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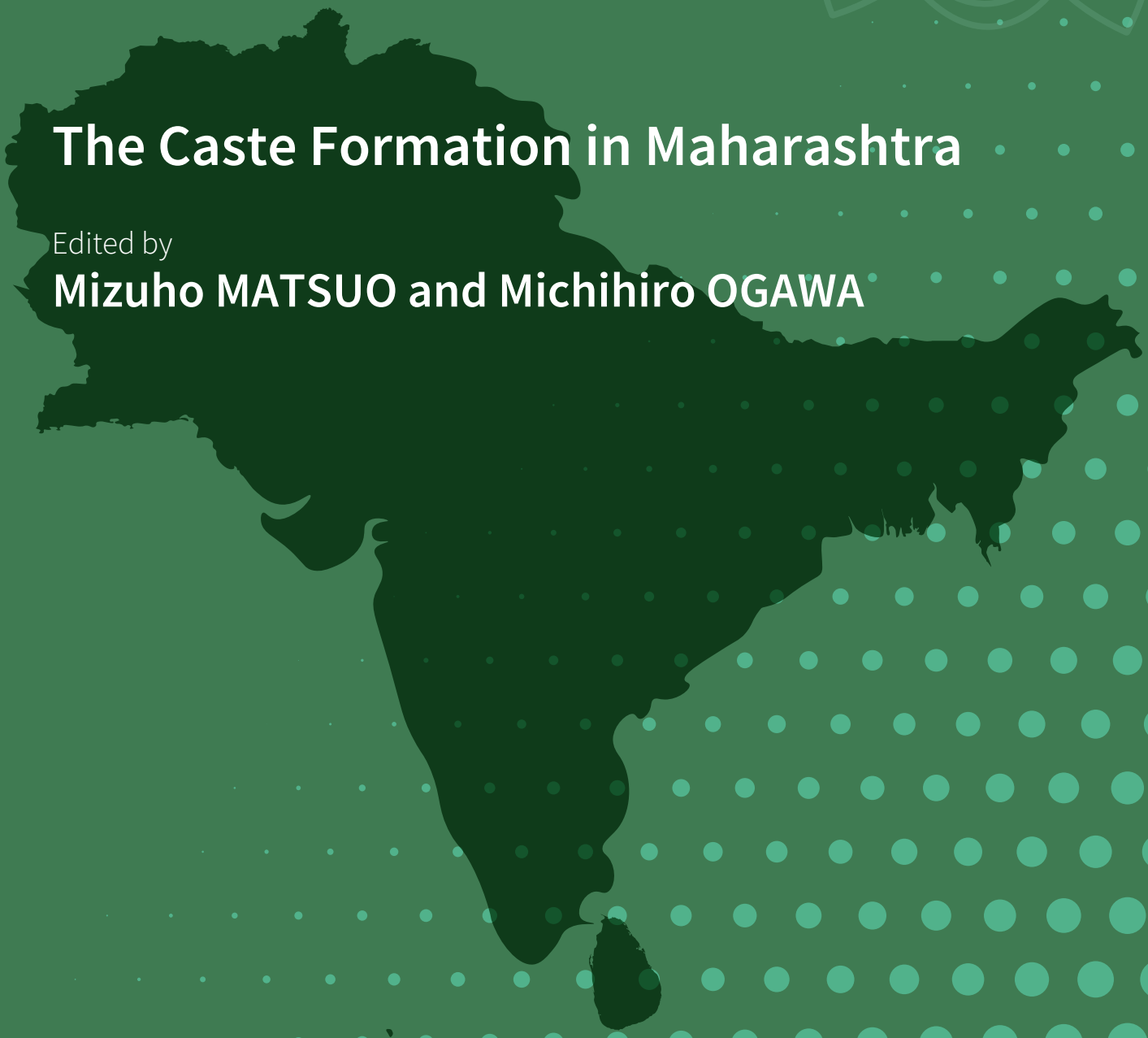

The Caste Formation in Maharashtra

Edited by
Mizuho MATSUO and Michihiro OGAWA

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NIHU Project Integrated Area Studies on South Asia

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Contents

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Introduction

Mizuho MATSUO

This volume is a collection of essays by Japanese and Indian scholars on the historical and social transformation of caste and caste perceptions in Maharashtra. It is based on draft papers presented at the workshop on 'Caste Formation in Modern Maharashtra' (5th and 6th March, 2018, Savitribai Phule Pune University)[1], as part of the Japan Society for Promotion of Science (JSPS) bilateral research project on 'The Construction of Caste Perspectives in Modern Maharashtra' (2017–2019, organised by Mizuho Matsuo). This project primarily intended to bring together researchers specialising in Maharashtrian studies to share and exchange ideas using primary data and sources for further discussion.

This volume aims to reveal the transformation of caste formation and people's consciousness of their own groups in Maharashtra from the medieval to modern periods. In recent years, some scholars have suggested that the pre-colonial caste relations were transformed in the modern colonial period, and that the understanding of caste as a system of exclusive status and discrimination may have been 'constructed' during colonial period (Bayly 1999; Kotani 2010). Following recent studies on the construction of caste and caste perspectives under colonisation, this volume considers the historical process of the construction of caste as a social institution in the specific geographical, historical, and linguistic region, that is, Maharashtra. However, our scope is not restricted to colonial modernity. We seek to place the restructuring of caste within a broader historical axis that extends from medieval to contemporary India.

Modern Maharashtra is one of the most politically contested regions with respect to caste in India. The anti-Brahmin movements, led by Jyotiba Phule, Rajashree Chatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur, and many others, and the Dalit movement under the leadership of Bhimrao Ambedkar, brought about significant changes in caste relations in modern Maharashtra. The demand for equality by the 'untouchables' and lower castes led significant political movements from the late 18th century onwards. Even before this, social movements for equality did arise in the form of religious movements based on the philosophy of *bhakti* (devotional worship directed to a supreme deity). In particular, the challenge to the existing stratified social structure was evident in the region from the medieval period onwards.

However, the transformation of caste through modern colonisation did not necessarily lead to the dismantling of caste hierarchies. The upper castes were becoming modern elites under the British

[1] This workshop was funded by the JSPS bilateral project and Centre for Asian Studies, Savitribai Phule Pune University.

colonial regime. Soon, a middle-class group connected with particular castes such as Chitpavan Brahmins emerged in Bombay Presidency as *bhadralok* in the Bengal and Tamil Brahmins in Madras Presidencies (Fuller and Narasimha 2014). The high caste middle-class group in Maharashtra produced a number of social reformers, independence activists, and politicians against the British colonial rule. Furthermore, this group continued to represent society as the leading 'citizens' of pre- and post-independence India. Tensions over caste have continued to present Maharashtrian society. In the context of this background, this volume is an initial attempt to provide a historical analysis of caste in Maharashtra.

A Brief History of Maharashtra

Geographically, Maharashtra refers to the Marathi-speaking region stretching from the Arabian Sea to the Deccan plateau. This region was under the rule of the Islamic kingship founded in the Deccan plateau and the Mughal Empire in the north for a long time during the medieval period. The establishment of the Maratha Kingdom in 1647 by Shivaji Bhonsle (1630–1680), who initially served the Adilshahi sultanate of Bijapur, is crucial in the formation of Maharashtra identity. The Maratha Kingdom and its successor, the Maratha Confederacy led by the Brahmin Peshwā, expanded its territories and even brought the Mughal Empire under its military protection in 1752. At one point, the Maratha Confederacy ruled as far north as Punjab and Sind, and as far east as Bengal and Bihar. However, after the Confederacy's defeat in the Third Anglo-Maratha War in 1818 and its subsequent dissolution, the region came under British colonial rule. Thereafter, the Bombay Presidency (Bombay State after the Government of India Act 1935) was the centre of colonial administration, along with the Bengal and the Madras Presidencies.

At the time of independence in 1947, Bombay State included parts of the present states of Gujarat and Karnataka. Notably, there were arguments with neighbouring states over the belonging of Bombay (later Mumbai), the major city of the region. Following a language-based reorganisation of the state policy in the 1950s, Bombay State was subsequently divided into the Marathi-speaking state of Maharashtra and the Gujarati-speaking state of Gujarat. In 1960, the present state of Maharashtra was formed from the parts of the former Bombay and Central states, with Bombay as its capital. The state is broadly divided into five geographical regions; Konkan on the arabian coast, Desh centreing on Pune division, Khandesh in the north, the former Nizam territory of Marathwada and Vidarbha in Central India (fig.1).

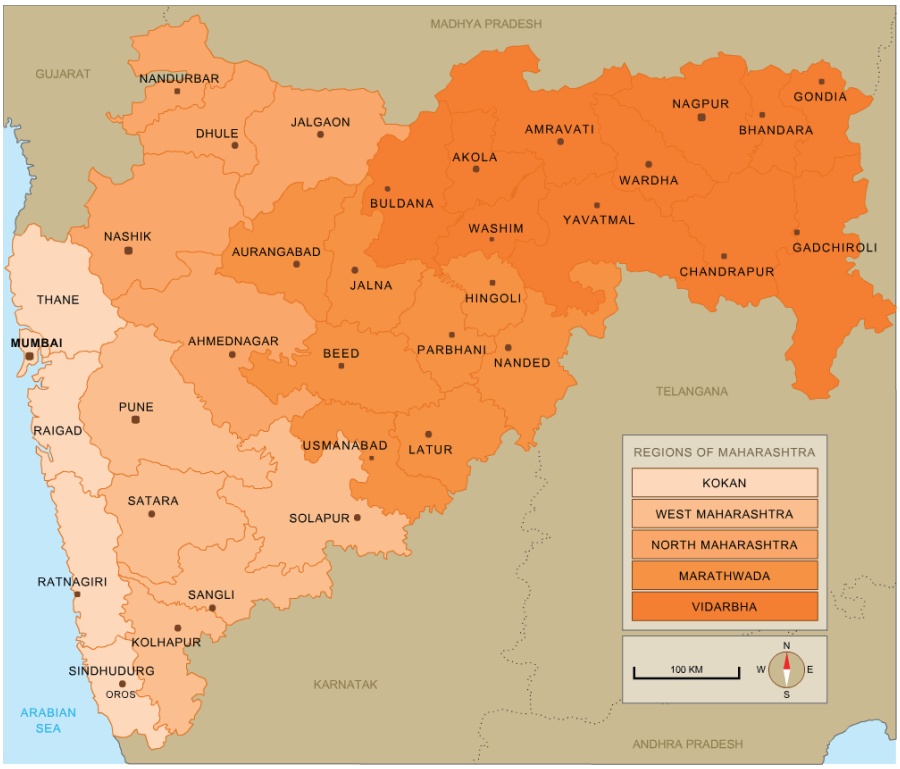

Figure 1. Regions of Maharashtra

(Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gr_Wiki_MH_Regions_96ppi.png)

The caste community in premodern Maharashtra: the *watan* system

The Maharashtrian rural society is known for the *watan* system (Kotani 2002), which is a socio-political system of division of labour and share distribution among village members in the community. The *watan* refers to 'the patrimonial rights of being hereditarily engaged in a certain office or work in communities (village community, district community and caste community) with prescribed emoluments or perquisites accruing from it' (Kotani 2002: 1). It is similar to the *Mirasi* in pre-colonial south India (Mizushima 1996).

Regular members of rural society hereditarily possess their prospective *watans*, and they are called *watandār*. Each *watan* was succeeded by a hereditary family line. It was said that the proper village in this region consisted of *bala balutedar* (twelve perquisite holders), which generally included service providers such as Parit (washerman), Nhavi (barber), Joshi (village priest), and Gurav (temple keeper); and craftsmen such as the Sutar (carpenter), Lohar (ironsmith), and Kumbhar (potter), and the so-called untouchable castes such as Mahar, Mang, and Chambhar (Kotani 2002: 2).

Kotani (2002) describes that a distinctive feature of rural society in the region was that the *watan* system was based on a district (*pargana*) level network that consolidated several villages. The caste *watan* in each village was managed by a district caste head called *Mhetar*. Whenever there was

a vacancy in a village for a particular caste *watan*, the *Mhetar* would fill the vacancy with a member of the same caste from another village in the district (Kotani 2002). The rule of the Maratha Kingdom over rural society was based on this *pargana* level network, with a secondary network connecting several neighbouring *parganas*. Kotani (2010) suggests that the range of this wider network may have been shaped by the extent of the Marathi-speaking world. During the colonial period, the *watan* system, which had characterised Maharashtrian society since the medieval period, underwent a major transformation. Thus, this period is undoubtedly important for the study of the changing relations of caste as well.

Although the construction of caste in colonial modernity has been the subject of recent historical studies, the continuities and discontinuities of this phenomenon with colonial modernity have been carefully examined in Maharashtrian studies (cf. Ogawa 2019). It should be necessary to have more nuanced and specific case studies. With this background, this volume does not limit the construction of caste perceptions to colonial modernity, but also looks at continuities and discontinuities in this region from longer temporal perspectives.

The structure of the volume

The first two papers deal with new religious movements based on the *bhakti* philosophy which preached equality in front of God in the 13th to 14th century Maharashtra.

Ida's paper (Chapter 1) discusses the Mahānubhāv sampradāy (sect) of the thirteenth century and the daily relations between Gundam Raul, one of the five *avatars* of a Supreme God for this religious sect. The daily interactions among Gundam Raul and the 'untouchables', such as Mahars and Mangs, which were depicted in hagiographies provide valuable insights about the caste relations in rural society in the medieval periods. It also suggests the possible agency of the saint to deviate from these exsiting caste relations.

Koiso's paper (Chapter 2) focuses on Cokhamela, a saint-poet in the Vārkārī sampradāya in 14th century Maharashtra. Vārkārī is a devotee to the god Vithoba (Lord Krishna) in Pandharpur and goes on pilgrimage to Pandharpur every year at fixed times. Even today, millions of devotees of all castes and classes from all parts of Maharashtra make their way to Pandharpur on foot. As Koiso describes, the Vārkārī pilgrimage is also a device for creating a regional space which connects the different villages and people on the pilgrimage route. Nevertheless, the careful examination of the life of the Dalit saint Cokhamela and his *abhangas* reveal the tension and contradiction between the ideology of equality in the *bhakti* movement and the caste discrimination of the real world in which the Vārkārī is located.

The third paper from Ogawa (Chapter 3) attempts to bridge the gap between medieval to modern Maharashtra in terms of caste formation by analysing the composition of social groups and how the ideology of caste was constructed among 'ordinary people' under the Maratha regime between the 17th and 19th centuries. Ogawa explains that even though caste is the basic unit of social

formation in village society, the *watan* seemed to be more significant than caste for social formation. This is because some of *the watans* are open to various castes and the mechanism of *watan* worked beyond the system of caste under the Marathas. In one case where sometimes the maintenance of *watan* is given more importance than the rights of each caste, Ogawa analyses the case of the Mahar *watan* of the Indapur *pargana* in Pune District. As this paper shows, caste and its position in early modern Maharashtra could be potentially changed by the acquisition of new *watans*.

The subsequent three papers (Chapters 4 to 6) examine the changes in caste and its views during the colonial period, focusing on the tribal community, middle castes, and the 'untouchable' respectively.

In Chapter 4, Ahire examines how the Ramoshi, considered a nomadic tribe, was branded a 'criminal tribe' under the Criminal Tribal Act of 1871 and how it attempted to uplift its status to change the situation. Under the Maratha regime, the Ramoshi members engaged in a variety of works, including guarding the fort and village borders, and subsisting on forest resources for their livelihood. After being designated as a criminal tribe, the once diverse Ramoshi was organised as the Ramoshi caste and social reforms aimed at modernising the Ramoshi community emerged from themselves.

