based on ability and work, has ossified into hierarchical structure based on birth. The author also conceded that uprooting these generationally sedimented hierarchies is impossible. And so, his advice was, "to remain where one is… but work towards seeking individual upward mobility by way of honing ones virtues and abilities." Moreover, it is imperative, he argued, that members of one nation should give up discriminatory caste feelings towards one another and work towards the well-being of the nation.[377]

In the Bombay Presidency in the last decades of the nineteenth century, concerns over the restructuring of the social realm dominated the public discourse, and nationalist concerns were rapidly intensifying beyond the elite liberal quarters. Increasingly overshadowing the politics of social reform, was the politics of nationalism. The nationalist question had come to dominate most public discussions. And there was no way that non-Brahman organizations and newspapers were going to refrain from stepping into this exchange of ideas.

For instance, in 1894, the nationalist playwright Anna Martand Joshi was invited as the chief guest to the second-anniversary celebration of the *Namdev Sudharneccha Sabha* (Society for the improvement of the Namdev Shimpi caste), a non-brahman tailor caste. Himself a Brahman, Joshi, who worked as a clerk at the Central Government Press in Bombay, was well known for his plays that demonized the Muslims and were known to be doused in nationalist fervor. His 1893 play entitled *Shiva Chattrapati Vijay* that dramatized the historical events between 1659 and 1674 — the invasion by Shahista

[377] Ibid.,9.

Khan[378] and the coronation of Shivaji, received severe criticism from the then Commissioner of Police. The latter argued that the play could potentially 'incite the low class Muslims during the Moharram period.'[379] This also suggests that in some instances, especially when it came to nationalism, non-Brahman castes that did not explicitly follow the Satyashodhak line did not hesitate to share the stage with Brahman public figures. Perhaps, Anna Martand's recognition as a nationalist trumped his identity as a Brahman.

Similarly, the May 31, 1896 issue of the *Din Bandhu,* a letter to the editor by one "ka" reported a meeting of the *Kshatriya Maratha Dnyati* held in the Library Hall of the Telugu Mali Samaj located at Kamathipura in Bombay. The meeting, with a presence of about 150 members, discussed the funds collected for the restoration of Shivaji's memorial. The letter mentioned that a part of the collected funds (rupees 4,500) were used to publish a book about the Maratha King's life.

As a rejoinder to this letter, the editors of the *Din Bandhu* clarified that, initially, the *Kshatriya Maratha Dnyati* intended to send the collected amount to the committee in Pune. In this regard, they sent three letters to B.G Tilak too; but they received no communication from him. The editors said, "It remains to be seen how Mr. Tilak utilizes the funds collected under the name of 'Shri *Chatrapati Shivaji Smarak funda."*

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[378] Shahista Khan (1600-1694) also the maternal uncle of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb was sent to the Deccan region as its administrator after the Mughals had seized the region from its earlier ruler—Adilshah of Bijapur. The Deccan and its key cities were also contested by the Maratha King Shivaji. The story of Shivaji and his men sneaking into Shahista Khan's palace under cover, and using guerilla methods to attack him has now become the thing of the legends. The nationalist refashioning of Shivaji since the late nineteenth-century was also accompanied by villainizing of Shahista Khan in the public memory of Marathi speaking regions.

[379] Aravind Gururao Ganachari, "THE CONTRIBUTION OF MARATHI THEATRE TO THE GROWTH OF NATIONALISM 1897-1913," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 54 (1993), http://www.jstor.org/stable/44143031., 583. Martand was also involved in the cow protection movement that was active in the 1890s.

In 1896 Tilak's attempts to canonize Shivaji as a nationalist icon, and a Hindu nationalist at that, received trenchant criticism from the *Dina Bandhu.* The legitimacy of the national question was such that it could not be circumvented, especially by socio-political public platforms such as the *Din Bandhu.* While the non-Brahman newspaper was not averse to contemplating the idea of nationalism, it was reproachful of efforts dominated by Brahman leaders and B. G Tilak, their closest nemesis in Pune, was the target of much ire.

Critique of emergent Cultural Nationalism

By May 31, 1896, when the above mentioned letter in *Din Bandhu* was published, B. G Tilak (1856-1920) had already emerged as the leading 'nationalist' voice in Western India. In the region, he was at the forefront of articulating the ideological contours of the Hindu community. The rise of Tilak's political image curiously paralleled Lokhande and the *Din Bandhu*'s assent.

In 1881, a year after Lokhande took over the editorship of *Din Bandhu*, B.G Tilak and G.G Agarkar along with their mentor V.K Chiplunkar, a leading conservative Brahman, literary and public figure, inaugurated the publication of two newspapers: The *Mahratta* in English and the *Kesari* (The Lion) in Marathi.[380] Within the first four years,

[380] Both Tilak and Agarkar were inspired by the ideas and political activism of Chiplunkar (1850-1880). A conservative, Chiplunkar vehemently argued against contemporary reformers like Lokahitawadi for criticizing the degeneration of the Hindu religion. He argued that reasons responsible for the corruption of Hindu religion do not lie within the religion itself, like Brahmans reformers of his time argued. Instead, he emphasized that external colonial rule had led to present corrupt condition of the religion. Himself a Chitpavan Brahman, Chiplunkar believed that Brahmans truly were the natural leaders of Hindu community. He exhorted them to rise up and reassume their lost position of leadership.
Chiplunkar had a curious caste politics. He believed caste distinctions were an anathema. Not because they hierarchized the worth of people, and stigmatized the labor and existence of some. But because they impeded the formation a united national community. This was the crux of the nationalist critique of caste. Chiplunkar's engagement with the Phule's writing is well known. that Nibandhamala , perception of caste, and all castes

Kesari truly worked up a storm. Within two years of its first appearance, it circulated 3,500 copies. And by 1884, *Kesari* had a circulation of 4,350, followed by that of the *Din Bandhu*, whose circulation was only one-fourth of the former.[381] While *Din Bandhu* openly claimed to be a mouthpiece of the working class, *Kesari* was the first Marathi paper to actually have a mass audience.[382]

The wide gap in their mass appeal and circulation numbers was not the only point of contention between the two papers; they were also strong ideological rivals. Right in the first year of its appearance, Chiplunkar, through his writing in *Kesari,* made the newspaper's Brahmanical inflection known. In an article entitled *Brahmans bear the taunts of all and sundry*, Chiplunkar wrote, "Several Marathas under the influence of an unyielding (*nissneha*) light (*joti*, here the reference is to Jotirao Phule) are determined to castigate the Brahman caste. This behavior leads to nothing more than harming the interest of the nation (*deshache nuksan*). Their vision has been blinded by the pale light of this *jyoti* (meaning flame, but also a play on Jotirao Phule's name).[383]

Also, *Din Bandhu* and *Kesari* clashed over the 1885 policy on positive discrimination in education for backward castes implemented by Lee-Warner, the director of public instruction of the Bombay presidency. He directed that the public funds collected from the peasants and agricultural class will be directed towards giving

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need to come together. We will see why Tilak's ideas and strategies to bring Hindus together flow from chiplunkar later.

[381] O'hanlon, *Caste, conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India.*288.

[382] Naregal, *Language, politics, elites and the public sphere: Western India under colonialism.*210. Earlier in the chapter we have seen the challenges faced by both Bhalekar and Lokhande in maintaining the circulation of a paper that wrote for and about the lower-castes. And so comparing the two contemporary papers for their circulation may not be fair to Din Bandhu.

[383] Kadam, *Narayan Meghaji Lokhande: Bharatiya Kamgar calvalliche janak [Narayan Meghaji Lokhande: The founder of the Indian labour movement]*.114.

scholarships to non-Brahman students.[384] However, even before the rollout of the education policy, *Din Bandhu* consistently campaigned for the question of education among the lower-castes, and the need for schools with non-Brahman or Muslim teachers instead of Brahman teachers, and to channelize freeships to non-Brahman students.

Kesari's response was scathing. An 1886 issue of *Kesari* published an article pejoratively addressed to their 'Shudra-brothers,' and jeering at their desire for education and to secure white-collared jobs. "Our Shudra Brothers! Don't you envy us Brahmans. If you think that after the arrival of the new regime, our condition has improved, and yours has declined, then in that case, why don't you transfer all your tracts of land, and what is left of a few principalities under your rule to us in exchange of all our government jobs… it is our opinion that intellectual prowess trumps physical strength. It's only because of this (our intellectual abilities), that we emerged as the leaders of the Maratha kingdom, a political realm whose foundation was established by one of you (Shivaji). Not just this, but it was our intelligence that helped us fight wars…garner fame and popularity, as well as wealth … we climbed up and helped many of you to do so too… From what you say, it looks like you wish that the Bhonsales, the Shrikes, and Manes (all non-Brahman surnames) want to take up professions like the *Mamlatdar* (revenue officer) and the *Munsif* (a lower court judge), and leave the Brahmans to pick up tools like the plane, plough, sledge-hammers, and perform carpentry, tilling, and smithery? It is as clear as day that soon we might have to start taking up these professions. Doesn't matter. We are willing to do it. But let us warn you! Once we turn our gaze towards these professions

[384] Kadam, *Narayan Meghaji Lokhande: Bharatiya Kamgar calvalliche janak [Narayan Meghaji Lokhande: The founder of the Indian labour movement]*.112.

and diligently refine our skills, think about the trouble you are going to be in! The realm of the living is replete with conflict… and only those whose are imbued with natural vitality (*naisargik oja*) will emerge vindicated."[385]

Although *Kesari's* immediate meteoric popularity could be attributed to its aggressive anticolonial journalism and the subsequent arrest of both Tilak and Agarkar, the above article made three things clear:

For one, that *Kesari's* consistent use of 'we' to refer to the Brahmans made amply clear that it spoke specifically on behalf of the Brahmans. Two, keeping in line with its Brahmanical position, the paper believed that the Brahmans were inherently imbued with intellectual superiority, which explained their historical edge over the Shudras, to whom the paper relegated the brawns in this duality of intellectual versus physical labor. Three, like the anti-caste movement, *Kesari* too perceived social relations mired in conflict, but with a conviction that the Brahmans possessed a certain 'natural vitality' and only those with this endowment will sustain the conflict, the paper arrived at it from a socially conservative and not from a place of equality.[386]

In 1882, soon after *Kesari* found its feet, Chiplunkar, the ideologue of the group and Tilak's mentor, passed away. By 1887, Agarkar, the relatively liberal voice of this English-educated Brahman collective, after several arguments, disassociated himself from the caste conservatism of the *Kesari* and began to publish his own newspaper called *Sudharak* (the reformer). As a result of these two events, Tilak took over the editorship of

[385] Ibid.,114.
[386] This is not surprising for both Tilak and Agarkar were inspired by the writings of Herbert Spencer.

Kesari. Now that Agarkar was out of the way, Tilak continued to invoke, this time even more strongly, the Brahmanical nationalist tradition articulated by Chiplunkar.

History of the Brahmanical Nationalist Tradition in South Asia

The Cow protection movement of the late 1880s and 1890s, which played a crucial role in consolidating the ideological entity called the 'Hindu community,' impelled Tilak to amalgamate his commitment to both Brahmanical supremacy and to the construction of a Hindu national community. The Cow Protection Movement was an instance of how a common symbolic meaning, broadly shared across a region, was invoked, solidified, and rearticulated in the public sphere by way of existing local networks and social organizations. In Punjab and United Provinces (UP), parts of North India where the movement first took shape, the cow was a locally revered animal amongst the castes more influenced by Brahmanical values. The fuzzy genealogy of the cow's sacredness is evident in a report by British Administrators, who took recourse to 'folk lore' in order to determine that 'the cow had attained a sacred status in popular discourse by the time the institute of Manu was compiled.'[387]

The Cow Protection Movement was an amorphous network of disparate urban social organizations, local leaders, publication houses, printers, members of the educated urban middle class, landlords, rulers of regional principalities, as well as well-known supra-local reformist societies like the Arya Samaj.[388] At the local level, the very discourse of protecting the cow meant different things to different people. Some justified it as the symbol of India's agrarian society, some deployed it as a site of anticolonial

[387] Sandria B Freitag, *Collective action and community: public arenas and the emergence of communalism in North India* (Univ of California Press, 1989).48.
[388] Freitag, *Collective action and community: public arenas and the emergence of communalism in North India.*

resistance against the provincial courts decreeing that the cow was not a sacred object in India, while others upheld its religious importance. But the travelling stump speakers, printed texts like pamphlets, newspapers, and organizational rule booklets created a larger symbolic, ideological umbrella that united these local meanings.[389]

From the dispersal of this discourse in the public realm by way of discussions, writings, rules, and images, two important things emerge. First, various local cow protection committees in north India suggested that a 'good Hindu' was one who demonstrated upper-caste habits and attitudes. For instance, the Gorakhpur Sabha (organization) in eastern U.P directed all twice-born (upper-castes) castes to sing the *gayatri mantra*[390] thrice a day or risk being expelled from the community. As the volunteers went from one Hindu home to another in order to collect a handful of rice as a donation, a practice modelled on the *diksha* (offering) collection by ascetic Brahmans, the Sabha instructed women to practice *purdah* (cover their face) when they stepped out to donate a handful of grains.[391]

Second, the movement shaped itself against non-Hindu religious groups. Christians and Muslims were attacked for practicing 'alien' cultural systems. For instance, in a meeting attended by five to six thousand people in the Azamgarh district of U.P, a picture of a cow as the home of Hindu gods was circulated. In the picture, standing next to the cow, was a Muslim man with a sword drawn out. More directly, cow protection organizations approached Muslim butchers and offered to buy the cattle that were to be taken to the abattoir. The Queen of the Majhauli principality incentivized

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[389] Ibid.,
[390] The *gayatri mantra* is a Sanskrit Vedic hymn that, like all other Vedic knowledge, the Shudra and untouchable communities were traditionally prohibited from chanting.
[391] Ibid., 152.

Muslim butchers to give up their profession in exchange for rent-free tracts of land. During the festival of Eid, while some organizations threatened to boycotts Muslims who sacrificed kine, others pressured Muslims in their areas to sign agreements that promised not to sacrifice.[392] With tension rising, local Muslim leaders and landlords activated their own networks and opposed cow protection meetings and organization. Finally, on the Bakri-Eid of 1893, riots irrupted in districts of Azamgarh and Mau in Eastern U.P.

Before the violence actually broke out in the rest of the western India, the Bombay presidency too experienced tensions, activities, and movements similar to those taking place in North India before the riots. In 1890, meetings were held to discuss cow slaughter and the excesses of Muslim festivities in Surat. In Bombay, subscriptions were collected to clamp down cow slaughter and deliberately dampen Muslim enthusiasm during festivals. Moreover, Tilak's writings in *Mahratta* and *Kesari* had already assumed an aggressive anti-Muslim tenor before the riots.[393]

Tilak's Ganpati Festival and Din Bandhu's Criticism

Perhaps, like the Cow protection associations, Tilak, too, was faced with the question: How to construct a unified Hindu community? The stakes of this question were particularly high for Tilak since *Kesari* had consistently antagonized the Shudra. In this case, how does one make a case for a united Hindu community after a decade of antagonizing 80 percent of its purported members?

Following in toe with the many cultural innovations taking place in other parts of the subcontinent to foster 'Hindu unity,' in 1894, Tilak too made the Ganpati festival, a

[392] Ibid., 153, 154.
[393] Meena Menon, "Chronicle of Communal Riots in Bombay Presidency (1893-1945)," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2010)., 65.

domestic affair in upper-caste families up until then, a massive public event. The ten-day-long festivity required organized effort at the local level, seek out volunteers, aggressive campaigning. The festival was a carnivalesque display of lights, performances, music, and mingling.

From its inauguration in 1894, it was all too clear that the Ganpati festival was organized as a fitting response to the radiance and grandeur of Muharram, a Shi'ite observance. Moreover, the Ganpati festival's political character was for all to see, since the idea of the festival emerged out of meetings meant to strategize and prepare for possible riots in Pune in the first place. Although the riot was averted, participants of the meetings agreed that Hindu participation in Muharram had to be stopped immediately. And hence, a rival Hindu equivalent in the form of the Ganpati festival was proposed.[394]

With the intention to both endorse and publicize lower-caste participation in Ganpati festivities, Tilak wrote an article in the September 18, 1894 issue of *Kesari* replete with condescension towards the lower-castes: " Ganpati the deity, all these years had remained amongst the white-collared people …But now the Marathas stand as a strong pillar with us. The artisan class such as the weavers, gardeners, dyers, carpenters, potters, goldsmiths, shopkeepers, traders, with the sweat of their brow brighten our faces…How the people of this industrious class have risen to the occasion and worked tirelessly, like never before, for this festival. Instead of returning home from a day of hard labor, only to engage in idle gossip, to be found drunk languishing in streets and the sewers, destroying their domestic life at the behest of alcohol, and spending their night

[394] Kadam, *Narayan Meghaji Lokhande: Bharatiya Kamgar calvalliche janak [Narayan Meghaji Lokhande: The founder of the Indian labour movement]*. 122.

enjoying vulgar performances, these people (the artisan castes) now have the opportunity to spend their empty time in the devotion of the deity of intellect (Ganapati)". The editorial finally reassured its readers that although several minds have been led astray by 'convert Brahmans and atheist reformers', the Marathas, who are the mainstay of 'our society', have retained their love for 'their own religion' (*swadharma*).[395]

Anti-caste activists, the Satyashodhak Samaj, and the *Din Bandhu* refused to accede to the construction of a unitary Hindu community. In fact, in a Satyashodhak Samaj meeting reported in the *Din Bandhu*, Dhondirao Kumbhar, an activist of the Satyashodhak Samaj, who rose to leadership in the last decades of the century gave a speech and furnished it with evidence about how the lower-castes and the Brahmans were different communities with nothing shared in common.[396] In fact, the anti-caste group approached the 'communal question' by expressing solidarity with members of the Muslim community.