In Chapter 5, Kumbhojkar refers to booklets published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Maharashtra which describe the caste rules and regulations among middle castes. At that time, many caste groups were trying to increase their cohesion as a group by establishing their own caste rules and sharing them widely among caste members. The author illustrates that caste is not something that has remained unchanged since ancient times, nor is it a colonial creation; rather, it is a resilient conception that adapts to socio-economic conditions.

Abhang's paper (Chapter 6) shows the way in which the institutionalisation of the scavenger caste was brought about by the formation of colonial cities and administration in the 19th century. Originally, there was no scavenger caste in Maharashtrian society. However, with the establishment of Bombay and other major cities, the British colonial government was concerned about sanitation in cities and brought in scavengers from other parts of the country. This paper illustrates that the establishment of scavengers as an 'untouchable' caste in Maharashtra was the result of colonial governance.

Lastly, Iida (Chapter 7) uses her extensive fieldwork to reveal the historical transformation of the folk performing arts group, the *Tamasgir*, and their contemporary caste consciousness. *Tamāsā* is a local folk performing art in Maharashtra, which features a singing-and-dancing repertoire called *lāvnī* and performances of impersonations, burlesques, and comedies with sexually suggestive content. The *Tamasgir*, who perform *tamāsā*, are collectively known as the Kolhati caste and administratively designated as a nomadic tribe. However, the *Tamasgir* comprises a diverse group of people of different origins and religions. Iida's paper makes it clear that the *tamāsā* served as a kind of asylum for the marginalised; further, the liquidity of the collective principle in *tamasgīr* is linked to the flexibility of the entertainment succession system, and the form of the entertainment and artistic discipline itself.

The volume covers a wide range of topics and social groups in Maharashtra from the medieval

period to the present. It is hoped that this initial attempt will stimulate further research on caste dynamics in this region.

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Chapter 1

The Relationship between Dalits and Guṇḍam Rāuḷ in the Mahānubhāv Hagiographies

Katsuyuki IDA

1. Mahānubhāv Sampradāy

The Mahānubhāv sampradāy was founded in the northern part of Maharashtra, or the Vidarbha area, in the 13th century. It is traditionally stated that this sect, a group of people who followed the *bhakti mārga,* was established by Cakradhar Svāmin, who was born in Gujarāt as a son of a minister (Raeside 1976: 587). He then travelled across Maharashtra to propagate his teachings. The Mahānubhāv sampradāy, initiated by the followers of Cakradhar Svāmin, is known as one of the oldest bhakti sects in Maharashtra, and their scriptures are one of the oldest texts written in the Marathi language (Tulpule 1979: 316).

1. 1. Pañca-avatār theory

According to the doctrine of the Mahānubhāv sampradāy, personal salvation can be obtained through passionate devotion (*bhakti*) to the Supreme God (*paramesvar*) (Feldhaus 1983: 28; Rigopoulos 2005: 33). Such a Supreme God is eternal and sovereign in its essence[1], and this God descends to Earth in the form of incarnations (*avatār*s) for the relief of the people. Although Sūtrapāṭh, one of the key theoretical works of this sect, proclaims that the number of *avatār*s is unlimited, the Mahānubhāv sampradāy considers only five of the *avatār*s as important and appropriate as objects toward which *bhakti* should be directed. Therefore, enthusiastic devotion to these *pañcāvatār*s (five incarnations) occupies a principal position in the soteriology of the Mahānubhāv sampradāy.

The foremost of the five *avatār*s is Kriṣṇa Gopāla, who appeared in the Dvāpara-yuga (one of the four *yuga*s or ages described in Hindu scriptures). The second *avatār* is Dattātreya Prabhu, who descended to Earth in the Kṛta-yuga (Raeside 1982: 491; Rigopoulos 2000: 90, 2005: 37-44). These two *avatār*s are also well-known gods who are included in the ordinary Hindu pantheon. The third *avatār* is Cakrapāṇi Prabhu or Cāṅgdev Rāuḷ, a famous Nāth yogin (Rigopoulos 2005: 45). The fourth *avatār* is Guṇḍam Rāuḷ, alias Govinda Prabhu. The last *avatār* is Cakradhar Svāmin, a disciple of Guṇḍam Rāuḷ and, as described above, the founder of the Mahānubhāv sampradāy.

[1] SP VI.1.

1. 2. Anti-Veda or anti-Brahmanism?

In general, popular bhaktism defends the equality of individuals. This movement maintains that whoever enthusiastically devotes themselves to God is destined to attain emancipation regardless of their sex, caste, or social status. In the same way, the Mahānubhāv sampradāy followed the idea that only the power of God is the way to salvation. This group of people, thus, denied the authority of orthodox Hinduism represented by Sanskrit scriptures, Vedic and Hindu rituals, and the power of Brahmins. The Mahānubhāvs had less respect for the orthodox Hindu gods, except Kriṣṇa Gopāla and Dattātreya Prabhu. Their unorthodoxy is suggested by the fact that they chose to write their scriptures not in Sanskrit, but in Marathi, from the earliest stage[2].

It is evident from the descriptions in their hagiographies that female ascetics or low caste devotees played an important role in the Mahānubhāv sect. Because of such anti-Brahmin or anti-Veda tendencies, Mahānubhāvs could not build a good relationship with orthodox Hindu communities and the then reigning Yādav empire[3]. Thus, their tradition gradually declined after the 14th century.

2. Scriptures of the Mahānubhāv sect

2. 1. Hagiographies

Since Cakradhar Svāmin preached to people on a daily basis, he left none of his teachings in a written form. After he passed away in 1274, his episodes (*līlā*) were collected under the direction of his successor Nāgdev, alias Bhaṭobās, and then compiled under the title 'Līlācaritra (LC)' in 1278[4]. This hagiography came to be regarded as the most important and authoritative scripture of this sect.

Further, the Sūtrapāṭh (SP), which is a compilation of aphorisms extracted from the Līlācaritra, was compiled by Kesobās during Nāgdev's lifetime. In addition to these two core scriptures derived from Cakradhar Svāmin, some other hagiograhies are also considered to be highly venerable. One of these is Rīddhapur Caritra (RC; also referred to as Govindaprabhu Caritra), a hagiography of the fourth *avatār* Guṇḍam Rāuḷ, and it was compiled by Mhāibhaṭ in 1287.

Another such hagiography is the Smṛtisthaḷ (SS), a compilation of stories regarding Nāgdev after the first two avatārs, Kriṣṇa Gopāla and Dattātreya Prabhu, left Earth. This hagiography was presumably compiled in the 14th century.

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[2] SS 15.

[3] According to the tradition, Cakradhar swami was arrested and beheaded on the order of King Rāmdev of the Yādav dynasty because he allowed women to be renouncers and stay with him, which was considered as 'immoral' (Raeside 1976: 587).

[4] It is said that hagiographies such as LC and RC were accidentally lost in 1307 or 1310 during Malik Kafur's invasion into Deccan, and that they were reconstructed based on the memories of the members of the Mahānubhāv sampradāy (Rigopoulos 2005: 27-29).

2. 2. Contextual inconsistency in castes described in the Mahānubhāv hagiographies

In the field of philosophical study, a typical tendency of a researcher is to read a text as a holistic entity; in other words, seek logical consistency in theories or stories given therein as if they were established contemporaneously. However, in reality, many conflicts, confusions, and contradictions are found between episodes, anecdotes, remarks, and dialogues among others, that compose one whole text as a historical entity. When it comes to this study, in the medieval hagiographies of the Mahānubhāv sampradāy, the authors adhere to at least two incompatible ideologies.

First, the discourses in these hagiographies reflect the religious ideology of the Mahānubhāvs. The authors repeatedly express their key theories, mostly in the form of teachings of the *avatār*s. These theories are related to the helplessness of humans, their equality before God, the omnipresence of God, and other similar ideas. Owing to their religious ideology, the *avatār*s in the hagiographies are more likely to deny the caste hierarchy and gender inequality through their deeds and behaviours. The hagiographers include many episodes wherein the *avatār*s prefer conventionally ostracised groups, such as Dalits, widows, and prostitutes, over Brahmins to serve them.

Second, a reader can easily identify biased views in these hagiographies based on the authors' birth or social status: two *avatār*s, Cakradhar Svāmin and Guṇḍam Rāuḷ, were both from higher castes, and many of their important disciples and hagiographers, such as Nagdev and Kesobas, were Brahmins. Even though the anti-Vedic ideology of the Mahānubhāvs is opposed to the religious superiority of Brahmins, their ways of thinking and behaviour are unconsciously affected by the caste system.

To summarise, in a single text, or sometimes even in a single story in the hagiographies, the religious equality of people before God is coexistent with inequality among people in worldly life. It should be noted that such inconsistency is found in almost all the popular bhakti literary works.

3. Cakradhar and Dalits

Some of the episodes in LC describe the following interactions between Cakradhar and Dalits:

A leather maker (Cāmār) made an offering of betel nuts to Cakradhar, and then the Cāmār went into a state of trance. (LC Pūrva 27-28)

Cakradhar Svāmin staying with Guṇḍam Rāuḷ received meal offerings from a Māṅg. (LC Pūrva 39)

A Māṅg worshipped Cakradhar when he was staying at the Jogeśvari temple. (LC Uttara 453)

Cakradhar stated to his disciples that God Dattātreya once manifested himself in the form of a Māṅg before his devotees. (LC Uttara 453)

The above testimonies suggest that in most cases, Cakradhar accorded same treatment to his Dalit devotees, such as Māṅgs and Mahārs as well as to his other devotees who were upper caste Hindus.

He willingly received food offerings, gifts, and salutations from Dalit devotees. His behaviour towards devotees from lower castes undoubtedly reflected the Mahānubhāv's ideology of soteriological equality.

However, except in the context of devotion and belief, Cakradhar had nothing to do with Dalits in his daily life; neither any instance of his friendship nor his cooperative relationship with people belonging to the lower castes is mentioned in LC. This suggests that Cakradhar had no actual connection with people belonging to the lower castes, or any such connection was carefully and intentionally concealed by the hagiographers.

4. Close relationship between Guṇḍam Rāuḷ and Māṅg devotees

4. 1. Playing at a Māṅg's house

Guṇḍam Rāuḷ spent his whole life in Rīddhapur and was well known for his divine power and insanity. He strolled around the village all day and occasionally performed miracles. Since the villagers witnessed his miraculous powers, they started to worship him as an incarnation of God. RC, the hagiography of Guṇḍam Rāuḷ, depicts him as an eccentric figure who often violated the rules of social or religious conduct. Many episodes of Guṇḍam Rāuḷ in RC reveal that he suddenly beat or abused people, mostly Brahmins, for no particular reason. Moreover, he often asked for food and sweets from the housewives in the village, and played with idols in the Hindu temples. The villagers as well as the disciples of Guṇḍam Rāuḷ were habitually annoyed by his childish and ridiculous behaviour. The villagers often spoke ill of him, saying: 'Rāuḷ is insane (*veḍā*), Rāuḷ is mad (*pisā*)!' (RC 7). At the same time, they regarded his insanity as a sign of his divinity (Feldhaus 1984: 26).

Interestingly, this eccentric avatār maintained a good relationship with the Māṅgs, Mahārs, and other lower caste people in the village. His ties with the villagers were not limited to religious or devotional contexts, as in the case of Cakradhar Svāmin. Even though Guṇḍam Rāuḷ was born in a Brahmin family of the Kāṇva tradition, he seems to have been indifferent to caste taboos.

> Gosāvi (Guṇḍam Rāuḷ) visited the quarters of the Mahar people (*mahār-vāda*). He took the piled pots down and played with them. He then said, 'Oh, drop dead! What's this?' A female Mahār questioned him, saying, 'Rāuḷ, what are you doing there? Why did you take them down?' He behaved similarly when he visited the houses of Māṅg devotees. Whenever he observed some food in their houses, he ate the food. He then said, 'Oh, drop dead! It's sweet. I'm telling you so'. He used to behave as such. He then went out (RC 46).

As testified in the text, he frequently visited the houses of Māṅgs or Mahārs, and partook of their food. As will be discussed later, he even drank water from a Māṅg water reservoir (RC 23). It seems that almost all the Māṅgs in Rīddhapur knew him very well (RC 97). He accepted all kinds of services and salutations from Māṅgs without making any discrimination.

His friendships with the Dalits caused great anxiety to the upper caste Hindus in the village. Guṇḍam Rāuḷ often visited a Brahmin's house soon after visiting a house of a Mahār or a Māṅg devotee. This led to the village headman's swift decision of shifting the quarters of Mahārs outside the village (RC 47).

4. 2. Departure from Rīddhapur

Guṇḍam Rāuḷ occasionally expressed hostility toward Brahmins and their orthodox values. The following episode describes his attitude towards Brahmins.

> One day, on the day of the festival of Navacaṇḍī, the village headman installed a water pot in the Uñcmāṭh temple. Nine kinds of grains were scattered between the two pillars on the veranda of the temple in a straight line from the entrance. A string of flowers was fastened. A garland was placed. The villagers left the temple, leaving a boy to keep watch. Soon after, Gosāvī came to the temple. When Gosāvī saw it, he showed his anger. He approached the temple, and kicked the water pot with his holy foot to the floor. He then threw the garland down on the floor. He destroyed everything in this manner. He also hit the boy... (RC 102)

Because of this outrageous conduct, his relationship with the villagers became worse. Accordingly, he decided to leave his village for a while.

RC reported that Dāmurt, a devotee of Guṇḍam Rāuḷ, who lived in Deūḷvāḍā invited Guṇḍaṃ Rāuḷ and his disciples to his village. When the party left Rīddhapur, Dāmurt came to the village boundary to pick them up and then went back to Deūḷvāḍā together. Dāmurt held a sword and a shield in his hands and blew a horn, which was a typical outfit of a guardian of the village boundaries (RC 103–104). It is a commonly accepted view that protecting the boundaries of villages was one of the important duties of Mahārs or Māṅgs (Kulkarni 2008: 59). Therefore, it can be deduced that Guṇḍaṃ Rāuḷ moved to Deūḷvāḍā, a village near Rīddhapur, with the aid of Dāmrut, who was a leader of Mahārs and Māṅgs.

4. 3. Kesav Nāyak and his well

After Guṇḍam Rāuḷ left Rīddhapur, a series of calamities befell the inhabitants of the village. Thereafter, Kesav Nāyak and Viṭhal Nāyak persuaded the village headman to invite Guṇḍam Rāuḷ back to the village (RC 115). RC described that Kesav Nāyak and his family were dedicated devotees of Guṇḍam Rāuḷ. They repeatedly offered food and services to Rāuḷ during his visits to their house. In addition to owning cattle (RC 68) and horses (RC 268), Kesav Nāyak acted as an advisor to the village headman. He was, thus, a rich and influential person in Rīddhapur.

There are several episodes about Kesav Nāyak's well in RC. When he tried digging his own well, he could not find any water underground. Subsequently, when he asked Guṇḍam Rāuḷ for help, Rāuḷ showed the right place for a well by the force of his divine power (RC 164). This episode is similar to one in RC 48, wherein Rāuḷ helped Māngs, who were not permitted to use any of the

common wells, to dig a well. Although these two stories have no direct connection, one can infer that Kesav Nāyak needed his own well because he was not allowed to use any of the common wells. This might be because Kesav Nāyak might have been a Dalit.