Lower-caste solidarity with the Muslim community rested on two related propositions. First, there was the feeling that Muslims, like the non-Brahmans, both erstwhile ruling communities of the subcontinent, had common interests, demands, and political desires and had become "backward" because of political and social processes. Thus, both the *Dina Bandhu* and the Satyashodhak Samaj extended solidarity with the Muslim community, as the communal tensions in the north and western India brewed over the question cow slaughter, disputes around Muharram processions, and the aggressive Hindu nationalism of Tilak's Ganpati festival. This is evident in a meeting

[395] Ibid., 122.
[396] Din Bandhu, April 5 1896.

Satyashodhak Samaj conducted in Pune on December 23, 1894, in order to address the question of communal harmony. The meeting certainly must have been an animated one, for discussions, speeches, and public readings of essays continued into midnight.

Din Bandhu reported that in this meeting 'the warmth between the Hindus and the Muslims was for all to see.' Alongside the activists of the Satyashodhak Samaj, eminent members from the Muslim community were present, such as Munsi Mahammad Ali, a teacher at the training college, and the Secretary of Mahamadi Anjuman, Abdul Mohammad Khan. *Dina Bandhu* underlined that in their speeches, both Hindu and Muslim speakers emphasized the need to spread knowledge and education among those who were 'backward' (*magaslele*).

The paper was, perhaps, alluding to the idea that neither the Hindu nor the Muslims were a homogenous community and that they included a large disadvantaged section. Moreover, by stressing material problems shared in common by the lower-castes and the Muslims, both the Samaj and Muslim organizations sought to prioritize 'real' concrete concerns faced by the two communities rather than the communal problematic that was under construction. Additionally, the Satyashodhak Samaj's solidarity and empathy towards the Muslim community rested on the argument that the lower-caste too, like the Muslims, experienced economic deprivation, as well as, social and political exclusion.

While Muslim exclusion could have very well been the Samaj's perception, or even its political strategy for seeking wider social solidarity, by the late-nineteenth century, the discourse of 'Muslim backwardness' was widely circulating among both, the Muslim elites as well as in the wider colonial public sphere in the Indian subcontinent.

The perception of Muslim backwardness and exclusion was a phenomenon shaped by political processes in the mid-nineteenth century. In fact, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the Muslim aristocrats in Bengal and United Provinces (U.P) were so consumed by their elite status that they expressed great disdain towards employees of the new East India Company administration. They viewed the newly emerging middle-class that sought modern education and subsequently a place in the colonial administration as lacking in culture and so chose to maintain a distance from them. However, towards the end of the century, prominent Muslim leaders and reformist organizations discussed the reasons for Muslim exclusion from colonial education, political representation, and the comparative advantage of the Hindu community in both these spheres.

By the 1860s, while the tone of 'Muslim backwardness' was set by colonial writings, policies, and the census, rapid social changes that were set in motion by modern institutions and colonial polity further reinforced the feeling of 'decline.' W.W Hunter, an administrator and ethnographer, best known for compiling 'The imperial Gazetteer of India (1881),' [397] published *'Indian Musalmans: are they Bound in Conscience to rebel against the queen?'* in 1871. In this work, he held the colonial government responsible for their 'backwardness' and discussed the potential seditious character of the whole Muslim community. He argued that the colonial government had failed to ensure that its Muslim subjects receive a modern education.[398]

This perception of Muslims as an uneducated and fanatical religious group prone to violence, was a retrospective one. After the 1857 rebellion, which unfolded under

[397] An encyclopedic work on Indian topography and people first published in 1881.
[398] Banerjee-Dube, *A History of Modern India*.154.

titular leadership of the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar and garnered support from principalities ruled by Muslim dynasties in North India, the loyalty of the entire Muslim community was increasingly seen as suspect. Moreover, the insecurity provoked by colonial distrust and surveillance was further hardened by the 1881 census operation that declared the Muslims as a 'minority,' constituting 19.7% of the total population of British India.[399]

Lower-caste activists were convinced that this condition was brought on both groups by upper-caste Hindus and that the Shudra and the Muslims shared a common adversary, the Brahman. The connection between the condition of the lower-castes and the Muslims must not have been very difficult to make. Both the lower-caste and the Muslim communities were experiencing a process of politicization simultaneously in the mid-nineteenth century.

Din Bandhu argued that a nationalist discourse led by the elite upper-castes of the newly formed Indian National Congress (1885) excludes both the lower-castes and the Muslims. In its June 25, 1896 issue *Din Bandhu* emphasized "What a boastful name have they come up with –'the National Congress', but those who have examined the organization closely are convinced that this organization is constituted of a few people from upper-caste among the Hindu community (*Hindu lokatil uncha varnachya jatitil kahi lokanchi ahe*). Muslims and the Marathas are kept outside the organization. How will this broken and crippled organization improve the condition of our society, leave alone bring nationness?"

[399] Banerjee-Dube, *A History of Modern India*. 155.

Din Bandhu perhaps recognized that the Ganpati and Muharram controversy was deliberately created by Hindu nationalists like Tilak as a mechanism to construct a united Hindu community. And in order to impede this construction, the paper published articles, letters to the editor, and editorials that deliberately highlighted how the lower-castes refused to join the Brahmans in this endeavor of making a homogeneous Hindu unity by continuing to participate in Muharram festivities, despite Brahman opposition.

For instance, in a letter to the editor dated June 27, 1896, *Varganidar* (a subscriber) Sheikh Ismail drew attention to the enthusiastic participation of the non-Brahman castes in Muharram, despite the aggressive campaigning by the Brahmans to boycott the Muslim observance. He mentioned that the Muslim community was relieved that Muharram in Ahmednagar that year was observed peacefully without any disturbances. They had anticipated a possible escalation of tensions when they found out that some *Bhatts* (Brahmans) with malicious intent were campaigning in Hindu-dominated localities to abstain from participating in and contributing to practices surrounding Muharram. In preparation for potential disturbance, as well as the possible withdrawal of support from the usual Hindu donors, Muslim organizers amplified their preparations. But Ismail mentioned that nothing prepared him for what was in store in the Bara Imam Kothla! The enclosure was bursting at the seams with Hindu men and women carrying flowers, sweets, and *loban* (perfumeries) as offerings. On seeing the presence of Maratha, Mali, Marwadi, Gujar, and Pardeshi castes (all non-Brahman castes), the author chuckled to himself: “How futile were the Bhatt’s antics!”

Similarly, The *Dina Bandhu* of July 5, 1896, demonstrated that in the face of Brahman opposition and violence, the lower-castes continued to display unwavering

support towards the Muslim community. One 'Ba' reported that the police had caught hold of two *Bhatts* who threw stones at the Tabut (bier) in Shaniwar Peth, Pune. On hearing this, men from the Nhavi (barber castes) and Vajantri (musician caste), both Shudra communities, rushed to blacken the faces of the 'malicious Bhatts', and then resumed to enthusiastically play their drums at the Moharram procession. *Ba* mentions that both the Nhavi and the Vajantri who participated in this act were of the opinion that 'the growing conflict and disagreements between the Hindus and the Muslims are not going to serve anyone if anything we all stand to lose.'[400]

A strong foundation in the Satyashodhak intellectual tradition allowed the *Din Bandhu* and its activist-writers and editors to step out of the duality created by the communal problem between 'the Hindus and the Muslims' and instead critique it from an anti-caste perspective. The anti-caste group refused to be a part of this 'religious' ideological community, for its very foundation, "our customary religion…is rotten and spiritless (*kuchkat ani ponchat*). It is time to overthrow the coat of religion"[401] They were of the opinion that a religion that was defiled by the touch of its own people cannot claim to be the foundations of a unified community. In a letter to the editor of *Din Bandhu*, dated July 5, 1896, the author emphasized that, "Until our Muslim people do not explicitly stop us from coming to event, we will continue to remain the Peer's devotees. Because the gurus of our seventeen or so castes (referring to Brahmans) still accuse us of defiling their gods even if we go close to them…"

[400] While both Nhavi and the Vajantri are non-brahman castes, in the past members of the Nhavi caste (barber caste) in Pune had supported Savitribai Phule's campaign against of the custom of tonsuring brahman women on attaining widowhood. Deshpande, "Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule."15.
[401] *Din Bandhu*, June 28, 1896.

Refusal to equate Hinduness with the national community.

A close reading of *Din Bandhu* reveals to us that carving out a Shudra public sphere, in opposition to a Brahmanical one, meant a lot more than just offering a Shudra point of view on questions that were increasingly attaining subcontinental significance. It also meant deploying a particular method of thinking, analyzing, and reasoning that owes much to the long tradition of anti-caste discourse. Not only did the *Din Bandhu* deploy the language of rights when it came to speaking on issues pertinent to the mill-hands workers and the peasants, but it also drew on the form of questioning which invoked simple common sense, a form honed by the satyashodhak tradition and the long tradition of anti-caste thinkers, in order to undo Tilak's glib imbrication of Hindu-ness and national identity.

In 1897, Tilak, along with his associates, inaugurated a public festival commemorating the seventeenth-century Maratha king, Shivaji. While the lower-caste movement had mobilized the figure of Shivaji as the evenhanded agricultural king of the peasants who stood up against Brahman resistance to his coronation, Tilak sought to construct a nationalist memory of Shivaji as a Hindu underdog, who fought Muslim invasion to carve out a Hindu empire in western and southern India.

Right from the get-go, *Dina Bandhu* recognized the sectarian overtones of Tilak's project to lionize Shivaji as a national hero. It understood that effacement of Shivaji's regional roots was a rhetorical device to entirely mold him as a subcontinental hero who resisted the onslaught of Muslim invaders. The *Din Bandhu,* in response to the celebration of Shivaji's Anniversary asked: "Who recognizes our Shivaji outside of Maharashtra? Weren't brave and virtuous men born in other regions of the nation? Why

shouldn't the people of Punjab celebrate Ranjitsingh's Jayanti [birth anniversary]? Why shouldn't the Rajput people celebrate Pratap Singh's Jayanti? Will the people of Panjab and the Rajputs take pride in Shivaji or will they revere their own like Ranjit Singh and Pratap Singh? The Musalman celebrate the imam's Jayanti, but that is a thing of the myths (*pauranik*), now what if they (the Muslims) decide to celebrate Aurangzeb's Jayanti, print his photos, compose *povadas* (ballads) for him, organized programs on street corner to read aloud stories of his exploits. [What if they] imbibed a sense of pride about him [Aurangzeb]? Marathas live only in Maharashtra, but the people who follow the *islami* religion live in all corners of the nation… in that case which of the two, Shivaji Jayanti or Aurangzeb Jayanti will have greater popularity? Kesarikar [the editor of Kesari] has devised this ruse of Shiva Jayanti and claims that he will give it a nationalist (*rashtriya*) character, but if people like the Parsi, Yahudi (the Jewish)], Christians, etcetera do not participate in this nationalist festival, then will the Kesarikar ostracize them? Or will he seize their property and banish them out of the nation? Or will he catch hold of them and force them to participate in the festivities? Or will he convert them to the Hindu religion? Shivaji fund and Shivaji jayanti is only a ploy (*dhong*) it is Kesarikar's aspiration to be lauded, exalted, and worshipped."

Additionally, the article also recognizes that the figure of Shivaji is mobilized not only as a national hero, but also as a Hindu crusader against the rule of the 'Muslim' Mughals. The author exposes Tilak's homogenizing logic by asking: 'what will the Kesarikar do if the Parsi, the Jewish and the Christians refuse to participate in the exaltation of a 'Hindu' icon's life? Will they be banished from the national community? Or worse, be forced to be a part of the national community by way of converting into

Hinduism?' Thus, the author recognizes that Tilak's efforts to use popular culture to imbibe nationalist feelings had tendencies that traced the boundaries of the national community onto that of the Hindu religious community.

Din Bandhu explicitly invoked both a syncretic culture between the Hindu and the Muslims, as well as drew attention to the fuzzy boundaries between the two. By foregrounding shared cultural practices and by underlining the affinity between 'two communities,' the author addressed the tension stirred by Tilak's discourse around the celebration of Shivaji Jayanti.

" If the English [ingraz] would not have come to our nation for another hundred years or so, then there was sure to have emerged some king like Akbar who would have reconciled the Hindu and the Muslim religions; and perhaps this would have led to the institution of a national religion [*rashtriya dharma*]. The Rajput princess that the Badshah of Delhi married lived in his palace as a Hindu woman. Even in the present, the landowning [*jahagirdar*] Thakurs of Gujarat and Mewad region betroth their daughters to Muslim households and bring Muslim brides into theirs. A sect called the 'Maulesalam,' near Gujarat, do not have a Hindu topknot, but maintain a beard. They also have traditional Hindu names such as Hari Singh, Ram Singh, Kisan Singh. They observe the *namaz* at the mosque, but if they come across a Ram or Balaji temple on their way, they do not walk away without touching the deity's feet. More than half of the Muslims are descendants of those who were converted here. In several places, the Hindus (even the Brahmans) and the Muslims draw water from the same well. Our language has many Muslim words in it. Because of our previous Muslim rulers, we had to compose

'*allopanishads*'[402] for them! Ram and Rahim are one, Vishnu's[403] one foot is in Gaya and the other in Mecca. Our people worship the *Peer*, and Muslims worship our village deities. Kabir was immersed in Ram's devotion. Shaikh Mohammad was an exemplary devotee of Pandharee [Vitthal]. The Badshah of Bidar was possessed by the love for Vithoba[404]…Although the rule was to abstain from speaking the foreign [*yavani*] language, Our Hardas *kirtans* narrate stories of the Badshah and the Muslim religion. All in all, what I mean to say is that there exists a cordial relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims. They had developed a feeling of tolerance [*sahishnuta*] and empathy [*sahanubhuti*] towards each other's religions."

The article goes on to map out a syncretic past between the two communities that was completely opposed to the one that Tilak was painting. Despite stringent rules about the preservation of religious knowledge, the Hindus in the past have accommodated their knowledge practices to suit the Mughal court culture like the 'allaopanishad' [Upanishad for Allah]. The exchange across the two religious communities goes beyond cultural practices, places of worship, and attire, it also extends to the exchange of brides and sharing of common water sources. While the lower-caste newspaper unfolds a heterodox history of Hindu-Muslim cultural confluence, including the use of the words like *sahishnuta* (tolerance) and *sahanubhuti* (empathy), the discussion of the communal problematic through the lens of the two communities —the category of the Hindu and that of the Muslim— is telling of the political discourse of its time.

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[402] *Allaopanishad* is a text of uncertain origin. Possibly, it could have been a text commissioned during Akbar's reign in the fifteenth century. Raghavan, V. (1966). New catalogus catalogorum: an alphabetical register of Sanskrit and allied works and authors. 1. Madras: University of Madras. p. 410.
[403] Vishnu is one of the principal Hindu deities. He is known for his many avatars. The Vishnu avatar trope has often been used to absorb local deities and regional mythic figures into the Hindu pantheon.
[404] Vitthal, loving called Vithoba by his devotee, is the paramount deity of the warkari Sampradaya.

The Elitism of the Indian National Congress

In his 1884 letter to Pherozshah Mehta, a lawyer and four-time municipal commissioner of Bombay Municipality, Robert Osborne, who was a British sympathizer, wrote, "Nothing would more strengthen the hands of your friends in this country than to have an authoritative statement which would show to all the world what the people of India want…To set the constituencies in motion will not be difficult as soon as we know for certain what the people of India wish for."[405] The Indian National Congress stepped up to write this 'authoritative letter.'

The Congress drafted a set of demands that fragmented provincial political bodies had been demanding for long. They proposed for a reform of the legislative councils in India so that they could include more Indian representation; they demanded reform of civil services so that more Indians could participate in the highest form of imperial bureaucracy; the need to bring Indian legal system and judicial administration in line with the practices in England; they proposed dissolution of racist legal provisions such as Indians could not carry arms; And finally, suggested changes in the method of levying taxes.[406]

On December 28, 1885, a gathering of about a hundred men in Bombay was organized so that 'the most earnest labourers in the cause of national progress' connected and assembled together in one place. The Indian National Congress, the first national political institution, came into existence at this meeting. A Congress meeting was called again in 1886 at Calcutta and then for the third consecutive year in Madras in 1887.

405Gordon Johnson, *Provincial politics and Indian nationalism ; Bombay and the Indian National Congress, 1880 to 1915* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge England : University Press, 1973).13.

406 Ibid.,13.

These three preliminary meetings made way for the Indian National Congress (INC) to make annual meetings a part of its organizational repertoire.[407]

From its inception in 1885 to the present, despite several bifurcations, the Indian National Congress has been the most enduring political association in the Indian subcontinent. In the twentieth century, especially under Gandhi's leadership, the Congress emerged as a mass organization as well as the dominant vehicle of Indian nationalism. As a result, with the transfer of power in 1947 Indian National Congress was perceived as the obvious recipient of the central office.[408]

Before the constitution of the Indian National Congress in 1885, provincial associations were party to demanding reforms and carrying out political negotiations with the British administration. Key among them were organizations from the three maritime urban centers that had the most enduring experience of living with British colonial presence: namely, Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. In 1858 with the transfer of power in the subcontinent from the scattered and patchy rule of the East India Company to the centralized administration of the British Crown, the politics of Indian natives too transformed significantly.