In another episode, Guṇḍam Rāuḷ drank water from Kesav Nāyak's water reservoir:

> One day, Gosāvī dropped by the water reservoir of Kesav Nāyak. There was a boy keeping watch nearby. Gosāvī hit him with his holy gaze. Next, he (Gosāvī) raised his hand to strike the boy. The boy became scared and ran away. Gosāvī opened the tap of the reservoir. He poured water into his mouth and began to drink water. ... (RC 20)

There is a similar story about the water reservoir of Māṅgs:

> Gosāvī came to the Māṅgs' reservoir. There was a boy sitting nearby. There were two horns. Gosāvī took one horn in his holy hand. He then hit the boy from behind. The boy ran away. Gosāvī picked up a water vessel with his holy hand. He then drank the water... (RC 23)

If the main motive of this episode lay in normalizing the idea of drinking water from an 'impure' water reservoir, that is, a water reservoir used by Māṅgs, the story pertaining to the reservoir of Kesav Nāyak (RC 20) may also have had a similar motive.

5. Conclusion

Some of the episodes in RC reveal that Guṇḍam Rāuḷ was surrounded by Dalits as well as upper caste Hindus in his village. The episodes mentioned above suggest that he maintained a good relationship with Dalits in general, and that he was supported enthusiastically by a few Dalits who were leaders or influential figures in the Dalit community, such as Dāmurt and Kesav Nāyak. We can say with fair certainty that these Dalits played an important role in the everyday life of Guṇḍam Rāul. This is in contrast with the life of Cakradhar Svāmin, who had a connection with Dalits only in the religious context.

Although both Guṇḍam Rāul and Cakradhar Svāmin were considered as *avatār*s of the supreme God in Mahānubhāv sampradāy, they were respected by adherents of different backgrounds. From a historical viewpoint, the followers of Cakradhar Svāmin gathered around him to form the Mahānubhāv order. After his untimely death, some of his followers came to Rīddhapur and started to serve Guṇḍam Rāuḷ according to Cakradhar's direction. Following the demise of Guṇḍaṃ Rāuḷ, the Mahānubhāv sampradāy was established as a religious sect under the guidance of Nāgdev (alias Baṭṭobās).

Cakradhar Svāmin wandered across Mahārāshtra as a renouncer (sannyāsin), gaining fervent followers from upper caste Hindus, including Brahmins and royal family members. On the other

hand, conversely, Guṇḍam Rāuḷ was born in a village and lived there for a long time. His followers can be classified into two different groups: the former devotees who had followed Cakradhar from outside the village, and the villagers of Rīddhapur, who had known Rāuḷ well since his birth. Considering that this was a cult movement that centred on a venerated saint who possessed miraculous powers, and that flourished apart from Vedic or orthodox Hinduism in village communities, it is no wonder that influential Dalits in villages were actively involved in this movement.

In the episodes pertaining to the departure from Rīddhapur, Guṇḍam Rāuḷ travelled to and from the houses of Kesav Nāyak in Rīddhapur and Dāmurt in Deuḷvāḍā. He made use of the network of Dalit communities to facilitate his travel to other villages. Thus, we can conclude that the 'local' cult of the saint spread across wide areas through the social network developed by people, especially those belonging to lower castes who lived in each of these areas.

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Chapter 2

Cokhāmelā: A Dalit saint-poet of *Vārkārī*

Chihiro KOISO

1. Introduction

Bhakti primarily indicates the emotional side of human-beings. That is why we are prone to consider *bhakti* as a personal affair, an intimate relationship between God and the *bhakta*. However, in the *Advaitic* approach, the notion of God as the 'Universal Spirit' (*Viśvātmaka Īśvara or deva*), i.e., understanding God as abiding in everything and every human-being, makes *bhakti* not only a personal matter but also a social matter. Because every living being is filled with God-hood, he is potentially divine. So, real bhakti is to worship every being as God. The service of mankind, therefore, is the most important way of worshipping God. This philosophy is elaborately discussed by Jñāneśvara, who believed to be the founder of *Vārkārī Sampradāya*.

The concept of *bhakti* according to the *Bhagavata dharma* includes all necessary principles regarding social philosophy. If a true *bhakta* attains the state of *para-bhakti*, he is able to see God everywhere, within as well as outside himself; this state of para-bhakti is characterised by absolute *samatva* (equality). According to the *Advaitic* approach, everything is filled with nothing but one *Brahman*. There is no room for discrimination.

Therefore, we assume that *bhakti* implies a religious rejection of social inequality, which is a characteristic feature of the caste system. This assumption arises from an essentialist interpretation of the 'real' theological and sociological meaning of *bhakti* (Van der Veer 1987: 680). This article tries to show that *bhakti* as a religious experience can only be understood in the context of practices, which are conditioned by religious organisations in the case of the *Vārkārī Sampradāya* in Maharashtra. The devotional worship of images requires an emphasis on caste distinctions. It seems that *bhakti* can easily be associated with egalitarian values that contradict the values of the *varna-āśrama dharma*.

Here the author will discuss Cokhāmelā, a Dalit saint of the Bhakti tradition in terms of his contributions to the Dalit movement. Both of them offer models for contemporary change with regard to untouchability. Despite being an 'untouchable', Cokhāmelā achieved sanctity and a place among the *bhakti* pantheon of saints.

Nemade (1981) notes that Cokhāmelā composed many *abhangas*. Cokhāmelā's *abhangas* have an undertone of opposition to the concept of 'untouchability', even though most of them

highlight only the devotion and piety of the *bhakta*. The abhangas reveal that Cokhāmelā was probably troubled by his miserable place in society. One *abhanga* relates to one of the legends about Cokhāmelā, which talks of rejection in the temple and acceptance by God.

Though Cokhāmelā lived in his traditional role as a Mahār with its traditional limitations, he did protest against and question the practice of 'untouchability'. The spirit of most abhangas is delight in God and liberation from life's suffering through devotion. Even though there is pain, the central message is that he experienced the grace of God (Nemade 1981: 115).

Scholars criticise the limitation of the *Vārkarī* sants' approach towards social equality, i.e., their protest against inequality within the framework of the *varna-āśrama dharma*. It is necessary to consider this point thoroughly.

2. Vārkārī Sampradāya

In the *Bhagavata sampradāya* (a religious sect of followers of God Vishnu) of Maharashtra, the devotees are known as *Vārkārī*. The term Vārkārī means one who undertakes '*vārī*'. The name '*Vārkārī*' itself seems to be originated from the practice of pilgrimage. The word *Vārkārī* is composed of the two words '*vārī*' and '*kārī*'. '*Vārī*' has a very definite and almost technical meaning. The root '*vārī*' means 'time' as in the expressions 'three times', 'four times' and so on, so '*vārī*' stands for the regular occurrence of the pilgrimage to Pandharpur, the annual going to and coming from that sacred place. '*Kārī*' means the one who does. '*Vārkārī*' therefore means one who journeys to Pandharpur at the fixed time (Deleury 1960: 2).

The main practice in the *Vārkārī* tradition is pilgrimage. A *Vārkārī* is supposed to go on pilgrimage to Pandharpur twice every year. It is not an obligatory rule for the *Vārkārī*, but a ritual that fulfils an essential and well-loved promise. That is why there is no special sanction against the *Vārkārī* who does not perform his annual pilgrimage. The problem does not even arise as the *Vārkārī* is very keen on his pilgrimages and never misses any of them wilfully. A proverb amongst *Vārkārī*s goes like this: 'if one of them is not seen at the pilgrimage he must be dead or dying'.

Deleury defines a *Vārkārī* as 'a man who although living in the midst of his family and carrying on his profession or trade has pledged himself to reach moksā through the way of bhakti and by devotion to Lord Krishna in the form of Vithoba of Pandharpur, and to go on pilgrimage to that place every year at fixed times, guided on the road by the society of the saints. He is also a strict vegetarian' (Deleury 1960: 3).

The *Vārkārī sampradāya* is unique in many ways. First of all, they have no specific organization; the *Vithoba* temple in Pandharpur is the symbol for their worship, but does not function as a religious organization. The annual pilgrimage is the only time when the *Vārkārī*s and other devotees gather. The pilgrimage is the most characteristic aspect of this *sampradāya*. The followers of this *sampradāya* take a vow to follow vegetarianism, and wear the *tulsimālā* (rosary made of basil wood) as a mark of being a *Vārkārī*. There is no specific initiation ceremony to become a member

of this *pantha*. Those who want to be members of the *Vārkārī sampradāya* express their desire to join the *pantha* in front of the leader of one of the *Vārkārī* groups. 'He must bring a rosary of 'tulsi' beads and the guru asks him to place the beads on the book of Jnaneshvārī (a sacred book of commentary on the Bhagavad Gita by Jňāneśvara), which is set on a low table in front of him. The candidate then pledges to visit Pandharpur regularly on the fixed dates, and live a straightforward life according to the Hindu '*dharma* (duty)'. The guru then places the *tulsimālā* around his neck, and offers him spiritual advice, enjoining him to lead a life of service and respect to the saints, and to observe a fast on all Mondays, and the two *ekadashis* (the eleventh day of the Hindu lunar calendar)' (Deleury 1960: 4-5).

There is no esoteric ceremony. The *pantha* is open to anyone who can uphold the basic regulations. There are people across social strata. Zelliot points out three elements of the *Vārkārī* tradition: 'implicit criticism of Brahmanical narrowness, egalitarianism in spiritual matters, and family-centered life' (Zelliot 1996: 39). Even the householder can practice bhakti in the *Vārkārī sampradāya*. These characteristic aspects seem to be the reasons for the popularity of the *Vārkārī sampradāya*.

As Deleury puts it, 'the pilgrimage must be considered as a real "*tapa*". A special line of mortification will give to the *Vārkārī* the opportunity to exercise the virtues required for getting at the perfect '*bhakti*' (Deleury 1960: 108). The pilgrimage is important to the *Vārkārīs* for maintaning their spiritual discipline. During the pilgrimage, *Vārkārīs* sing *bhajanas*, composed by the great saint-poets, and listen to *kīrtana*. Through these activities, *Vārkārīs* can experiencen the oneness of all and feel closer to the great saint-poets. Thus, *Vārkārī pantha* can be understood as a spiritual group centred on the saint-poets of Pandharpur.

3. Importance of bhajana and kīrtana in the Vārkārī tradition

In the *Vārkārī sampradāya*, *bhajana* and *kīrtana* play important roles as they serve the purpose for literates and illiterates alike. Moreover, *bhajana* and *kīrtana* are based on the *abhangas* of the saint-poets of *Vārkārī*. The *Vārkārīs* become acquainted with the philosophy through *bhajana* and *kīrtana* without having to resort to the written scriptures, which are often complex in nature and need explanations. *Bhajana* can be said to be a mediator between God and the devotees. The devotees can feel close to his God by singing and being engrossed in *bhajana*. One important merit of *bhajana* is that it is easy to practice for every devotee. Engblom says, 'What makes *bhajana* so attractive a *sādhanā* (spiritual means) is that it is comparatively accessible to the common man or woman and does not require esoteric disciplines. Bhajana is an act of the most complete self-abnegation and total self-surrender to Vitthal (Vithobā)' (Mokashi 1987: 25).

Singing *bhajana* or listening to *kīrtana* is important to not only have access to God, but also gain proper knowledge about the moral and spiritual teachings, which are adapted to the cultural level of ordinary people. The previous saint-poets wrote a huge number of *abhangas* (poems) that

contain moral and philosophical teachings. Therefore, singing and listening to *bhajanas* have a more important meaning. It is through the medium of these poems that *Vārkārī* traditions and teachings are passed on from one generation to the next.

Deleury describes pilgrimage as a means to liberation, saying 'the moksa promised by bhakti is open to all, its method of purification is possible for all and not restricted to the fortunate few who are able to leave the world and isolate themselves in forests or deserted places' (Deleury 1960: 108). It is not necessary for seekers of the ultimate reality to resort to the forest. Pilgrimage is an easy means for anyone. If one has the will to undertake the pilgrimage, and follow vegetarianism, they can pursue this *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline or means). There is no esoteric element, and it is open to all.

We shall now consider another important aspect of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage plays not only a religious role, but also a social role. The practice of pilgrimage provides a powerful medium of communication for the commonality that united the people of Maharashtra. On the way to Pandharpur, pilgrims pass or stay one night or so in villages. Even the villagers, who cannot join the pilgrimage, share the merit by offering pilgrims help and hospitality. They get an opportunity to participate in the *bhajana* and *kīrtana* programmes. Deleury refers to two main functions of *Vārkārī* pilgrimage: 'It is a religious activity essential in the formation of *Vārkārī* and, at the same time a powerful way of spreading the pantha and promoting the religious education of the people' (Deleury 1960: 109). Therefore, pilgrimage plays an important role not only in developing individual ethical sense, but also in promoting the social awareness of the people. Pilgrimage has great importance as a spiritual discipline.

4. Cokhāmelā and his *abhangas*

The saint-poets preach universal, spiritual and ethical values within the broad framework of the traditional *varna-āśrama-dharma* (the institution of caste). Devotees can listen to the preachings of saints through *bhajana* and *kīrtana* during the pilgrimage. Even illiterate devotees can understand the holy teachings of saints by listening to *bhajana* and *kīrtana*, and share the experience with other devotees. Cokhāmelā also wrote many *abhangas* which are sung during the pilgrimage.

Given below is a summary of Cokhāmelā's biography written by Khanolkar (1990). Cokhāmelā was a 14th century untouchable saint-poet who lived in Mangalvedhā with his family comprising his wife Soyarabai, his sister Nirmala and her husband Bamka. They went to Pandharpur and settled there. They were all deeply devoted to Vitthala even though the authorities at the time did not allow them to enter the temple. All they could do was stand outside the gate, with their tear-flooded faces and, their eyes yearning for the sight of the distant deity. They all were ardent *bhaktas* of Vitthala and always remembered Vitthala and repeated his name. Vitthala was pleased and invited Cokhāmelā to the inner temple. The horrified priest pushed him out and dragged him all the way across the river Bhima and left him on the other bank, warning of further penalties should he try to

sneak into the temple another time. Cokhāmelā pleaded to God: 'O Lord, I am only a dog at your door, do not send me away to other men's doors. The real Pandhari is in my own body and my soul is the Lord Vitthala within'.

In a tragic accident, Cokhāmelā and some other Mahārs who were forced to work as indentured servants to build a wall were accidentally buried under the rubble when the wall collapsed at the construction site. It took days to recover the bodies, which had been badly mangled. Namadeva, who deepy grieved the death of great devotee, said 'Those bones which constantly emit the sound of Vitthala belong to Cokhāmelā.' Namadeva picked up Cokhāmelā's remains and buried them outside the Vitthala temple in Pandharpur where he used to worship. His *samādhi* is in front of the Vitthala temple, Pandharpur, where it can be seen today.

From the story, we can understand the difficult social status of the untouchable saint-poet at that time. Cokhāmelā is believed to have had a very close relationship with God Vitthala. There are many episodes related to their close relationship in Mahipati's book, named Bhaktivijaya. Cokhāmelā is said to be the embodiment of egalitarian philanthropism. He wrote many *abhangas* to protest social injustice and unreasonable discrimination. He described his Mahār origin as polluted, impure, inauspicious and so on. He had profound awareness of being an untouchable. He was totally hurt by the fact that he was ill treated as an untouchable.

The following *abhangas* of Cokhāmelā are quoted from Rohini Mokashi-Punekar's book titled *On the Threshold* (2005). The author referred to the numbering following the Kadam collection (1998).

My body is impure, my caste
inauspicious; full of filth
and flaws, my thoughts reveal
only chaos. Neither my
verse nor voice is pure; folks
full of scorn, draw away.
Not one is ready
to sit close to me.
Says Choka,
such is my life. (127)

Pure Cokhāmelā
Celebrates the Name
I, who am
but an outcaste mahar
Was in the past
A descendant of Shiva:
My mahar birth

a result of
desecration Krishna
Cokhā says
this state of pollution
is the fruit of my past (73)

Cokhāmelā accepted his social status as an untouchable. He believed that this birth was due to his past faults when he had derided Krishna.