Indian provincial associations soon realized that their political demands could no longer be made at the local administration. The new administration of the Crown, with its novel institutions and administrative units, had begun to forge connections across districts and provinces. They noticed that this was quite unlike the Company rule where the three urban presidencies were allowed to develop in their own way. But now the sovereign

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[407] Ibid.,
[408] Gordon Johnson, *Provincial politics and Indian nationalism ; Bombay and the Indian National Congress, 1880 to 1915*., 5.

power in London laid down the rules of governances for the capital in India, which in turn curtailed provincial autonomy, and the latter increasingly interfered in district administration. Only supra-local bargaining bodies could best respond to the newly streamlined colonial rule.[409]

During its earliest phase, Congress' efforts were mostly directed towards the British parliament and the electorate. The formation of the Congress too was pivoted on the idea that the presence of multiple Indian representations in England would be counterproductive. Osborne's suggestion of an 'authoritative statement' to Mehta, who was one of the founding members of the INC, indicated this.

In addition to generalizing its demands in an unequivocal 'authoritative statement', the INC also reframed its proposals into a new language that suited the seat of government in the metropolis. It had to devise techniques of communication that were legitimate and appropriate for the colonial government. In articulating its demands, the INC walked on thin ice. Although the British government claimed to rule by the virtue of 'liberality' they were still an autocratic colonial power in the subcontinent.

In its early years, the nationalism of the Indian National Congress was articulated by 'urging' the British government to recognize its 'unbritish' character in the colony and its broken promises to its subjects. Congress' initial demands were not that of self-rule or national sovereignty; in fact, all the demands took the form of petitions and written correspondence directed to the English parliament and the Crown. If they ever addressed their countrymen, they would always assume a corollary British audience.[410]

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[409] Ibid., 7.

[410] Seth, "Rewriting Histories of Nationalism: The Politics of" Moderate Nationalism" in India, 1870-1905."102. While Mrinalini Sinha argues that in the early decades of the establishment of the congress its members' idea of rights emerged from the assumption that they were subjects of the British crown. And so,

In the second half of the nineteenth century, only a few in India had a mastery over the legal language suitable for petitions and of letters to the British government. The Congress was predominantly composed of men who were not only proficient in the English-language, but also understood the nuances of the law and government functioning. Lawyers, high court pleaders, and bureaucrats were a majority; although an exception, journalists too were involved.[411] While their engagement with the state machinery on a day-to-day basis gave them direct access to the administration, with their middling position, they viewed themselves as intermediaries between the British administration and the Indian people.

Members of the Congress were no doubt urban elites. More so, the leadership was concentrated in three maritime colonial centers of Calcutta in the east, Madras in the south, and Bombay in the west of the subcontinent. Within them, men from traditional elite communities in Bombay, such as the Brahmans, Parsees (Zoroastrians), and Prabhu (the scribal caste), dominated the membership. In fact, there were several instances where the Congress was accused of making demands that best suited the interests of their own social class. For instance, the demand for a greater representation of Indians in the civil services was opposed by elites and governments in other regions of the continent. Aware of the uneven development of English literacy, the Punjab government feared that with the opening up of senior appointments to Indians, 'foreigners' from Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras would administer their province. The chief Commissioner of Central

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demanding freedom from the empire would be incoherent with their demands to British government to fulfill the promise extended to the colony by the Queen's proclamation. Nevertheless, the Congresses expression of fidelity had a tactical implication. Members of the Congress sought to operate by way of liberal and constitutional means, so that their meetings did not raise suspicion in the mind of the autocratic government, which could very easily clamp it down. (Seth, 103).

[411] Johnson, *Provincial politics and Indian nationalism ; Bombay and the Indian National Congress, 1880 to 1915*., 9-10.

Provinces too argued that this policy would lead to the Brahmans from Bombay presidency populating their administration and excluding local elites.[412]

However, this first generation of nationalist elite thought deeply about Indian poverty. Between the 1870s and 1880s, the likes of Dadabhai Nowroji (1825–1917), M.G Ranade (1842-1901), and Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848–1909) wrote extensively on the 'ruralization' and 'deindustrialization' of India, and emerged as the canonical thinkers of a political economy of nationhood. M.G Ranade argued that Indian's impoverishment was accelerated by its inclusion in the global economy organized by the British Empire. Critiquing India's position in the global development of labor, Ranade argued India had been transformed to a "plantation, growing raw produce to be shipped by British Agents in British ships, to be worked into Fabrics by British skill and capital, and to be re-exported to the Dependency by British merchants to their corresponding British firms."[413] Nawroji's formulation that colonialism is 'draining' the Indian nation was nothing less than emblematic. Criticizing official statistics of the Imperial government, Nowroji conducted an empirical study and offered an estimation of Indian's national income and the drain of wealth by colonial policies.[414]

However, the Congress leaders' vibrant discussion on Indian poverty did not translate into concern for the peasants and the poor. They were silent on issues of famines and peasant protests against increasing revenue, and in some cases, even questioned government policies meant to provide greater security to tenants working on

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[412] Ibid., 26-27.
[413]Manu Goswami, *From Swadeshi to Swaraj: Nation, Economy, Territory in Colonial South Asia, 1870 to 1907*, vol. 40, Comparative studies in society and history, (New York, USA: New York, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1998).616.
[414] Ibid., 619 Banerjee-Dube, *A History of Modern India*.208-209.

the land. Their engagement with the question of wealth drain and impoverishment emerged from developmental concerns. They viewed poverty as a sign of developmental backwardness and expressed the desire to be modern and strong like European nations.[415]

However, by way of their economic writings, early-elite nationalists, who assumed the Indian nation as a unit of their economic analysis, played a significant role in naturalizing the connection between the nation, territory, and the economy. Undoubtedly, the territorial and administrative boundaries of the Indian nation were first chalked out by the transfer of colonial administration from the East Indian Company to the British government in 1858. The territorial and social enclosure of India was sought by central monetary systems; policies of land revenue, taxation, tariff and customs; census and cartography that measured and mapped people and land; a complex network of bureaucracy; massive infrastructural projects such as railways, communication, and architecture.[416] Moreover, globally, late nineteenth century was also a time of both high imperialism and nationalist fragmentation. While colonial territories expanded and new regions were woven into the global market, the formation of spatially bound states and movements towards nationalist self-determination too was simultaneously on the rise.[417] Elite nationalists were aware of this.

The naturalization of the nation as a common economic unit with a corresponding set of peoples, social relations, bounded territory, culture, and history translated into the *Swadeshi* movement. *Swadeshi,* meaning 'of one's own nation,' mobilized support for

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[415] Sanjay Seth Seth, "Rewriting Histories of Nationalism: The Politics of" Moderate Nationalism" in India, 1870-1905.", 106.
[416] Goswami, *From Swadeshi to Swaraj: Nation, Economy, Territory in Colonial South Asia, 1870 to 1907*, 40.,612.
[417] Manu Goswami, "From Swadeshi to Swaraj: Nation, Economy, Territory in Colonial South Asia, 1870 to 1907," *Comparative studies in society and history* 40, no. 4 (1998), 617.

indigenous production and a boycott of foreign imported products. While the movement radicalized only after 1907, by the last two decades of the nineteenth century, its aesthetic had become popular among the middle classes. Congress workers conducted public campaigns through newspapers, publications, pamphlets, and exhibitions, advocating for giving up the cheaper and better quality Manchester cotton for coarse Indian handloom. Taking up the vow of using *swadeshi* was imbued with many meanings. *Swadeshi* goods emerged as material symbols of national continuity and a means of constructing popular memory of a glorious Indian past before colonization. They were also romanticized as goods emerging out of the simple, pure, folk rural life of Indian villages.[418]

While contemporary anti-caste writers too were convinced of the Indian nation as a unit of analysis and making demands, they called out the romanticism of *swadeshi*. The *swadeshi* movement was the first systematic attempt by a national political organization to draw in the masses. However, the anti-caste writers identified it as an essentially elite, middle-class exercise in nationalism superficial. The editorial of the March 4, 1894 issue of *Din Bandhu* stated that "During Sarvajanik Kaka's[419] time, one saw great enthusiasm for the idea of *deshabhiman* (nationalist pride). Foreign goods have entered our markets and crushed *deshi* (country-made) goods and the markets, as a result our cultivators have been ground down. And so it was decided not to buy foreign goods. Having made this resolve Brahmans swiftly opened up shops that sold *deshi* goods, set up workshops and factories to produce *deshi* things. But how will the spoilt, indulgent clerk be comfortable in coarse cotton shirts, discolored turbans, and rough-hewn *dhoti*? They cannot do

[418] Ibid.,624.
[419] G.V Joshi (1851-1911),popularly known as *Sarwajanik kaka (*roughly translated as the people's uncle), was a lawyer, reformers, political activist who spearheaded the Swadeshi movement in Bombay and Pune.

without soft spun Manchester muslin. In the winters they will not wear thick-coarse desi wool, they want foreign made clothes. They desire foreign shoes, foreign cars, their horses too want foreign made things, foreign oil, lights, perfumes, right from needle to the thread everything has to be foreign made. Poor Sarvajani Kaka! Instead of saying lets all give up foreign goods, he should have said, "let's all Brahmans give up our jobs and open *deshi* good shops."