Issued in impurity, dying in impurity,
living in impurity, they go
weeping and suffering till death,
never once utter,
even in forgetfulness,
the Name
What, dear fellow,
is the comfort of your body:
naked will you go after all.
Cokhā says, don't cling to this,
the god of death, in the end
will tighten
his noose round your neck. (280)

Five elements compound the body impure;
all things mix,
thrive in the world.
Then who is pure and who impure?
The body is rooted in impurity.
From the beginning to the end,
endless impurities
heap themselves.
Who is it can be made pure?
Says Choka,
I am struck with wonder,
can there be any such
beyond pollution? (279)

Vedas and the shastras
polluted; puranas inauspicious

impure, the body, the soul
contaminated; the manifest
Being is the same.
Brahma polluted, Vishnu too;
Shankar is impure, inauspicious.
Birth impure, dying is impure:
says Choka,
pollution stretches
without beginning
and end. (282)

In these *abhangas*, he uses the Marathi word *vitāl* many times to refer to impurity. The word *vitāl* has the following connotations: 1. Impurity or uncleanness as subsiding in certain persons, animals, and things and communicable through contact with them; 2. Pollution or defilement arising from contact with such subjects; and 3. Menstrual discharge (Molesworth's Marathi-English Dictionary). Through this word, Cokhāmelā expresses his outrage over the caste system.

Johar, mai-baap, Johar
I am the mahar of your mahars
I am come,
Starved
For your leavings.
The servant of your servants
Waits with hope.
I have brought, says Chokha,
My bowl
For your leavings. (343)

He repeatedly uses the Marathi words *vitāl*, to denote impurity and pollution, *jātihīn*, for humble birth, *ustā* for left over, and '*Johar, mai-baap*' as a humble salutation towards the upper caste. Cokhāmelā questioned social injustice on one hand and accepted his fate with resignation on the other.

Cane is crooked, but its juice isn't crooked
Why be footed by outward appearance?
The bow is crooked, but the arrow isn't crooked,
Why be footed by outward appearance?
The river is twisting, but the water isn't crooked.
Why be footed by outward appearance?

Cokhā is ugly, but his feelings aren't ugly.
Why be footed by outward appearance? (52)

As Zelliot puts it, his abhangas are about 'delight in the Lord, delivery from life's sufferings through devotion. Even though agony is there, the central message is that Cokhā, even though a *Mahār*, could experience the grace of God' (Zelliot 1996: 8). Cokhāmelā seems less critical of the excesses of Hindu orthodoxy, and more apologetic about his own birth.

5. Concluding remarks

Liberation is sought through *bhakti*, and through *svakarma* and *svadharma*, which go against the disposition of modern Dalit radical rhetoric. As Amandeep points out 'dalit emancipation is to be sought in the domain of the material, through the material only, the worship of the divine is only an escapist way of emancipation' (Amandeep 2010: 4).

Lele also points out that 'they (Dalit intellectuals) are currently critical and suspicious of bhakti. They see Cokhāmelā as well as his followers of today as being taken for a ride by the hegemonic classes, and perhaps rightly so' (Lele 1980: 7). However, he adds that, 'they also fail to examine the source of potency of the *Vārkārī* message and practice for most non-mahar dalits' (Lele 1980: 7). Lele's assessment is objective and as critical of the *Vārkārī sampradāya* as it is appreciative of the *bhakti* poets' contributions to mobilising social consciousness. He says that the *Vārkārī sampradāya* is an example of the 'counterproductiveness of countercultures', nothing that the tradition emerged 'as a serious critique of the socio-religious order' and 'challenged the religious hegemony of the Brahmins and came to the point of threatening the medieval Brahmin-Kshatriya hegemony', but this 'authentic liberationg impulse' developed under 'unripe social conditions' (Lele 1980: 14).

Ranade appreciates the sense of competitive spirit among the *Vārkārī* saint-poets will respect to social injustice in the process of modernity in Maharashtra (Ranade 1966). However, this was limited in the framework of *varna- āśrama dharma*. We should not forget the contribution of the saint-poets in the upliftment of socially downtrodden people and development of their spiritual and religious life. Through the practices of pilgrimage, listening to *abhangas* and so on, saint-poets preached the importance of upholding moral virtues and performing one's *karma*. They always tried to awaken the masses and boost their confidence. Their epoch-making activities in the strict hierarchical class society of those days laid the foundation for the social reform movements that Maharashtra witnessed from the 19th century onwards.

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Chapter 3

Reconsidering the Caste Construction in Early Modern Maharashtra

Michihiro OGAWA

1. Introduction

As previously discussed in the introduction, Maharashtra under the Marathas saw the construction of castes even before British colonisation in the nineteenth century. Shivaji Bhonsle, who founded the Maratha kingdom in 1674, insisted that he was 'a lordly thread-wearing' *Kshatriya* (king or the ruling and military elite) and reinforced that hierarchy by integrating the classifications of *jati* and *varna* into his court rituals and statecraft (Bayly 2002 [1999]: 56-57). In a sense, he used the caste system to justify and consolidate his position and status during the late seventeenth century. The *Peshwas* were the prime ministers of the Maratha kingdom, whose family belonged to the Chitpavan Brahman community of Maharashtra's coastal area. They held the real power in this kingdom in the eighteenth century, and they recruited many commanders, official bankers, and bureaucrats who belonged to the same caste to carry out the administration smoothly and effectively. Many Chitpavan Brahmans moved from the coast to Pune, where the *Peshwa* established the government. (Gokhale 1988: 129). During this period, the Chitpavan Brahmans, both socially and politically, formed a highly cohesive group with the *Peshwa* at the centre. These instances demonstrate that rulers took at least some advantage of casteism. Contrarily, these cases describe the behaviour of only a small portion of the political elites and are not indicative of a widespread phenomenon. Thus, this chapter considers whether both the composition of social groups and the ideology of caste were constructed among 'ordinary people' in the early modern Maharashtra and, if so, how they were formed.

Two terms must be defined before launching this discussion. (1) The term 'ordinary people' applies to villagers in an agrarian society because most of the population in Maharashtra lived in rural areas during this period[1]. (2) The term 'early modern period' is not a universally established and understood term in the periodisation of Indian History. It has been generally considered that Indian history consists of the ancient, mediaeval, and modern periods, terms that go back to the British colonial period. According to Indian historiography, as defined by the British, Hindu dynasties flourished in ancient India. The Muslims invaded and ruled India in the mediaeval period,

[1] Even in the 21st century, according to the Census of India (2011), 68.84% of India's population lives in rural areas (Census of India 2011: 1).

and the British returned India to Indians *viz., Hindus,* and 'modernised' India in the modern period. The use of this periodisation supported British efforts to justify colonisation. After independence in 1947, nationalist historians regarded the period of British rule, including the period of the transition in the eighteenth century, as a 'dark age'. Recent discussions on 'the eighteenth-century problem', however, have articulated the view that the eighteenth century, after the decline of the Mughal Empire, was not a dark age. Contrarily, the Mughal empire's successor states, including the Maratha kingdom, developed various viable states on the Indian subcontinent. Some studies have argued that even the rule exercised by the English East India Company (1757–1857) could be partly considered as having occurred during the long eighteenth-century (Alavi 2002; Marshall 2003). Furthermore, David Ludden thought of the period between 1550[2] and 1850 as the early modern period of Indian history (Ludden 1999: 122-128). Considering the discussions above and the history of Maharashtra, this paper defines the term 'early modern' as having occurred between the foundation of the Maratha kingdom (1674) and the end of rule by the English East India Company (1857). In short, this paper analyses the construction of castes in villages under the Marathas from 1674 to 1857. The first section briefly describes the social system that formed the basis for the construction of castes in the early modern period, especially under the Marathas with references to previous studies. The second section considers the social system based on the use of primary sources (original documents) found in the Maharashtra State Archives, Pune.

2. Social System of Villages under the Marathas

Previous studies revealed that the phrase, '60 peasants and 12 *balutedars*' appeared quite often in primary documents describing agrarian society under the Marathas (Kotani 2002: 24). The use of this term indicates that villages under the Marathas ideally contained 60 peasants and 12 *balutedars*. The word '*balute'* means 'a share of the corn and garden-produce assigned for the subsistence of the twelve public servants of a village' (Molesworth 2010: 567). Thus, the term '*balutedars*', implying holders (*dar*) of *balute*, indicates that the village possessed public servants. According to Grant Duff, a British officer in the early nineteenth century, the twelve *balutedars* included a carpenter (*sutar*), a blacksmith (*lohar*), a shoemaker (*chambhar*), a *mahar*, and a *mang*, who occupied the lowest social order because they dealt with the corpses of cattle. In addition, there was a potter (*kumbhar*), a barber (*nhavi*), a washerman (*parit*), the priest of the village-temple (*gurav*), an astrologer (*joshi*), a goldsmith (*sonar*), and a Muslim priest (*mulana*) (Duff 1826: 31-32). In the category of *balutedars,* not only artisans and service workers, but also religious professionals such as the astrologer were included. This situation, as described above, is quoted most often in studies of agrarian society in Western India. As A. R. Kulkarni points out, the term, '12 *balutedars*', was commonly used

[2] In the late sixteen century, the Mughal Empire established new policies. Many were inherited by successor states in the eighteenth century and some were adopted by the English East India Company in the early nineteenth century.

(Kulkarni 2009 [2000]: 4), even though the actual number and members of *balutedars* varied from village to village. In any case, various professionals worked as village public servants. In return for their services, they received grain or wages (*ballute*), tax-free land (*Inam* land), various privileges called *haks,* or a combination of all three according to the work performed for their village community (Kulkarni 2009 [2000]: 1).

The combination of their duties and rights was called *watan. Watan* was inheritable, transferable, and saleable (Fukazawa 2007 [1982]: 250-251). In other words, these village servants called *balutedars* inherited their professions for generations, but they could sell *watan viz*., their profession when they could not continue to perform it. For example, when a servant suddenly left the village community, the *watan* was transferred from him to another person. Besides *balutedars*, the rights and duties of peasants were also inheritable, transferable, and saleable as *watan*. Peasants cultivated their land for generations and sent grain to the village headman called the *patil,* who paid the land revenue to the government, gave grain to village servants as *balutes,* and sometimes delivered grain or money to Hindu temples or Muslim mosques. Thus, the *patil* managed the village community by distributing grain or money. This local distribution system functioned under the Marathas[3], with the village headman at the centre. The village headman and the village accountant, called a *kulkarni,* worked to manage this system in the village. As was the case with the *balutedars,* the headman and accountant enjoyed the use of *Inam* land and various *haqs*. Furthermore, other artisans and workers, such as the oilman (*teli*), weaver (*koshti*), and seller of betel nut (*tamboli*), who were not generally included in the above-mentioned roster of village servants, also possessed *watan*, the combination of duties and rights related to their professions. The duties and rights of these last-named village officers were inheritable, transferable, and saleable as *watan*. The duties and rights of peasants, village servants, other artisans, and workers and the village officers, all of whom played crucial roles in the local distribution system in the early modern period, were defined in the terms of *watan*. In short, understanding *watan* is a key requirement for understanding the agrarian society of the early modern period.

It is noteworthy that not all villagers held *watan*. Some peasants and servants did not enjoy the combined duties and rights of *watan*. They were called *upari,* temporary residents, while the holders of *watan* (all of whom were regular members of the village community) were called *watandars*. *Upari* artisans and peasants, however, substituted for *watandars* when the latter could not carry out their professions. The village headman sometimes contracted the cultivation of a village's uncultivated land in its frontier by *upari* peasants. If *upari* peasants and artisans were employed, they received grain, money, or privileges as *watandars* (Kotani 2002: 24-25; Fukazawa 2007 [1982]: 250-252). In short, *upari* peasants and artisans were not excluded from the local distribution system but made up shortfalls of labour in the local community. Moreover, *upari* peasants and artisans could become *watandars* when they purchased *watan* and when the village

[3] Kotani called this system the division of labour inside the village (Kotani 2002: 24).

headman transferred *watan*[4] to them. *Upari* peasants and artisans moved beyond the territorial bounds of a village responding to the demand of labour or the vacancy of a *watan.* This situation indicates that the division of labour related to a *watan* was not necessarily performed only within the boundary of a village. Kotani points out that 'scores of village communities grouped together and formed an upper level of community structure' and called it 'the *pargana* community'. A *Pargana,* consisting of 20 to 100 villages (Kotani 2002: 25-26), was the higher-level unit of village administration and was used widely on the Indian subcontinent before the colonial period. Each *pargana* had its chief hereditary officer called a *deshmukh* or *desai* and its accountant, the *deshpande* in Today's Western Maharashtra, who were the local community leaders. Representing the local community, they assisted and supervised the government officer (the *kamavisdar*) who the government appointed as *pargana* administrator. The rights and duties of the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* were also defined as *watan*. Basically, the *pargana* was a unit for the local community whose rights and duties were based on *watan,* rather than on the village. Local judicial institutions were established under the Marathas. These judicial institutions consisted of the *pargana's gotosabha* or *parchayat*, meaning assembly, the *qasba* (town) *gotosabha* or *panchayat,* and the village *gotosabha* or *panchayat*. The *deshmukh* and *deshpande* were the heads of the *pargana* assembly (Gune 1953: 61-62), which settled disputes in the local community.

Under the Marathas, caste, which is called *jati* in India[5], formed a primary group within the territorial limits of the *pargana*. Kotani called this group the '*jati* community'. In each *pargana,* there was a leader of a *jati community*, called the *mhetar*. (Kotani 2002: 26). For example, oilmen (*teli*) formed their caste community in a *pargana* under the control of a leader called the *teli mhetar*, who generally resided in the headquarters town (*qasba*) of a *pargana*. The *mhetar* represented the *jati* community and was able to negotiate with the government officers (Kotani 2002: 26). It appears that the above-mentioned inter-village activities of *upari* peasants and artisans were principally carried out within the territorial limits of the *pargana*.

The *Jati* community had a caste *panchayat* (assembly) as an institution that exercised self-determination (Gune 1953: 66), which seems to have been held within the *pargana* as a unit. Members of the *jati* could expel an individual who had disobeyed caste customs or committed a religious or spiritual offence. This offender had to undergo a penance, called *devadanda,* to atone for his sin. After this penitential rite, the ceremony was held to re-admit the offender into his own caste community (known as *gotai* or *gotpat*). As part of this ceremony, the readmitted individual gave members of his caste a dinner (served with sweetmeats) as a social occasion. Additionally, he paid a fee to the local officer of the *pargana* (*kamavisdar*), part of which the *deshmukh* received as chief of the local community (Gune 1953: 110, 114). This payment indicates that the entire process was carried out at the *pargana* level. These local judicial systems under the Marathas support the

[4] In case the peasants or artisans holding *watan* suddenly left their village, the village headman, in this case representing the village community, usually made decisions affecting the *watan.*

[5] The word 'caste' originates from a Portuguese word '*casta*', meaning 'race, lineage, or breed'. In India, this word is identified with the word '*jati*', which originally means 'kind', 'sort', 'species', 'class', or 'tribe'.

contention that the *jati* community worked primarily within the geographical and administrative limits of the *pargana*. Kotani argues that caste groups formed secondary networks with *jati* communities of neighbouring *parganas* (Kotani 2002: 26). In Kotani's argument, the *jati* community was considered to exist within the *pargana* as a unit.

Under the Marathas, the caste community existed in each *pargana* and its leader lived in the *pargana* headquarters. The caste, however, was not the sole unit for social formation in the early modern period because the *watan* also performed a function. The *jati* community consisted of members belonging to the same profession, such as carpenters (*sutar*) and washermen (*parit*). For example, in one instance, a *watandar* carpenter suddenly left his village. An *upari* carpenter from the carpenter caste in the same *pargana* where the village was located gained *watan viz*., the duties and rights of a carpenter. In a sense, the *jati* community worked to maintain the *watan* system in its *pargana*. Interestingly, *watans* of the local hereditary officers such as *patil*, *kulkarni*, *deshmukh*, and *deshpande* were open to various castes, although Brahmans tended to enjoy the *watans* of accountants (*kulkarni* and *deshpande*) because they were frequently literate. In this context, the mechanism of *watan* worked beyond the system of caste under the Marathas. In short, *watan* seemed to be more significant than caste for social formation in early modern Western India.

In the next section, focusing on original documents held in the Pune Archives, we will see how the *watan* was maintained. From this analysis, it will be seen more clearly how the *watan* system worked in the early moden Maharashtra.

3. Maintenance of *Watan* in the Early Modern Maharashtra

This section analyses the original documents held in the Maharashtra State Archives, Pune, designated as the Pune Archives, which was called *Peshwa Daftar* under British rule. This archive has the richest collection of indigenous documents[6] from the precolonial period. After British rule in Western India began in 1818, British officers collected and assembled official documents held in the record offices administered by the Marathas to learn how revenue had been collected before British rule commenced (Kulkarni 2006: 96-100). Thus, most of the documents kept in the Pune Archives deal with tax collection under the Marathas. Moreover, the *Inam* Commission[7], which had jurisdiction over the *Peshwa Daftar* from 1843 to 1857, investigated local privileges such as *Inam* that were exercised in the Bombay Presidency in this period. The local staff in this commission produced documents about *Inam* in the local language (Marathi), which are kept in the Pune Archives. Because *Inam* was part of the rights that *watandars* enjoyed, this section considers how *watan* was maintained by its holders by analysing documents on *Inam* held in the Pune Archives.

This paper focuses on 'Inam Patra, Mahar Mehetre, Fusli 1257 (AD 1847), Pune Jamav Rumal

[6] Documents are written with *Modi* or the medieval Marathi scripts. Marathi is an official language of Maharashtra.
[7] The Inam Commission mainly composed of the Inam Commissioner, who was the British officer, and the judicial native officer (*Sadar Amin*) in addition to whom some native staffs were employed (Etheridge 1874: 24).

no. 715, Pune Archives'. The local staff in the Inam Commission produced these letters (*patra*) supporting the Inam Commissioner's enquiries to the leader of the *mahars* of the Indapur *Pargana* in Pune District of the Bombay Presidency, who lived in Qasba Indapur, or the headquarters of this *pargana*, in 1847. These documents comprised three letters, including eight sections of questions and answers and the genealogy of the *watandars*.

The individual who responded to the above-mentioned enquiry was the leader (*mhetar)* of *mahar*. Assumably, *mahars* were the original inhabitants of Maharashtra. Some had been absorbed in the lowest stratum of the newly developed agrarian society as scavengers or watchmen (Kotani 2002: 26). This respondent held the *watan* of Qasba Indapur with *Inam* land called *hadola*[8]. According to this respondent, 'each village in Indapur *Pargana* has the *mahar* who held *hadola*'. In the accounts of villages in Indapur *Pargana*, *hadola* was separately accounted for distinctly from other *Inam* land[9]. Although there was more than one *mahar*[10] in a village or town[11], *hadola* seems to have been held by one family of *mahar*. Probably, the *mahar* holding the *hadola* was at the centre of the village community of the *mahar*. The leader (*mhetar*) of the *mahar* was ranked higher than the *mahars* with *hadola* in villages. In short, the respondent was at the top of the structure of *the jati* community of *mahar* in Indapur *Pargana*[12].

The respondent held 120 *bigha* of *Inam* land (*hadola*) in Qasba Indapur. Among the 28 holders of *Inam* land in this town, only eight held more than 120 *bigha*. His *Inam* land was larger than that of the *joshi* by 30 *bigha*[13]. In the accounts of Qasba Indapur, this *Inam* land ranked as the third item of *Inam* land below the holdings of the village headman (*patil*) and village accountant (*kulkarni*)[14]. These entries indicate that the *Inam* land of this respondent was both quantitatively and qualitatively important in Qasba Indapur.

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[8] The word '*hadola*' means the *Inam* land which the *mahar* held as a right conferred by his *watan*.

[9] For example, Akar, Qasba Indapur (Awalsal-Akhersal), Fusli 1227, Pune Jamav Rumal no. 713, Maharashtra State Archives, Pune.

[10] For example, there were 53 families and 175 individuals of *mahar* in Qasba Indapur in 1820. Yadi Khane Sumari Qasba Indapur Shuhur 1220 Fusli 1229 Shaka 1741, Pune Jamav Rumal no. 714, Maharashtra State Archives, Pune.

[11] This point is supported by the report made by R.N. Gooddine or the British officer who surveyed another *pargana* in Ahmednagar District of the Bombay Presidency in the early nineteenth century as follows: 'At some former period each village has had appointed to it a certain number of Muhars, -8, 12, 16, -according to its size'. R.N. Gooddine, *Report on the Village Community of the Deccan,* (Bombay 1852) in (Nand 2009: 80).

[12] Although Kotani points out that the *jati* community of *mahar* went beyond the territory of *pargana* keeping a sort of tribal structure (Kotani 2002: 27). *Mahars* in Indapur Pargana basically appeared to work within the geographical limits of this *pargana.* Probably because Indapur Pargana was near Pune *viz.,* the central city of the Marathas, the community of *mahar* was absorbed into agrarian society more deeply than in other areas.

[13] In Kumbhari Pargana in Ahmednagar District, according to the report by R.N. Gooddine, the total measure of *Inam* land held by *Mahar*, which amounted to 3458 *bigha*, in this *pargana* was the largest among groups of holders of *Inam* land including village officers (*patil* and *kulkarni*), Hindu temples, and so on. R.N. Gooddine, *Report on the Village Community of the Deccan,* (Bombay 1852) in (Nand 2009: 98). This report implies Indapur Pargana was in exceptional situations about the size of *Inam* land held by *mahars.*

[14] Akar, Qasba Indapur (Awalsal-Akhersal), Fusli 1227, Pune Jamav Rumal no. 713, Maharashtra State Archives, Pune.

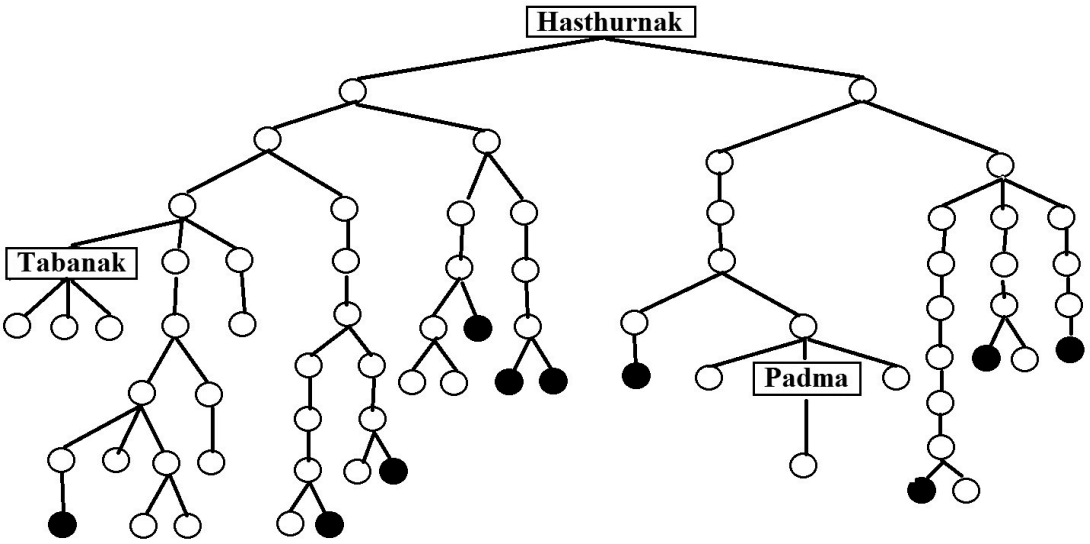

Figure 1 The Genealogy of *Watandars* of *Mahar* in Qasba Indapur

Sources: created by the author

The genealogy appearing in the last part of these letters states that *Inam* land was given to Hasthurnak (the ancestor of this respondent during the reign of Shahu or the Maratha King (1707–1749) (See Figure 1). This respondent, or Tabanak Mahar, maintained the *watan* of *mahar* in Qasba Indapur, including *Inam* land with Padma Mahar with the *watan* divided in half. In the letters, it was clearly declared that Padma Mahar had inherited half of the *watan* from his father. This statement indicates that the *watan* was inherited for generations in the family of this respondent. Moreover, copies of these letters were sent to ten individuals, whose positions in the genealogy are indicated by the black points in Figure 1. This genealogy indicates that ten members in this family became involved indirectly in the management of the *watan* of *mahar,* while two maintained it directly. It can be seen from this case that a joint family of *mahar* was formed with the *watan* at the centre. Although it was a high priority in Maharashtra's early modern society to keep *watan,* it was a joint family that maintained the *watan* more directly than a *jati* community. In this sense, a family was a principal unit of society rather than a *jati* community.

4. Conclusion

This paper considered how the social system, which was the basis for the formation of castes, was established in early modern Maharashtra. Previous works have argued that the system of *watan, viz.,* duties and rights of a profession, was established in an agrarian society with the *pargana* (a group of villages) as an organising unit. Although caste groups existed under the Marathas, it can be said that these groups worked toward maintaining the *watan*. Analysis of original documents in the Maharashtra State Archives, Pune, has made it clear that *watan* was maintained by a joint family

more directly than by a *jati* community. In the early modern period, families with *watan* worked differently than families without *watan,* even in the same *jati* community. This difference was a qualitative or institutional distinction in a *jati* community and was unlike the quantitative or economic difference between the rich and the poor in a *jati* community. The next issue to be investigated is how these families were related to each other within a *jati* community in the early modern period.

The new land revenue system, called the *Ryotwari* settlement, dealt with land property separately from the other rights peasants held in the *watan*. In short, this settlement worked toward dissolving the *watan* system, especially as it related to peasants (Guha 1985: 8-16, 38-53). Moreover, the Bombay Hereditary Offices Act of 1874 attempted to separate the official duties of *watandars* in the local community from their private duties (Kotani 2002: 143-150). This act also worked toward dissolving the *watan* system from another angle. In the modern period, especially after the British took direct control in 1858, the *watan* system gradually collapsed, chiefly because of new colonial policies[15]. It is possible that caste groups emerged in the modern period after the *watan* system in the early modern period, under which a family acted as a unit. These groups declined under colonial rule. The historical change of the social unit from a family to a caste group must be considered with other members in this joint project.

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[15] Not all kinds of *watans* were broken down. For example, the *watan* of *mahar* survived throughout the British colonial period. See (Kotani 2002: 136-160) for details.

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Chapter 4

The Resilient Nature of Caste: Colonial Manifestations

Shraddha KUMBHOJKAR

A deeply exploitative caste system has remained an integral part of Indian society for over two millennia. It has survived and maintained its grip over the Indian social structure for so long by adapting continuously to social changes. During the colonial period, the system of caste-based social differentiation dramatically evolved, until it emerged in its new, present day avatar. This paper studies a few caste regulatory booklets published in Maharashtra from the 1870s to the 1910s which reveal that caste has never been an eternal, unchanging institution. Rather, it has adapted to its social surroundings for survival. Regulatory booklets of four middle-status castes, Dakshini Fulmali, Aagari, Kitte Bhandari, and Prabhu, are analysed in this paper. The rules and regulations adopted by local caste assemblies indicate that the perpetuation of the status of a caste was the primary goal for which a regulatory framework was wilfully adopted by all members of that caste. Thus, this paper argues that resilience and adaptability have been the characteristic features of the caste system which ensured its survival.

For the purpose of this research, the definition of caste by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is accepted. He defined caste as 'a social group having (a) belief in Hindu Religion and bound by certain regulations as to (b) marriage, (c) food, and (d) occupation... (and) a social group having a common name by which it is recognised.' (Ambedkar 1989: 158) It is a system of graded inequality wherein each caste in the social hierarchy—even the lowest untouchables—has a pride of place *vis-à-vis* another. It may be noted that Dr. Ambedkar in his definition acknowledged the vital role played by regulations in the existence of a caste.

The primary source material for the present study includes regulatory booklets of four middle-status castes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Dakshini Fulmali (1879), Aagari (1900s), Bhandari (1902), and Prabhu (1909). These booklets are available at the Shivaji University, Kolhapur; the Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai; the British Library, London; and the Jaykar Library of the Savitribai Phule Pune University. As secondary source material, Vaidya's article on the consolidation of castes with the help of caste-based periodicals in colonial India is useful (Vaidya 2018). Kotani's article on the legal status of the depressed castes is also pertinent. In this article he indicates that with the help of, what he calls, 'legal fiction', 'social discrimination against the depressed castes was kept intact in the name of custom and usage under the colonial rule' (Kotani 1997: 80-81). Additionally, in order to understand the discourse on the unchanging, inherited, and

racial nature of the caste system, Risley's *The Study of Ethnology in India* (1891) and its critique by Crispin Bates (1995) are useful.

It may be beneficial to briefly review the four booklets that form the primary source material for this study.

(1) *Dakshini Fulmali* (1879)

The Dakshini Fulmali caste of gardeners and flower vendors reside primarily in Bombay and Thane Districts. This booklet contains date-wise resolutions passed by the caste assembly, such as resolutions forbidding the caste members from getting drunk, from committing adultery, and from non-payment of fines due to the caste assembly. Though maintaining written records was a comparatively new practice at that time, the caste assembly seems to have accepted it. It also printed and published the regulations for systematic distribution to members for future reference. We can notice here one of the first instances of adaptation, i.e., acceptance of modern technology to maintain a printed record. Earlier, the word of the five caste leaders, the *pancha*, would have sufficed.

While the *pancha* and their word were still honoured, the rules also proclaimed that the five leaders could sue in court anyone who transgressed caste regulations. Thus, the authority of the colonial legal system over the caste-based judicial system was accepted.

Moreover, when a leader was unable to discharge his duties, a replacement was chosen by majority vote. This was a remarkable adaptation, as earlier replacements were chosen by the existing leaders. Thus, the Fulmalis adapted to their surroundings by accepting new technology and new media to maintain group coherence.

(2) *Aagari* (1900s)

This caste, with clear matriarchal traditions, is a caste of salt-pan owners found in the coastal areas of north Konkan around Bombay. They held numerous meetings and published a booklet to 'let all the Aagaris know where their well-being lies'. The rules are fairly standard: members should not get drunk, should not commit adultery, should oblige a social invitation, and married women should be made to stay with their husbands rather than elsewhere.

However, the most noteworthy regulations concern outlining in detail the various *sanctioned* expenditure items for a remarriage. Remarriages were looked down upon in higher castes, but in the case of the Aagaris, not only remarriages but also the custom of bride price—that is, *dej*—was practiced and duly recorded in the booklet. When a woman was remarried, the expenditure items included two separate headings for bride price. First was the amount to be returned to her previous husband's family by her new husband; the other was the bride price paid to the bride's father.

At a time when remarriages were frowned upon by higher castes, it was a clever strategy by the Aagaris to print the rules regarding the same and distribute the booklets to the caste members. Thus, record-keeping and the use of new media and printing technology helped them maintain their status by legitimising their customs.

(3) *Kitte Bhandari* (1902)

The purpose of a book of regulations for the Kitte Bhandari caste residents of the coastal region of south Maharashtra is clearly mentioned in its introduction section.

> Although our caste members have written a number of books about our history and traditions, there are no books that record the customs common for all of our caste brethren. The reason is that, earlier, we, the members of our caste used to conform to the opinions of other caste members. Nowadays, we have become independent and careless about our customs. This has resulted in the transgression of rules to the detriment of our caste. Hence, we called a meeting at Ratnagiri and framed the following regulations.