The article continued, "Less than half of the foreign clothes that you see the white-collared wear are used by the Kunbi Maratha peasants. Our dhotis, our jackets, turbans, are all made out of rugged material made in the mills of Mumbai. We don't need foreign made umbrellas, our desi blanket protects us from rain, wind, and the sun. Our very own carpenters, potters, and coppersmiths make utensils for us. We don't use porcelain cups, saucers, and glasses. But what will the Brahmans so do in their absence? They will be inconvenienced without these things. It is not my opinion that the Brahmans should give up using "good things." They surely should keep using them. But don't turn away *deshi* things because they are of poor quality, because they are not as refined as foreign goods. This cannot be expected of people who are educated and cultured. We should accept *deshi* things just the way they are and increase their sale. In this way we can retain the wealth at home. This will also motivate the artisans to refine their skills and make better products."

Besides the anti-caste movement, the Indian National Congress received criticism from several quarters. While some accused them of being a bunch of urban elites, others criticized their policies and actions as lukewarm and lacking aggressive nationalist force. For instance, the Indian National Congress was decried for its 'mendicancy' by its critics

like Aurobindo Ghose. The latter argued that the Congress' functioning lacked self-respect, and its timidity emerged from a deep fear of offending the colonial masters.[420] But what Ghose saw as diffidence, the Congress brandished as its brand of politics and strategy. According to W.C Bonnerji, the first president of the Congress, the organization was an association of 'loyalists and consistent of well-wishers of the British government.'[421]

Like the Indian National Congress, the anti-caste group too pledged fidelity to the Crown; they too invoked the liberality of the British government. But they too, like the critics of the Congress, compared the organization's functioning to 'mendicancy.' But the 'mendicant' that the Shudra critics of the Congress had in mind was vastly different from the one imagined by its elite critics. The elite critics used the word mendicancy to denote the Congress' supplicant tone, obsequiousness, with how they stood with their open palms, thankful for whatever is thrown their way. In short, they loathed the self-styled privation of the Congress.

The figure of the 'mendicant' mobilized by the anti-caste group was not a privative and a supplicant one. Rather they used the meaning to denote a Brahman mendicant who extorted ritual services, charity, and free meals from the peasant and artisan patron (*yajman*). In a letter written to the *Din Bandhu,* the anti-caste activist-writer Thorat foregrounds the seamless continuity with which the Brahman went from exploiting the peasant in the agrarian social assemblage of a village to extracting

[420] Sanjay Seth Seth, "Rewriting Histories of Nationalism: The Politics of" Moderate Nationalism" in India, 1870-1905." 102.
[421] Ishita banerji guha Banerjee-Dube, *A History of Modern India*.206.

donations from him as a member of the INC, both for a greater common good, first for the salvation of the soul, and in the second instance for the nation.

An article published by the *Din Bandhu*, in its May 3, 1896 issue, makes this continuity clear. *When will our ignorant people be free of the demonic hold of the Brahmans?,* written by Thorat, painstakingly describes how the Brahman pilfers the peasant of whatever little he is left with after paying the taxes to the government. The peasant is 'raided' by the *bhata rakshas* (the Brahman demon) *Brahman savkar* (Brahman usurer), *Brahman vakil rakshas* (Brahman lawyer demon). In what remains the peasant has to pay the twelve service castes (*Bara balutedar*), which does not exclude the Brahman. During festivals as well as months of mourning for the dead, the Brahmans turn up for donations, gifts, meals, and rituals. In the unfortunate event of a death in the family, the Brahmans line up for thirteen long days of offerings, rituals, and meals. If the peasant decides to get his children married, there is no escape from borrowing from the usurer and sinking deep in debt. 'who cares, let the peasant sell his jewelry, borrow some more, let him get imprisoned for defaulting, let him steal, murder loot, and if none of this works, let him gulp down poison and take his own life!'" Later in the article Thorat writes that the INC is just another device of the Brahmans to "fill their coffers (*tumbadi*)." The Congress only added to the existing troubles of the artisans and the peasants and is no different from village client castes that wring the peasant dry at the level of the village.

The *Din-Bandhu* emphasized the need for social reform before political change by drawing its readers' attention to both the elitism among the delegates of the Congress and

the insensitive internal life that they lived. A strong critique of the Congress thus emerged from the lower-caste public sphere.

In the May 24, 1896 issue of *Din Bandhu* published a trenchant commentary on the caste and class character of the elite Hindu delegates of the Congress: "The delegates go to meetings for four or five days, enjoy the hospitality, the laughter, the merriment, and once the meetings of the organizations are over, they resume their usual professions. Again next year, as the time for the meeting approaches they wake up from their slumber and prepare to attend them. This is the life-cycle of the delegates and this is their national pride (*deshabhiman*). If the delegate is a lawyer by profession, and if faced with a situation that requires him to show kindness towards the poor, why doesn't he put into action his values of philanthropy, justice, and duty? Has anyone thought about that? If the delegate is a money-lender or is in the profession of usury, how many times is he considerate to his poor debtors who risk losing their homes and their lives, how many times has he agreed to compromise, go easy, ignore the contract so that the poor peasant is not reduced to a heap of ashes? Have any of you thought about this? In such a situation, at the most they say, ideas discussed in the meetings of Nationalist Congress should be kept separate. How embarrassing! If the administration had not implemented laws to rescue indebted peasants from the south from absolute pecuniary, would have our delegates of the nationalist congress worked towards ameliorating the conditions of our poor peasants?"

The article points to the hypocrisy of the delegates. After their superficial participation in the INC meetings, they returned to their predatory professions as lawyers and money-lenders: two professions that bled the peasant dry. Also, the article effectively

communicated the absurdity of a people demanding political and representative rights without the reorganization of social relations by illuminating the casteism embedded among delegates of the Congress.

It argued: "[S]ome of our delegates are scholarly, determinate, but also, so callous, that they insist on not taking steps to educate people of the lower-castes (*neech varna).* They say there are more disadvantages than benefits to educating the kunbi, mahar, mang, mali ramoshi, berad, koli, bhils, etc. If they received knowledge they will be embarrassed of performing their caste occupations. If they receive education, they will be embarrassed to wear their 'langoti' (loin clothes, also a marker of their lower-caste status) and insist on giving up their *kambala* (coarse shawl generally worn by a laborer). They would want to straighten out their turbans… they will give up their caste occupations… this will rob them of their happiness and serenity…These people (members of the INC) travel across villages and collect money for the Rashtriya Sabha (the INC), but at the end it is the Bhatts who enjoy the fruits of these conferences … our people don't stand to profit… we don't stand to benefit from these Rashtriya Sabhas."

By exposing the paradoxical character of the Indian National Congress, the editors implicitly asked: what kind of a national community can the Congress delegates imagine, given that they refuse to let go of their caste prejudice? What kind of a national community would it be where the lower-castes and the untouchables cannot live a life of dignity, where they cannot nurture the desire to straighten their turbans, and choose to wear clothes that do not reveal their stigmatized existence. On the one hand, the members of the INC had begun to reimagine new political relations and reorganization of political power in relation to the British government. But on the other hand, they could not stand

to imagine the possibility of new social relations, where the lower-caste received education and dreamt of upward economic mobility and dignified life.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored how lower-caste activists of the Satyashodhak Samaj sought to carve a niche for themselves in the mainstream public realm. In order to accomplish this, much groundwork had to be done. They had to convince their audiences to replace the old version of the religious public that the lower-caste thus far inhabited, which was marked by devotion, corporeality, surrender, and faith with one that stood on the scaffolding of reading, writing, and literacy. But as we saw, unlike the upper-caste middle-class editors, who catered to an already literate public, a large part of anti-caste activism was dedicated to the very creation of a lower-caste literate audience. But this could not be done through the print media alone. Anti-caste activists drew on other forms of communication such as travelling activists, performances, plays, and social organizations. Ironically, at times they had to invoke old Bhakti forms of public to popularize the new.

Din Bandhu emerged as a point of convergence for all the anti-caste efforts at reaching out to its audience. The paper did much more than report news. It helped its audience imagine a modern Shudra life, where marriage alliances could be sought, everyday lives and deaths could be reported, advertisements about women's clinics could be found, stories about mill workers could be published, and directions on how to fill a government tender for contractors (wo mostly came from Shudra communities) could be found. *Din Bandhu* also emerged as a strong opinion maker and a scathing critic of B.G Tilak's Hindu nationalism and the Brahmanism of the INC.

In *Din Bandhu's* engagement with both INC's political strategies and Tilak's Hindu nationalism, we see the deployment of an anti-caste notion of secularism. First, Din Bandhu's insistence on prioritizing social change over political change emerged from their moorings in the anti-caste tradition that viewed caste also as a social relation of power. They viewed the peasant and the artisans as the backbone of the nation. Not only because they were the *Bahujan* or majority, but also because the nation was supported by the revenue paid by them. In this case, how is the caste-based organization of the social world not important to the political question of the nation? And so by radically secularizing caste the primary form of conflict in the Indian social world lower-caste reformers criticized the elitism of the INC.

Second, *Din Bandhu* was also extremely wary of the 'Hindu community' that the likes of B.G Tilak sought to forge. They did so by fiercely criticizing 'Brahmanical Hinduism as a rotten sham' and foregrounding the cultural differences between the Shudra and the Brahmans. Their refusal to be a part of Tilak's Hindu majority, was accompanied by reaching out to the Muslim community. They argued if anything, over the years, the exclusion of lower-castes by the Brahmans both in the realm of the religious and the political had brought them closer to the Muslims community. In her work *Indian Secularism,* Shabnum Tejani argues that secular nationalism in India "needed Muslims to be a minority and the untouchables to be Hindus."[422] Although Tejani's work focuses on the mid-twentieth century, a time by when Ambedkar's politics had come to its own, nonetheless, the anti-caste movement's politics in the context is crucial. This is because we see that in the nineteenth century the anti-caste movement

[422] Shubnam Tejani, "Reflections on Secularism," 60.

was already engaging with the ideas of the majority, minority, and religious communities as these categories were being molded in the context of Indian politics. For instance, by invoking the category of the *Bahujan,* not only does the *Din Bandhu* seek to redefine the concept of the 'majority' by untangling it from its meaning moored in a religious community to one defined by caste and class, but it also resists the Shudra's inclusion into the 'Hindu majority' envisioned by Tilak.

CONCLUSION

"Now if we invoke the Vedas to refute the opinions of the gluttonous Brahmans, who loathe us, and consider themselves superior to us, they say that the Vedas belong to them. Only they are allowed to study them. From this it is clear that we don't have a religious book. If the Vedas are for the Brahmans, then it is the Brahmans' dharma to act according to them. If we don't have the liberty to even see the dharmapustak (religious text), then are we not without religion? har! These Vedas are such that (according to the Brahmans) even if we read them it is like committing a sin of the highest order, then imagine what crime it would be if we were to follow them …Oh Lord, tell us what is your true religion so that we too can experience it … religions that can be experienced only by one, while the rest of us gawk at the face of the gluttonous should be destroyed from the face of the earth…"

Mukta Salve, an 'untouchable' girl, was only fourteen when she wrote this essay in 1855. Astonished that a student from his school for the children from untouchable castes had demonstrated such clarity of thought, Phule invited her to read the essay aloud and sent it to the missionary paper Dnyanodaya. The fourteen-year-old's writing is strikingly prescient. When Mukta was enrolled in Phule's school in 1852, i.e., three years before the essay was published, there were no signs of the Satyashodak Samaj. Phule had just written his earliest work, The Third-Eye (Trutiya Ratna), but it was not yet printed. Padwal's Jatibhed Viveksar, too, would only be written five years after that of Mukta's. However, her essay succinctly encapsulates what later would develop as the anti-caste movement's perspective on the relationship between the Hindu religion and caste.

Mukta puzzled over how significant exclusion and secrecy were to the core tenets of Brahmanical Hinduism. She asked: what is this religion that not only hides its foundational texts on those over whom it claims authority but, oddly, punishes them for imbibing the learnings of the texts into their lives? Ironically, the message of the Vedas for the members of the lower-caste and the untouchable communities was to stay away from them.

By asking why the Mangs and Mahars (two untouchable castes in western India) could not access the Vedas, a question that Tukaram Patil would repeat forty years later, Mukta refused to be a part of a religion that did not allow a community its own scriptures. She asked: How are untouchables a part of the same religious universe as the Brahmans when the former do not even have the right to sacralize a set of ideas for themselves; the dominant Brahmanical religion, which they are expected to follow, does not even view the untouchable castes worthy of making a bundle of thoughts sacred? Mukta's introspective inquiry, as also that of the anti-caste radicals who came after her, led them to two crucial questions through which they problematized their lower-caste and untouchable identities: one, to which religion do we belong? Two, how does the dominant Brahmanical religion view us?

Mukta Salve's ideas and what retrospectively came to be called the anti-caste movement secularized caste by stripping off the divinity of the canon of Vedic Hinduism—what the former perceived as the ideological root of caste. In their criticism, both Salve and the anti-caste radicals argued that a 'religion' that hierarchizes its experience among its people is not a religion. In fact, it is a social arrangement that has roots in political conflict.

This dissertation has been a deep dive into the intellectual world of nineteenth-century social observers and reformists of Bombay. This city had only recently transformed into a metropolis and was increasingly being roped into the global circulation of capital, people, and ideas. As the city, its educational and economic institutions, and social life at large underwent an unprecedented change, the new middle class, trained in colonial institutions, too expressed a strong desire to 'improve' and embrace 'liberal (*udar*) sentiments.' However, in order to live a 'modern life,' almost a requirement if one had to keep up with rapid transformations in the economy, bureaucracy, and the political structures ushered by British colonialism, the first generation of English educated reformers had to separate the religious realm from the non-religious, and empty their new public lives from religious infusions. This classification of practices, knowledge, spaces, objects, and ideas, as religious, and their subsequent separation from the non-religious was the first step towards adopting the modern value of secularism.[423]

This dissertation parses two kinds of secularisms: one, articulated by the first generation of English educated reformers, and a critical secularism foregrounded by Shudra activists and writers.

The version of secularism practiced by the Brahman reformers bore a strong imprint of their admiration for European society and knowledge. Educated in colonial and missionary institutions, they were influenced by the European idea of "useful

[423] We also see a similar discussion on the separation of caste into its religious and 'civic' aspects in Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India.*

knowledge." Also, they were somewhat convinced of British educationist and missionary criticism of Hindu religious epistemology and social practices.

Early nineteenth-century writers like Balshastri Jambhekar argued that the traditional idea of knowledge was based on faith and did not use evidence of the senses. As a result, shastric knowledge did not help navigate everyday life and the mastery of this-worldly (*aihika*) activities. Thus, while Sanskrit knowledge of the *shastras* or other worldly-knowledge could inhabit *paramarthik* realm (other-worldly life), 'everyday business of life,' the realm that truly mattered, had to be governed by ways of knowing that were objective, evidence-based, and that were devoid of religious authority. Brahman reformers' critique of religious knowledge made way for separating religious knowledge and its functional domain from non-religious knowledge and the domain of secular life that it simplified.

While this was a relatively easy separation to make in principle, these Brahman social observers struggled to actually live this "secular life." This is because the notion of *dharma*, meaning religion, but also duty, rituals, right actions, charity, sacred law, cosmic order, and properties of a thing, cut through all aspects of life. As a result, just the act of keeping up with the 'changing times' ran the risk of an upper-caste person violating their "*dharma"* and ran the possibility of excommunication from their caste community.

This fluid idea of *dharma* must have certainly obstructed the new emerging middle-class' access to modernity and the liberal selfhood they wished to cultivate. Brahman reformers' desire to narrow down the definition of *dharma* was motivated by several factors. Of course, the anglicized middle-class had a strong yearning to uncontroversially inhabit 'modern spaces' without tripping caste and family boundaries.

Additionally, they also inhabited an intellectual universe where the civilizational capacity of a colonized society was measure by its ability to 'progress' in the direction of secularizing its public and political life.[424] Thus, to pass this 'civilizational litmus test,' in the mid-nineteenth century, an increasing number of reformers discussed in newspapers and journals the question of what constitutes non-religious life and how to live it. They earnestly tried to present the Indian social world as one that too was amenable to a division of religious and non-religious practices and that the Hindu religion too could be practiced in the private realm.

The discussion on secularism foregrounded the question of caste. This was also because the relational character of caste hierarchy was such that it inevitably created a situation of crisis for upper-caste natives in social and public realms. Liberal journalists and reformists devised a way to get around this problem. They argued that caste in the present was a religious phenomenon, but it has not always been so. In the past, it was only a benign hierarchy of virtues. However, its recent version, i.e., mired in ritualism, had unleashed its excesses in public life. In their categorization of caste as a part of the present-day Hindu religion, they were not too off the mark. For given the broad definition of *dharma*, following caste duty and maintaining one's conduct within the ambit of caste rules were indeed considered one's *dharma*.

In chapter one, we saw how Dadoba Pandurang bifurcated *dharma* (in this case meaning only religion) into two parts: *paramarthik dharma* that was to be realized as an interior practice of the individual believer, and *vyayaharika dharma* or a religion of

[424] Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the colony : the Jewish question and the crisis of postcolonial culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). 4.

exteriors, i.e., rituals, performances, and caste. This treatment of religion was a critical step in the life of vernacular modernity in western India. First, in their 'discernment' of religion, elite reformers abstracted Hindu religion from their lives, analyzed it from the position of distant commentators, and made it an object of their study. Moreover, besides abstracting and objectifying Hindu religion, by 'revealing' its rational and the truly 'religious' core, they took a step towards secularizing it.