The objective of the Bhandaris for framing the regulations was clear. They did not appreciate differences in opinion and wished to concentrate authority in the caste assembly. The act of printing and distributing booklets was meant to secure acceptance of the rules framed by the caste assembly. These rules concerned officiating marriages in a simple, inconspicuous manner because overspending worked to the detriment of the wealth of caste members. The focus on the financial interest of caste members is evident in the introduction to the booklet. Thus, the techniques used by the Kitte Bhandaris for survival included financial prudence and unified decision-making.

(4) *Prabhu* (1909)

This was a monthly magazine of the urban caste of Pathare Prabhus, who were traditional scribes native to Bombay. Each issue carried the reports of their caste assembly meetings and recorded various 'praiseworthy activities' of caste members. These included donations and scholarships for promising students by the wealthy members or art exhibitions organised by women members. One issue in 1909 carried a feature exhorting members to raise money for the experiments conducted by Shivkar Bapuji Talpade, as he attempted to fly an aeroplane on a beach in Bombay. It assured the members that they would get their money back when the enterprise turned profitable. Thus, apart from image-building of illustrious members, the magazine also attempted to raise capital for its entrepreneurial members.

It also resorted to a different set of means to obtain compliance from its members. While other castes levied heavy fines on members that transgressed caste regulations, the Prabhu magazine did not mention any punishment. Rather, it worked to make the members accept prescribed norms as standard caste practices. 'Good Prabhu women' pursued education, wrote articles in magazines, participated in art exhibitions, and gave speeches at public functions. 'Good Prabhu men' pursued education, participated in public life ranging from the Anthropological Society to cricket clubs, and gave donations to various institutions. Thus, the mechanism of concession rather than coercion was employed by the magazine.

What do the four caste regulatory publications tell us about the caste system in colonial Maharashtra? Contrary to the colonial depiction, caste was not eternal or unchanging. It is evident

from these examples that castes were receptive to change and responded to the realities of the colonial period. It is noteworthy that as many as 185 caste-based periodicals were published during the nineteenth century—the earliest was by the Kshatri caste in 1860 (Vaidya 2018). The examples studied here show how some of the well-organised castes evolved by adopting useful measures to keep themselves afloat. The Dakshini Fulmalis and the Aagaris adopted the new media and the new printing technology during the late nineteenth century for consolidation of their respective castes. They levied fines on members who disobeyed caste rules. They also attempted to gain legitimacy for their rules by printing booklets.

The Kitte Bhandari adopted measures of financial prudence and unified decision-making so that the caste could survive the financial pressures under colonialism. The Prabhu caste, the most urban of these examples, discarded the system of fines and exhorted the members to emulate the examples publicised in the caste magazine. Thus, without negative reinforcement, it managed to garner support for survival strategies under colonialism.

Such adaptations can be seen in the cases of other castes as well. Several artisan castes such as the Padmashalis migrated to large cities (Botre 2006). Still others, such as the Brahmins and the Mahars, renounced their traditional occupations to practice new professions. Even new castes, such as the Bhangi (scavengers), were created entirely because of colonial interventions (Abhang 2017; see also the capter 7 in this volume). Thus, the caste system continued to evolve even during the colonial period, never fossilising into a hard mass. These adaptations confirm the definition of caste given by Dr. Ambedkar, which underlines the fact that a caste is a social group bound by regulations regarding food, marriage, and occupation.

To conclude, the caste system survived for at least two millennia because it adapted to the changing socio–political environment. One can neither argue that it has remained exactly as was prescribed by Manu, nor that it is a colonial creation. The very fact that it has survived for so long and continues to play a major role in Indians' decisions regarding food, marriage, and even the choice of location of their house (Kumbhojkar 2008), shows that it has not fossilised. A study of various castes and their publications in colonial Maharashtra thus highlights that throughout its history, the caste system has been resilient and adaptive.

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Chapter 5

Protector to Criminal: Ramoshi Caste in Colonial Maharashtra

Devkumar AHIRE

…We know that great freedom fighter Umaji Naik fought for freedom,
but his community is still stigmatized as criminals, and not just in pre-independent India
but even in independent India we are being branded as criminals.

1. Introduction

In 1952, the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed, and as a result, nomadic tribes that were 'notified' as criminal tribes in 1871 were de-notified. Presently, nomadic tribes are free from the legal implications of the act but the colonial stigma of being 'notified' remains the same, and those communities still face the 'humiliation' on a daily basis.

Although we, Indians, are outside the colonial regime, the colonial hangover has continued through acceptance of such notions by 'Indians' of colonial mentality. Caste is something that is decided through birth and we do not have control over the caste we are born into. As Indians give immense respect to things that are beyond human control, the caste system receives great respect. Untouchability is based on the birth; similarly, regardless of whether a person is criminal, if the person is born in communities marked as 'criminal communities', the person would be regarded as criminal. This means that criminals are increasing through birth and not with the crime (Rathod 1984: 21). This mentality persists in Indian society. For the research purpose, I have selected Ramoshi Caste out of many criminal tribes. Thus, this study focuses only on Ramoshi Tribe.

2. Background of the Ramoshi Caste

Whether to call the Ramoshi community nomadic, tribal, or untouchable is a debatable issue. Currently, Ramoshi is called a nomadic tribe, but this does not have a historic basis. Ramoshi is not indeed nomadic; so, even colonial studies on caste and communities in India have this wrong hypothesis about Ramoshi. We need to understand the socioeconomic status of Ramoshi in colonial times through social structures and anthropological understanding of Ramoshi as a community,

which can be called a historic-anthropological method or multi-linear historical materialism. The Ramoshi community was mainly hill dwellers, primarily located in Pune and Satara districts of Maharashtra (Kennedy 1908: 143). Ramoshi communities made their livelihoods through different professions, such as armies, agricultural labour, and forest economy. Therefore, identifying their status in the social hierarchy becomes crucial.

The main profession of the Ramoshi community was to protect the village boundary, and they were awarded agricultural land for this work. In the Maratha regime, many Ramoshi had the responsibility to protect forts (Patil 1990: 107). On this, Hiroyuki Kotani says, 'The fort was one of the most important power apparatuses of the medieval state… watan system which formed the backbone of the medieval society in Deccan'. (Kotani 2002: 129) As forts were protected by Ramoshi communities, many Ramoshi received the Watan (title and status) of 'Naik' and 'Sar-Naik', and Watan was the backbone of medieval society. Ramoshi were Jagale (literally means, the ones who are night watchmen and keep others alert), and Jagale were equivalent to the police officers of current times (Atre 2013: 52). Ramoshi worked in various positions and levels ranging from protection of forts to protecting villages, but most of the time in armies of different kinds. Thus, the Muslim ruler Haidar Ali had appointed Bedar groups in his army after converting them to Islam. This is how different divisions of the Bedar groups came into existence (Patil 1990: 113).

The Ramoshi community was fetching their livelihood through contributions to armed forces and agricultural labour, 'few Bedar are into farming, few are into protection of villages and few even have their farm lands, few are Patil's (village heads) and few worked as laborers'. (Kalelkar 1999: 109) Few of them produce farm products in their farmlands, which they have received as Inam (awards). Ramoshi said that they have farmlands, earned through these lands, and they can earn their livelihood by employment in armed forces and farm lands. The traditional village society in Maharashtra and the neighbouring farmland was protected by Jaglya, who were predominantly recruited from Mahar and Ramoshi communities. As a result, 'these communities had rights over the produce of those farmland owned by Kunbi communities. In both the crops, Jirayati and Bagayati communities like Mahar, Mang, Bhilla, and Ramoshi had their own share, as contributors of labour in producing them'. (Atre 2013: 105) Many Ramoshi men, women, and even children were seen taking grass, fodders, and other things directly from farmlands of Kunbi, both in front and behind them (Atre 2013: 106). From the examples stated above, we can say that Ramoshi communities were connected with villages and agriculture as Jaglya, Rakhandar (Watchmen), and even as Watandar.

We have seen that Ramoshi were hill dwellers. Many historians who have found logic to the word 'Ramoshi' claim that Ramoshi must have come from Ramavanshi. Some of them even claim that Ramoshi came from Ranawasi. Considering the fact that Ramoshi communities resided on the borders of villages, the second possibility of the origin of word Ramoshi appears more valid (Kalelkar 1999: 195), and this origin of word Ramoshi from Ranawasi is more material and existential. Ramoshi never stayed in hills or on the top of the hill; they were always on the slope of hills, and such a geographical location allowed them to be mediators within the village and the hill. Another result was that Ramoshi, Mahar, and Chambhar became untouchables (Mann 1921: 108).

Having said that, Ramoshi community is neither untouchables nor tribal. However, as they resided near forests and their livelihood was partly dependent on forests through various processes like hunting-gathering of forest produce, they were organically connected with the forest.

Until the end of the 18th century and the start of the 19th, Ramoshi community was active in the castist mode of production. When the colonial regime was fully established, Ramoshi communities lost their jobs and other means of livelihood, and then colonial researchers were faced with the question whether to classify Ramoshi as untouchables, or nomadic, or tribal?

3. Colonial Policy, Administration, and Ramoshi Caste

Although the new British empire emerged from a trade organisation, it was related to trade and other activities, and that colonial regime was unlike the present one in terms of polity. In this British regime, new forms of state, education systems, printing press, spread of printed books, newspapers, Christian missionaries, and the indigenous people came together and formed a system where new social and cultural values flourished. These processes gave new perspectives to local people to look at the political, religious, economic, and cultural sides of society, which triggered political and mental transformations (Prabhudesai 2010: 70-71).

Colonial policies and administration have greatly affected Indian society, as colonialism was an administrative project and a project of control (Dirks 1997: 1). In 1818, when Britishers defeated the Maratha Empire, they tried to bring this entire Indian subcontinent under their control. This resulted in the proliferation of the police, revenue, Inam commission, forest policies (Draxe 2005: 127), and communities like Ramoshi were severely affected. In the beginning of the 18th century, the British brought the State Forest Policy, and many communities like Ramoshi who were dependent on forests for their livelihood were denied their rights to forests. Subsequently, when the British fully controlled India, they put on a classification on forests as follows: Useful for government, Useful for citizens, and Useless for both (Atre 2013: 45). The British government brought further control over such communities by banning them from their older jobs in villages. Ultimately, communities like Bhat, Gurav, Koli, Sonar, Ramoshi, and Jangam were denied their rights over farm produce and similar periodical income (Atre 2013: 275). Earlier Ramoshi had the responsibility of protecting the forts situated on hills, and they were awarded tax-less farmlands in return for their service. However, the British, on coming to power, expelled these communities from the land given to them for the same purpose (Patil 1990: 107).

Because of these policies, the Ramoshi community lost their basic means of livelihood and were forced to stand against the British government. This resistance first appeared through the revolt by Ramoshi leader Umaji Naik. While theorising such revolts Sumit Sarkar says:

> In constructing a typology of popular movements under colonialism, it is convenient to start with the distinction between ‘Primary’ resistance and ‘Secondary’ resistance…primary resistance

> refers to the opposition of pre-colonial, as yet largely unchanged, socio-political structures to foreign intrusion, headed by traditional elements…and having in the main a restorative aim. Secondary resistance develops somewhat later, with deeper colonial penetration; it is characterised by new types of leadership and aims to go beyond simple restoration of the past (Sarkar 2015: 14).

Although this theorisation is extremely useful in understanding the phenomenon of revolt around that time, Sarkar fails to comprehend specificities such as Umaji Naik's resistance to the British government. Umaji's revolt was against Peshwe and British, both of whom were trying to snatch farmlands awarded to Ramoshi communities for their services in armed forces (Draxe 2005: 127). Thus, Umaji was bringing Ramoshi young men together and training them to become freedom fighters and courageous by imparting them with skills like dandapatta (Long and Flexible Blade), swords, and gofan (Stone pelter) (Gaikwad 2013).

In 1832, Umaji Naik was caught by the British and was hung to death, and the resistance by the Ramoshi community ended there. V.S. Joshi, a biographer of Vasudev Balwant Phadke, has written, 'In 1879 Vasudev Balwant Phadke realised that Ramoshi men are loyal to their word/ oath and this loyalty could be used in bringing this community in the betterment of building nationalism'. (Joshi 1959: 36) For the same reason, V.B. Phadke can be called as Adya Krantikark (Pioneer freedom fighter). It highlights another side of reality, which is, no one could be called a freedom fighter just because he was into tribal revolts or peasant revolts. Even before V.B. Phadke, Umaji Naik brought Ramoshi men together and tried to build a resistance against the British government. Umaji Naik also claimed the status of Raja a King. Then, why can't we call Umaji Naik a pioneer freedom fighter? This question was asked by many subaltern scholars studying history.

In 1879, V.B. Phadke visited Hari and Tatya Makji, who were in Satara, and tried to convey the importance of Umaji Naik's work of resisting the British government. They were convinced to complete the task, which was left undone by Umaji Naik's sudden death. After that, on 13 March 1879, Hari Makji was arrested and hung to death by the British government to set an example for such freedom fighters and their revolts. Hari Makaji is still remembered through various folk songs for his bravery and sacrifice for the cause. One folk song describes him as follows;

Listen to the story of Hari Makaji's hanging,
He came from the place called Jejuri an Ayodhya and Kashi of our,
He used to go for pilgrimage on Somavati Amavasya,
So he was hanged by Britishers on Somavati,
On the old banyan tree next to the Post office,
His Hanging was announced loudly everywhere,
Today Makaji will be hanged to death,
To see their loved one many villagers gathered at that place,
Many came with fire in eyes,

They praised him, whole Jejuri was filled with their sound,
He was hanged under strict protection of white soldiers,
But with this sacrifice, Ramoshi's from Kalambigaon felt contentful,
As one Ramoshi, Hari sacrificed his life for Bharatmata,
Yashawantrao Sawant, Jejuri.

This was the clear reason that the Ramoshi community despite not belonging to nomadic tribes, were put on the list of Criminal Tribes Act 1871. Those communities who resisted the British Raj were marked as criminal tribes by the British government (Radhakrishanan 2009: 3). Through this act, many nomadic tribes were listed as criminal tribes. T.V. Stephen, who was instrumental in bringing this act, said, 'Stealing things is the religion of these tribes and we can't change their religion' (Rathod 1984: 7), which says, nomadic tribes are born criminals. Meena Radhakrishna stated, emerging disciplines like anthropology, eugenics science, and anatomy actually produced 'subjects' like 'Born Criminals'. These disciplines were used to serve the purpose of colonial administration (Rathod 1984: 4). Additionally, these tribes were compelled to give attendance in few places where they were confined to camps surrounded by huge walls.

4. Reformist Movements and Ramoshi Caste under Colonial Dominance

Social reformation in Maharashtra started because of the Western ideas of education (Phadakule 1997: 73). English education, thought, and practices were the reasons behind many transformations in the social, religious, cultural, and logical spheres of Maharashtra, through which many organisations and institutions were established. They were united in whatever social and religious movements triggered; they all were against caste as a value of their own project, but the kind of remedies they suggested were qualitatively different from each other. Like Mahatma Jyotiba Phule resorted to Shudrati-Shudra communities for this movement, as they were the ones who were facing injustice and discrimination for generations (Phadakule 1997: 84). Therefore, Mahar, Mang, Kumbhar, Mali, Kunbi, and Ramoshi were important in Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj movement.