Dadoba and his contemporary reformers had rearticulated *dharma* and made it coterminous with a secular idea of religion. In *Dharma Vivechana*, Dadoba isolated all other meanings of '*dharma*,' except the one that sought an equivalence with the modern idea of 'religion,' to its exterior chaff of *vyavaharika* dharma. This included caste too. By untying rituals and caste or *vyavaharika dharma* from the core of true *dharma*, Dadoba subordinated it to *paramarthika* dharma and situated it in the realm of choice. Rituals, he argued, were meaningless in themselves, and the sole purpose they performed was to keep men engaged and steered them away from headiness, cruelty, crime, and intimidation. In themselves, rituals were not harmful but were definitely erroneous. In Dadoba's writings, the religion of a higher meaning (*paramarthika dharma*) was already an interior practice. But by making rituals, a matter of choice, which could serve an instrumental purpose for the person performing it, Dadoba made both *Paramarthika dharma* and its subordinate—*vyavaharika dharma*, parts of a person's private life.[425]

Dadoba secularized caste and its religious injunctions in other ways too. He did so by deploying a secular reading practice. Chapter one shows how Dadoba reinterpreted the

[425] Saba Mahmood, "Religious reason and secular affect: An incommensurable divide?," in *Is critique secular? Blasphemy, injury, and free speech*, ed. Talal Asad et al (UC Berkeley: Townsend Center for the Humanities. , 2009).89.

Vedic *purushasukta* hymn by separating the real from the metaphorical.[426] He argued that much of the problem of caste was created by the poor reading techniques used by the Brahman pandits who read the texts literally, as the word of the divine, without assuming a critical distance from the text. These metaphors, the author argued, had no divinity of their own; in fact, they were mere figures of speech, i.e., human conventions used by the original authors of the texts. Dadoba secularized the shastras on caste at two levels: one by arguing that they were the products of human labor; and two, by suggesting that the true meaning of the texts can be realized only by deploying the correct methods of reading, again by channelizing human efforts.[427]

With Shudra writers stepping into the world of print, both their engagement with religious texts, as well as the subsequent secularization of caste, departed significantly from the established reformist discourse. Anti-caste thinkers such as Phule, Patil, and Lokhande shared the idea of inadequacy of religious knowledge to understand their contemporary world with Brahman reformers. Nevertheless, their critique went much deeper. They argued that the problem with religious knowledge was not merely the fact that it stood on erroneous grounds, but more importantly, that it was deceitful, unethical, and that it served a very specific political purpose: that of hiding truth from the lower-castes and perpetuating the unequal social relations of caste across generations.

By drawing on historical narratives such as the Aryan invasion and the Buddhist-Brahman conflict, Shudra commentators contended that canonical Hindu religion, and its religio-legal texts, were established by a political struggle over land, resources, and

[426] Ibid.,73.
[427] Ibid.,73-74.

culture. This proposition was a departure from the ways Brahman and Prabhu reformists secularized caste and the Hindu religion. The Shudra critique closed the possibilities of parsing Hindu religious texts and tents into reasonable/non-reasonable and divine/non-divine aspects. In fact, Shudra writers challenged both the divinity and morality of the canonical Hindu religion as a whole. They pointed out that its texts, ideas, and ritual practices, were designed to ensure repeated exploitation and humiliation of the castes placed lower in the caste hierarchy.

Contrary to elite reformers, who isolated caste from public and political spheres by underlining its religious and ritual character, Shudra writers secularized caste by arguing that it was both political and public.

First, in chapter two, we saw how Tukaram Padwal gifted the anti-caste politics a history of righteous conflicts between the indigenous Shudras and the marauding Aryan-Brahmans, as well as the conflict between the 'anti-Vedic' Buddhist tradition and the rise of Vedanta Hinduism of the Shankaracharya, which renewed the importance of the *Dharmashastras —a* religio-juridical text that officially codified caste rules. While these narratives allowed lower-caste writers to both historicize and politicize the economic conditions and social relations between Shudra peasant and artisans with the local village Brahman, it also gifted the lower-castes the figure of the politicized Shudra, the vanquished heroes who went down fighting for what was rightfully theirs.

Padwal politicized religious utterances on caste in one other ways too. Steering away from the colonial idea of separating religion and politics, Padwal's work suggested that the struggle between two competing religious traditions, Buddhism and Brahmanism,

was backed by force and violence. Thus, pointing out that religious histories and intellectual traditions have never been apolitical.

Second, by engaging extensively with the *Dharmashastra* and its regionally specific and practical adaptations in the form of *shudra dharma nibandha*, Padwal foregrounded the juridical and public character of caste. Invoking the memory of early modern and early nineteenth-century caste conflicts and the nuances of ritual performances in ritual manuals, he argued that caste was not just a later-day addition to the Hindu religion. Instead, it was integral to principles of justice, distribution of resources, the performance of occupations, and the shaping of the social world both in the past and present.

Paying close attention to how ritual and economic relations between the peasant and the Brahman were entwined, Satyashodhak writers such as Tukaram Patil highlighted the material aspects of Hindu ritual life. Unlike Dadoba Pandurang, who brushed aside ritualism and caste as the external chaff of religion, Patil identified ritualism as a deeply exploitative aspect of the caste hierarchy. Not only did the fanfare around the performance of ritual sacrifices bleed the lower castes dry, but Brahmanical monopoly over ritual texts, liturgical propriety, and incantations were a key source of Brahman superiority, he argued. By suggesting that caste is a social relationship, and an unequal relationship of exchange between the lower and the upper-castes at that, as also one that plays a vital role in organizing the village economy, itinerant *upadeshaks* like Tukaram Patil recentered caste as a social and public phenomenon.

This dissertation has also shown how until the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the idea of the nation-state was still nascent, and questions of citizenship,

national belonging, and a national community were still dormant, caste ideology and practices were central to secularism. In chapter four, we saw how this changed at the turn of the century. As the national question emerged, nationalist leaders approached secularism from the juncture of religious difference, particularities, and minority rights. However, the Shudra writers-activists, firmly grounded in their critical secular discourse of the anti-caste movement, intervened in the newer nationalist discussion on secularism from an anti-caste lens.

Mobilizing their critique of Hindu religion, Shudra activists refused to assimilate Shudra communities with the Brahman castes to form a 'Hindu majority.' They pointed out that the lower-caste and the Brahmans could not be fused into one community because they had widely different cultural and religious practices. But difference was not the only reason stated for their refusal to join hands. Activists like Dhondiram Kumbhar asked: how could the Shudra and the Brahmans "be one" when the latter considered the Shudra inferior to them?

The newspaper *Din Bandhu* too opposed the inclusion of the Shudra castes into the broader Hindu community. The editors argued that Tilak wanted the Shudra merely as foot soldiers for this political gain. Addressing Tilak, they asked," [in your Ganpati festival] why do you make our Maratha youth wear ornamental costumes and dance on the streets with bells on their feet…is this the 'bravery' of the Maratha that you talk about …in present times the duty of the Maratha is to secure knowledge and make a name for themselves."[428]

[428] *Din Bandhu*, September 3, 1894.

By bringing an anti-caste perspective to the idea of nationalism and secularism, Shudra activists contended that both on cultural and religious grounds, Shudra castes had more in common with the Muslim community than with the Brahman Hindus. They argued that when their own Brahmanical religion refused them equal access to their Hindu deities, the Muslim community shared their *imams* and *peers* with the Shudras.

This Shudra approach to the question of secularism brought together two meanings of 'religious minority:' one, that of the numerical minority, marked by religious difference, and central to the idea of minority politics that the Muslim community was expected to inhabit; and two, a politics of religious minority that was not centered on difference, but on subordination by the dominant Brahmanical religious discourse. In her work on Indian secularism, Shabnum Tejani argues that in post-colonial India, liberal secularism required the 'Muslim to be a minority, and untouchables to be Hindus.'[429] The anti-caste activists' radical secularism opens up the possibility of imagining an ethical politics that brings both these ideas of 'religious minorities' together: forging an alliance between caste subalterns and the Muslim community, two groups marginalized by Hindu cultural nationalism.

My hope is that this project contributes to the scholarship on the history of the distinctive trajectory of South Asian modernity. I have shown how in the nineteenth century, experiments with being modern and a critique of what *is* did not trickle down from elite intellectuals and reformers to the semiliterate sections of the society. In fact, I show how these experiments with transforming the social realm were simultaneously

[429] Shabnum Tejani, "Reflections on the category of secularism in India: Gandhi, Ambedkar, and the ethics of communal representation, c. 1931," in *The crisis of secularism in India* (Duke University Press, 2007).60.

taking place at the periphery too, and not just among Brahman and Prabhu 'professional intellectuals.'

The questions that lead this project emerged from my engagement with social activism, and I hope that the project, in turn, reaches out to the broader field of anti-caste politics. Social movements in the present implicitly engage with themes from the nineteenth century; they also explicitly invoke the Satyashodhak tradition and the political idiom of the anti-caste critique. And so, by revisiting the archive of the anti-caste discourse, I hope to contribute to the social movement's constant search for a new and regenerative political vocabulary.

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