With the guidance from the Satyashodhak movement, Vidyadevi Savitribai Rode worked for the upliftment of Ramoshi communities. Savitribai Rode was Dhondiba Rode's daughter-in-law. In 1856, because of suggestions from traditional Brahmins, Dhondiram, Namdev Kumbhar, and Dhondiba Rode tried to kill Jyotiba Phule. When Phule talked with them, they changed their minds (Ugale 2016: 1). Dhondiba Rode further joined Phule's movement and became his disciple. At times, he also worked as a bodyguard for Phule. Phule used to visit Dhondiba's family before establishing Satyashodhak Samaj. Phule had completed Jyotirao's Gulamgiri, which is a product of a dialogue between Jyotiba and Dhondiba. The character of Jyotiba was played by Jyotirao Phule, and Shesh Dhondiba was carved out of Dhondiba Rode's personality. From both of these characters, affection was flowing in dialogical form (Ugale 2016: 1).

During the beginning of the 20th century, Satyashodhak's thought was flourishing across many conferences. They discussed the upliftment of the masses in all. Savitribai Rode was a whole-hearted follower of Satyashodhak Samaj, and she started working for the upliftment of her own community (Ugale 2016: 7). Again, for that collective action was needed, and with this thought, the 'Ramoshi Sangha' was established. The reason behind establishing such an organisation was the worsening conditions of the Ramoshi community.

The condition of Ramoshi brothers was worsening daily. They were losing their livelihood; especially, the poor ones were suffering a lot because of this situation. One person could not take this work ahead and so, at that time the only option was to come together and form a Sangha (collective), and with the power of 'collective', we would be able to take the task of educating our caste, spreading awareness in our caste, serving our caste, and relieving our caste from sorrows of all kinds. Therefore, Sangha was established. This was the aim of the Sangha, to promote the welfare for the caste. People willing to join for the betterment of the caste could join the Sangha, and they could even contribute to their knowledge, information, money, and experience (Kshatriya Ramoshi (Ramvanshi), First Year, Issue 1, Feb 1923).

Savitribai Rode was the founder Secretary of Romoshi Sangh. She had passed many resolutions and some of them were as follows: 'Ramoshi community should be loyal to the British empire. We should get free and compulsory education. The British government is far better for the Ramoshi community than the orthodox Peshwas. Ramoshi needs to be brought out of the criminal stigma, we need to ban the monopoly of religious leaders, and our rituals should be carried away by our own people and not Brahmins' (Ugale 2016: 8). She took a pro-British stand in her declaration of the establishment of Sangha itself because other ways of collecting the Ramoshi community were already crushed by the British government and those histories of violence were still alive in the community. Moreover, she had her base in Satyshodhak Samaj so she opposed the rule of Brahmins and welcomed the rule of Britishers as they came with English education.

Kshatriya Ramoshi Sangha organised many Ramoshi Shikshan Parishad (Ramoshi Conference on Education). On 15 April 1919 at Devarashtra, in Satara district, the first conference was organised with the help of Nanabhau Naik and Salary Naik (Ugale 2016: 9). In May 1920, the second regional Ramoshi Conference on Education was organised at Chinchwad. For these conferences, Savitribai worked extensively. To praise her contribution to the education of Ramoshi community, this second conference awarded her the title of Vidyadevi, and since then she was called Vidyadevi Savitribai Rode (Ugale 2016: 10). A total nine such conferences were held, and the last one was organised at Mahimgad, Tal. Man and Satara District on 17 March 1925. In this conference, the son of Tatyasaheb Rode and Vidyadevi Savitribai Rode, a nine-year-old Shankarrao Rode presented a paper (Ugale 2016: 11). In these conferences, the usually discussed topics were the education of Ramoshi community, criminal tribes act, history of Ramoshi community, and social and religious and moral transformations of the Ramoshi community. People from the Ramoshi community across Ahmednagar, Satara, and Pune districts used to attend these conferences.

In the colonial period, every movement had its own periodical and aimed to provide masses

with their own agenda, for instance, Kshatriya Ramoshi Sangha launched their own periodical. Therefore, the Ramoshi community could be brought together and 'Kshatriya Ramoshi (RamaVanshiya)' was published in 1923. In February 1923, the first issue of this magazine was published. As the financial situation of the Sangha was not quite well to be able to sustain as a periodical, we could see the combined issue of 1923, fourth, and fifth together. Thereafter, they did not publish any issues, which clearly indicates that this magazine could not sustain beyond the fifth issue. These published issues covered topics like reports of Kshatriya Ramoshi Sangha meetings, reporting of Ramoshi Shikshan Parishad, old articles on Ramoshi communities, a history of Ramoshi community, and news articles on the Satyashodhak and Brahmanetar movement. As in the overall discourse of Satyashodhak Samaj, 'Vidya/knowledge' was a very important factor. Therefore, Vidyadevi Savitribai Rode and Kshatriya Ramoshi Sangha gave extra emphasis on Vidya/knowledge. Vidyadevi Savitribai Rode had presented many papers on education, benefits of knowledge, and similar issues in the Ramoshi Conference on Education. In paper, Vidyadevi Savitribai said, knowledge is like a pool of resources and if we distribute it to others, it will grow further (Ugale 2016: 4). She strongly believed that the only path of knowledge can bring about a change, and the question of Ramoshi caste can be solved only through education. She wanted to solve the problems of boys pursuing education by building a 'Ramoshi Orphan Boarding'.

Vidyadevi Savitribai Rode tried to uplift the Ramoshi community through her Kshatriya Ramoshi Sangha, Ramoshi Shikshan Parishad, and Kshatriya Ramoshi (Ramavanshiya) Magazine. It was in the spirit of spreading education and thoughts to the community. She was trying to advocate changes in the status of her community as a criminal community with the British government by sending appeals to them. With that, she worked with Satyshodhak Samaj and tried to bring social, religious, and moral changes in the Ramoshi community. While she was doing this, the Ramoshi caste was reproduced in various ways.

5. Conclusion

The attempts of assigning criminal status to caste groups to reform caste groups were dominated by colonialism. A 'protection-giver caste' in pre-colonial Maharashtra, was branded and notified as 'criminal caste' under the colonial rule. Therefore, this particular caste group had to suffer extensively and the problem persists even now, with unresolved statuses and roles of this caste group in the society and polity of Maharashtra state. Although such caste groups could breathe freely and build their caste reformist movements under colonial emancipatory space, there was an overall burden of colonialism on social movements existing at that time. So, as a strategy to keep themselves alive in the hostility of British administration and polity, many times, these movements claimed that they are loyal to the British government. Thus, we cannot ignore the colonial discourse while dwelling upon the caste issues prevalent during that period.

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Chapter 6

Institutionalisation of Manual Scavenging During the Colonial Period in Modern Maharashtra

Chandrakant J. ABHANG

1. Introduction

With the establishment of British rule in Maharashtra, there was a substantial increase in the number of urban centres. The spread of the railway network also led to the growth of new towns along the network. The new urban centres provided employment opportunities, and workers from villages were attracted to these towns. With the increase in population, the towns started facing severe problems of sanitation, health, water supply, and drainage. The surroundings became noxious. Systems of closed drainage and safety tanks were absent. The indigenous latrines in use at the time in the homes of the semi-urban centres were connected to baskets, which were manually carried away by sanitation workers. Night soil accumulated in the baskets was emptied at either dumping grounds outside the village, or near the river, sea, creek and so on. In this way, with the rise of early modern towns in Maharashtra, we see the institutionalisation of the practice of manual scavenging. This practice was city-centred, while villages predominantly continued the traditional practice of *Jungal Pani*, that is, using bushes around the village to relieve oneself in the morning.

2. Pre-colonial sanitary practices

In medieval times, we find some references to sanitary management in the fort complexes. For instance, there are references to indigenous latrines that were constructed for royal families. There are also references to a category of workers called Halalkhors or Mehtars, who were responsible for sanitation work, including manual scavenging. The word Halalkhor has a Persian origin (Mate 1996). It is doubtful whether the term Halalkhor was invented by Akbar, as claimed in Ain-i-Akbari (Yule 1903: 409-410), but the terms Halalkhor, Mehtar, and Bhangi were popularly used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An order[1] regarding the recruitment of Bhangis issued by Peshwa to the

[1] Bhaskar Rao, the governor appointed by Mahadji Shinde in Broach, issued a proclamation in 1783 instructing that 'no Halalkhor, Derah or Chandala Caste shall upon any consideration come out of their houses after nine o'clock in the morning, lest they should taint the air, or touch the superior Hindus in the streets' (Forbs 1813: 232).

Kamvisdar of Dabai Prant dated 10 March 1754, and the proclamation[2] mentioning 'Halalkhor' issued by Marathas at Broach in 1783 is testimony to the incidence of scavenging in the eighteenth century. However, it must be noted that both regions, Dabai and Broach, mentioned in the Maratha records above, were outside the geographical boundaries of the region known today as Maharashtra. The Bhangi community seems to be absent in Maharashtra in this period and was introduced in the region only later. Presumably, up to the beginning of the 19th century, the sanitary needs in the region were taken care of by adopting the traditional mode of open defecation or constructing toilet blocks that did not require manual scavenging. For example, every royal palace on the hill-fort Raigadh had several latrine blocks. They were constructed in such a way that night soil was discharged directly into the deep natural cavities of the hilly region. It is noted that this type of excellent system was not present even in the palaces of Delhi, Agra, or Fatehpur Sikri (Bhave 1997: 85-86). We begin to obtain evidence of manual scavenging in the early 19th century with the establishment of British dominance in the Maratha territories. A document issued in the name of the Pune Collector dated 5 September 1825 gives us information about the allocation of a house to a prison official, which had a separate entrance for the Halalkhors[3]. We do not come across evidence of the presence of manual scavenging in Maharashtra before this specific occurrence; thus, manual scavenging was not practiced in pre-colonial Maharashtra but was institutionalised in the colonial period, especially with the rise of new urban centres.

3. British Sanitation Policies Leading to the Institutionalisation of Manual Scavenging

In 1662, the British received the island of Bombay from the Portuguese as dowry for Charles II. After the sack of Surat by Shivaji in 1664, the British decided to shift their headquarters to the island of Bombay, realising that it was no longer possible for Mughal rulers to protect trade being carried out from Surat. Bombay soon became the main centre for British trade in all of Asia. Consequently, there were efforts to develop the infrastructure in the island city. Wary of the city's deteriorating hygiene by 1722, the British appointed a senior officer to supervise hygiene maintenance. Scavengers, carts, and buffalos to pull the carts were arranged for.

The Chartered Act of 1793 empowered the Governor General to appoint 'Justices of Peace' by selecting individuals from the employees of the East India Company, or the British living in Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. Apart from dispensing justice, they were given the responsibility of maintaining hygiene in the cities. In 1845, the Board of Conservancy was established, which undertook the work of hygiene management (Gadgil 1970: 58-59).

After crushing the revolt of 1857, the British Crown took over the control of India from the British East India Company on 1 November 1858. To compensate for the financial losses

[2] In the order, the Kamvisdar was asked by the Peshwa to send five persons from the Koli, Bhangi and Vaghari Castes (Vad1906: no.315).
[3] Unpublished document, Bharat Itihas Sandhodhak Mandal Pune.

incurred while crushing the revolt, a new tax on the income of individuals (income tax) was imposed. Meanwhile, there were approximately three to four thousand deaths every year due to unhygienic surroundings. The Royal Sanitary Commission was appointed to find a solution to this problem. In the first half of 1864, approximately 6434 deaths occurred due to hygiene-related diseases. In the second half of the same year, the number of deaths reached 12,284. This situation was ascribed to the dismal management of effluent, and the carelessness (Acharya and Shingane 1890: 62) and laziness of the Halalkhor scavengers. It is thus evident that the scavengers were mainly held responsible for the upkeep of sanitation in the towns.

Sir Arthur Crawford, who was appointed to manage public health, wrote that the Halalkhors had created a big problem for the public. They would distribute task amongst themselves but would not actually do it. Therefore, the Municipal Council brought in its own Halalkhors. Earlier, individual house owners had to get their latrines cleaned by hiring scavengers. Crawford transferred this responsibility to the Municipal Council. There were no provisions in the Act of 1865 to collect a levy from citizens for the maintenance of scavengers or Halalkhors. Crawford began strictly collecting the levy[4].

The Royal Sanitary Commission asserted that there were three causes for the sanitation crisis: 1) Constraints of traditional self-governing bodies, 2) illiteracy, and 3) absence of awareness about healthy practices and attitudes among Indians. The Commission called for the immediate attention of the British government towards these issues. The Indian educated class became concerned about the unhealthy practices followed by their countrymen, and efforts were made to improve the situation.

The picture of the prevalent social conditions and people's psyche is reflected in the article '*Jarimari ani Durgandhi*' published in the Marathi monthly Shalapatrak dated 1 July 1884. The author of the article says,

> Recently, the epidemic has caused havoc everywhere. The rains have reduced the fury to some extent. The devastation at Nashik, Saswad, Panvel, and Narayangaon is unprecedented. Entire families have vanished. This has forced us to think about the prevalent conditions. What is causing this epidemic? How is it spreading? These questions need to be answered. To urinate and to defecate is necessary. It is not correct to ignore them just because they are filthy. The neglect is evident even at big places. Only God knows how people live happily in Ganishwadi and Fanaswadi areas of Bombay (Thakur and Khadas 1989: 42).

Epidemics of plague, cholera, and smallpox, caused by disregard for even minimum levels of public sanitation, were responsible for diminishing the population from all strata of society.

[4] Sir Arthur Crawford was the first commissioner of Bombay municipal council. During his tenure, the base of urban infrastructure was setup. Due to Crawford's uncontrolled expenditure, the council's total expense exceeded its income. Crawford was removed from his position by the government in 1871, holding him responsible for misgovernance (Bhosle 2011: 32-33).

However, the so-called higher castes held the lower castes responsible for this crisis and sought to find a solution by sacrificing individuals from lower castes to the deity. Thus, the situation was such that, due to the neglect of hygiene, humans first fell prey to epidemics and to the attitude of orthodoxy. The article '*Hindustanatil swachyata*' published during that period aptly comments that:

> Hindus pretend to be very purificatory in their homes especially in their kitchens. They believed that if the home is free from contamination, then its end in itself. Orthodox old ladies would wash even salt and lime before it is used, but they would not hesitate to throw dirt even in the courtyard or backyard of their own homes. People here think that it is their right to spoil the roads and public places. This is because, for them, the purity is the concept only related to spiritualism and not physical surroundings. In the society where even salt is washed and used, there is no arrangement for cleaning the latrines. If scavenger doesn't show up everyone gets concerned but no one takes up responsibility. It is the hypocrisy of high castes that they pretend to be the worshipers of cleanliness but actually spread filth everywhere at the same time. They desist from even the contact of the shadow of those who clean all this filth. Instead of using their intellect in finding new ways of maintaining hygiene, these higher castes have found out the foolish and new-fangled methods of propagating untouchability (Thakur and Khadas 1989: 49).

On the other hand, British administrators' efforts to manage the crisis of sanitation continued. The following proclamation was circulated all over Maharashtra to implement the Royal Sanitary Commission's recommendations for establishing a new defecation management system to reduce mortality:

From the Hon. Magistrate, District – Satara[5]

> The letter no. 69 dated 22 July 1864 was sent by the honourable President of Sanitary Commission to the office of Secretary General to the government. The details are as follows:
>
> 1) To maintain hygiene in the villages under the control of Bombay, the government is recommended that those villages where there are no halalkhors or scavengers to clean the latrines, the arrangement similar to the one in the military cantonments, with some modifications, if necessary, must be implemented.
> 2) For this purpose, some field or grassland around the village must be acquired. From one corner of this field, a narrow trench must be dug up to the end of the length or the breadth of that field. The trench must be one or one and a half feet deep. The soil removed while digging the trench must be heaped at the distance of one or one and a half feet from the trench. The people of the village must use this trench as a latrine. People should start using this trench from one end and

[5] Bharat Itihas Sanshodhan Mandal, S. G. Joshi Daftar, Rumal No. 20, Letter no. 10812.

after defecation cover night soil with the soil from the heap adjacent to the trench. In this manner, the trench should be used till it is completely covered back with the soil dug out of it. Then the next trench must be dug parallel to the earlier one and be used in a similar manner. At first, the arrangement is to be made for the ladies.

3) Once the field is completely covered with the trenches as mentioned above, the field must be reused with new trenches. Alternatively, the field may be left as it is for some more days and another field may be used. The decision in this regard must be taken considering the size of the village and the area of the field. Thus, by the time the complete field is covered by the trenches, night soil in the first trench used in the field is decomposed and there is no foul smell. If this much time has passed then the first trench must be reused or new field must be brought in the use.

4) It is unlikely that there would be any problem in the digging of the trench due to the caste relations in the village. Nevertheless, if no one is available to accept the responsibility of covering the trenches with soil every evening, the individual who uses the trench must himself pour one or two pans of soil in the trench.

5) The well-off individuals who have big yard around their homes and those who cannot find the service of scavenger to clean the latrines must make a similar arrangement for their family members.

The preceding note was received by the Honourable Police Commissioner-South Division from the General Department of the government by letter no. 1298 dated 27 July 1864 and was immediately forwarded by letter no. 1256 dated 27 September 1864 to the Magistrate of Satara for his comment. The Magistrate of Satara has sent his remark to the Police Commissioner by letter no.1454 dated 17 October 1864 saying that the instructions related to the digging of trenches and using them for defecation, sent by the Chief Medical Officer are excellent.

The above proclamation underlines how even the British administrators saw manual scavenging as essential to keep villages sanitised. In the absence of scavengers to clean latrines, military type arrangements were suggested.

In another attempt to institutionalise sanitation management, the Bombay Village Sanitation Act of 1889 was introduced. The Act provided for a sanitary committee in every village. Village servants who hold land, profits from land, or other emoluments by way of remuneration for services, such as sweeping and conservancy, were placed under the control of the Village Sanitary Committee. In this case, the village servants might have included Bhangis as well as the sections of traditional Balutedars and Vatan holders. This is mainly because the Act talks about the acquisition of land for night soil depots, and such depots could not have been operated without engaging the Bhangi community.

4. Municipal councils and institutionalisation of scavenging

The municipal councils established in various towns were responsible for managing the problem of sanitation within the towns. This was managed by availing the services of scavengers. A noteworthy proclamation by the chairman of the Miraj Municipal Council, originally issued in Marathi in the last decade of the 19th century, provides information regarding the institutionalisation of scavenging at the municipal level. The proclamation concerns the tax imposed on the performance of sanitation work within the jurisdiction of the Miraj Municipal Council. It reads:

Proclamation[6]

The Chairman, Miraj Municipal Council hereby notified to all the residents within the jurisdiction of Miraj Municipal Council that:
With the consent of Miraj Sarkar following tax will be collected for the services of scavengers with effect from 1st October 1891.

1) For one basket of night soil 4 anas per month
2) For two baskets of night soil 6 anas per month, when there are latrines side by side in one house.
3) For three baskets of night soil 8 anas per month. When there are latrines side by side in one house.
4) For more than three baskets of night soil – for first basket 4 anas and 2 anas for every subsequent basket. When there are latrines side by side in one house.
5) For the houses which do not have latrines but pay house tax and have received a number from committee the scavenger tax would be as follows:
   a) For the house paying house tax of 8 anas per year, the per month tax would be 3 paisa
   b) For the house paying house tax of 1 rupee per year, the per month tax would be 6 paisa
   c) For the house paying house tax of 2 rupees per year or more, the per month tax would be 1 rupee
6) For the property which does not have house tax number but is inhabited and has a latrine, the tax would be as per clause no. 1/2/3/4 above. If the property does not have a latrine, the tax would be collected after determining the appropriate house tax and then applying the provisions in clause no. 5 above.
7) For the houses having latrines of percolation bin, per month 8 anas would be collected without cleaning the latrines.
8) The taxes mentioned in the clause no. 1 to 7 would be collected from the owners of the houses or the individuals living inside the house or the custodian of the house

[6] Bharat Itihas Sanshodan Mandal, G. H. Khare Daftar, Rumal no. 3, letter no. 42.

The decision would be implemented in the stated manner. Date 25th November 1891.

M. R. Bhatkhande
Chairman

Image 1. A woman manual scavenger involved in her work (Pathak 1981)

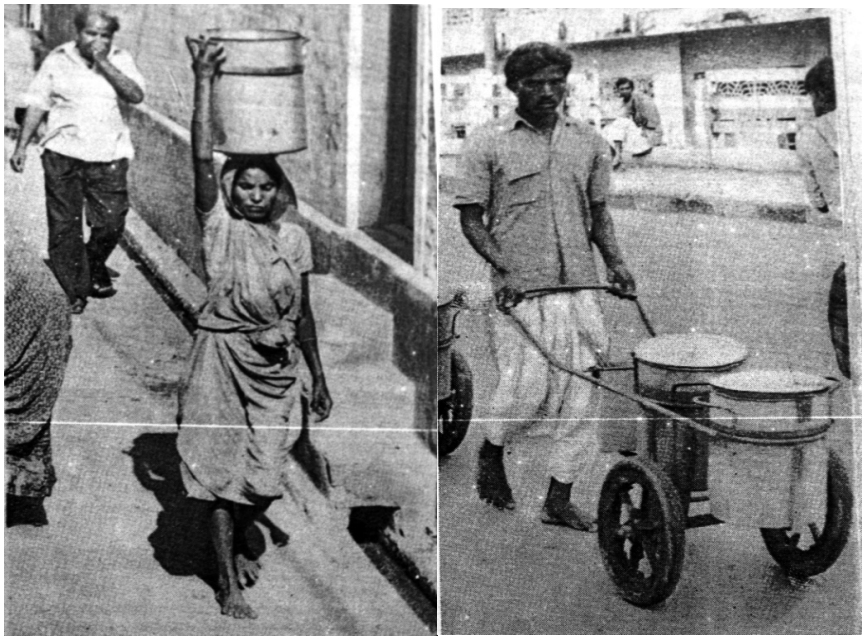

Image 2. Night soil being transported on the head and in a cart (Pathak 1981)

Another record throws light on the financial aspect of the Nashik Municipal Council's expenditure on the maintenance of the scavenging workforce. The following table shows that the Council's statement of accounts for 1864 is dominated by sanitation expenditure.

Table 1: Expenditure in rupees made on sanitation by Nashik Municipal Council in the year 1864

Sr. No.	Post	Monthly pay	Nos.	Total
1.	Medical Officer	100	1	100
2.	Scavenger supervisor	15	2	30
3.	Sweeper - male	10	2	20
4.	Scavenger	15	40	600
5.	Sweeper - female	8	36	288
6.	Cart driver	17	8	136

(Source: Nashik Nagar Palika 1876)

It is evident that a large number of scavengers were employed, and they were paid a good salary. Every scavenger had to clean 26 private and 13 public latrines every day (Shivadkar 1965). It is clear that the sanitation work in the city was a responsibility of the Medical Officer, who had sweepers and scavengers under him. Every individual working in the sanitary department was identified as a scavenger by the upper castes. Though 'scavenger' and 'sweeper' have been used in an interchangeable manner, they in fact denote different responsibilities. Sweepers cleaned roads, and the work of scavengers was to clean human excreta (Nashik Nagar Palika 1876). The above records show that after the establishment of municipal councils, the manual labour-based sanitary system was given an organised structure, and scavengers were recruited in a large number to keep the cities and towns clean. This propagated scavenging as an organised profession.

5. Some Innovative Suggestions for Management of Night Soil and Continued Emphasis on the Role of Scavenger

Some individuals made efforts to manage night soil and related pollution by suggesting experiments and sanitation methods/techniques. However, these ideas and techniques continued the practice of placing the onus of sanitation work on manual scavenging by individuals from the Bhangi community.

a) The research of Chatre for deodorising and reuse of night soil

Traditionally, India has seen the wide use of bovine excreta as a fertiliser, and cow dung-cake has been used as fuel. However, getting rid of human excreta was a major problem. While the dumping system was possible in smaller villages, with the growth in size of villages, dumping night soil became a cause for spoiling the health of the village environs. The threat posed today by the polyethylene plastic material is similar to the threat posed by night soil at that time. The question

then arises, was there any research on managing night soil, similar to current research being undertaken to manage polyethylene? While considering this problem, some documents were found indicating that there was a successful attempt made in this direction in 1872.

The Pune Municipal Council was a relatively small body at that time. The areas of Band Garden, Camp, Station, Wanavadi, and Swargate, which are integral to today's Pune, were outside the jurisdiction of the then Municipal Council. At that time, these areas were basically sugar cane fields or military camps. The government did not allow the Municipal Council to dump its effluent in the Mula-Mutha River, which was getting increasingly polluted, and many diseases were becoming endemic. Nonetheless, some farmers would purchase this effluent as a fertiliser, while others were paid to dump it in their fields. The Camp area became a favoured dumping ground. However, subsequently, the establishment of some important institutions such as Sasson Hospital (1865), Deccan College (1867), and the Collector Office and Court complex (1870) in this area caused more people to visit the area. Hence, people started complaining about the dumping of night soil in that area.

Nonetheless, there was also some consent about the fertilising quality of night soil, which was then referred to as son-khat. It was thought that it could be a useful product only if its odour could be removed. Keru Lakshman Chatre started experiments in this direction. He took an equal proportion of night soil and natural soil, and mixed them well. The mixture was stored in a metal tank to get dehydrated, and then heated in a furnace. The steam was thus generated, and the odour associated with it was removed at some height by the high-rising chimney. According to him, the process took five to six hours. The leftover heated portion was in metal trays, which gave it the shape of bricks. Thus, odourless night soil bricks were prepared that could easily be used. The bricks were lightweight and could also be used as fertiliser in house gardens. Chatre was very optimistic because of the use of these bricks in the construction of the governor's palace at Ganeshkhind. He also provided information on the cost of preparing these bricks. He estimated that 90 sq. ft. night soil and an equal amount of natural soil, five tons of firewood, and 100 brick moulds of 6×4×2 inches would yield 3600 bricks at a rate of 30 bricks per sq. ft. The total depreciation is 1/3. Considering the sale value, the production cost was almost zero.

The above research was reported in the Dnyanprakash dated 15 June 1872. The government took cognisance of the report, and on 8 July 1872 the central agriculture department asked the Bombay Government to obtain thorough information about the research from Chatre. Upon contact, Chatre presented a detailed report on 31 July 1872. At that time, he was a member of the Pune Municipal Council. It is thus evident that municipal councillors of the time not only debated these issues, but also carried out research on them. Clearly, the commendable sense of waste management through recycling was felt well before it became a severe problem.

b) Technique to clean the latrine blocks

There are writings published in the nineteenth century detailing techniques to clean the latrine blocks to mitigate problems associated with night soil and urine pollution:

'…the box filled with the regular soil is placed inside the block. Two buckets—one to collect the night soil and other to collect urine were fixed below. To prevent urine from being sprinkled on person's body, a pan with the hole at the centre is placed on the front bucket. If night soil, urine and water that we use get mixed then it gives very bad odour and makes cleaning process very nauseating and thorny. After using the latrine block, a person must dump the regular soil from the box on the night soil in the back bucket. Thus, the odour is neutralised. The soil is not to be dumped in the front bucket. The water used for cleaning gets accumulated in this bucket and prevents stench. The latrine block, buckets and the places where buckets were placed were to be washed clean every day. Attention must be given that the box is always filled with the regular soil. The night soil and urine accumulated in the bucket must be dumped in a deep ditch dug for the purpose. The ditch must then be covered with the soil. One ditch can be used for 8 to 10 latrine blocks for four days. The place where the ditch was made must be marked to avoid same place being dug again' (Bhave 2017: 35).

These experiments and techniques for the management of night soil were noteworthy efforts directed towards meeting the challenge of sanitation. However, it is amply clear that such experiments and techniques were to be performed with the manual efforts of the scavenging community. No upper caste individual would manually participate in any activity dealing with night soil. In this way, these experiments and techniques further propagated the institutionalisation of scavenging.

6. Bhangi Community's Migration into Maharashtra

It was observed that none of the individuals working as manual scavengers in Maharashtra in the 18th and 19th centuries were from the local Marathi-speaking Dalit community. Maharshi Vittal Ramji Shinde commented that local lower caste communities had declined to work as scavengers. T. N. Aatre writes, "it became a huge controversy as to who is responsible for cleaning the village. The government had to clarify by bringing out a proclamation that the work of village sanitation is traditionally the responsibility of Mahars. But Mahars have never taken care of this responsibility" (Aatre 1959: 65). S. M. Mate has given a list of 52 trades in his book Asprushyanche Prashna (The Problems of Untouchables). The responsibilities of the untouchables are also described in the book. We do not come across scavenger work as one of these responsibilities (Mate 1950: 136). As per the Bombay Act for village sanitation of 1889, a sanitary board was established (Aatre 1959: 61). The same Act states that the village Mahars who possess hadki-hadola land grants are included in the service of the government committee. However, the work done by these Mahars was that of cleaning the roads, and not scavenger work. It is noticed that even the British administration was not ready to

alter the existing caste system. The question then arises as to how a group that did not exist in the traditional caste system of Maharashtra subsequently came into existence?

The following note about scavengers is found in the Maharashtriya Jnanakosh (Maharashtra Encyclopaedia):

> This community emerged from the work of clearing the excreta. Naturally, this community has followers of Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim faiths. This community is mainly concentrated in United Province and Bombay Province. There are castes like Chuhra, Halalkhor, and Mehtar in this community. Scavengers are considered as untouchables. Following reasons may be responsible for their acceptance of scavenger work: Scavengers may be the progenies of Pratiloma marriages or they may be primitive non-Aryans who become Dalits (Ketkar 1929: 874).

Einthoven's book also states that scavengers may be progenies of Pratiloma marriages. Pratiloma progeny is a result of a marriage between a high-caste woman and a low-caste man (Enthovene 1920). Pauline Kolenda, in her study of untouchable sweepers in North India, came to the conclusion that, to escape from religious anxiety, the sweepers refuse the idea that their low status is due to wrong deeds in the previous birth. Instead, they refer their present status to collective myths stating that they were once of much higher caste and fell to a low status due to an accident while performing a meritorious deed (Michael 2007: 32-33). According to one such myth, the original untouchable was a Brahmin who came upon a cow mired in mud. While the Brahmin was trying to save the cow, the cow died, and he came in contact with a dead cow. On seeing this, the other Brahmins outcasted him, and he became the first untouchable (Michael 2007: 33). Thus, it is also mentioned that high caste individuals who have broken some caste rules are made outcaste, and they have become scavengers. It seems that of all the untouchable communities of Maharashtra, Bhangi is the only caste to have migrated from outside the state. The migration most probably occurred from the cantonment cities of the erstwhile provinces of the United Province, namely Bihar, Assam, and Bengal (Enthovene 1920: 104-105)

The word for scavenger, Bhangi may have originated from the profession of making bamboo baskets. To make the baskets, the bamboo must be split or bhanga. This word bhanga may be the origin of the name bhangi (Superintendent of Ethnographic Survey of Bombay 1909: 1-2). Work related to bamboo was regarded as very lowly work. While studying the balutedari system in Village Bebad Ovhal of Pune District, when an elderly man of a Mahar community was asked whether he works with bamboo, he angrily replied that 'we do not do such lowly work'.

The commercial developments in Bombay between 1863 and 1866 attracted migrant workers. Similarly, due to the famine of 1876-77 in Gujrat and Rajputana, many affected people migrated towards Bombay. Some of them were forced to accept the work of manual scavengers. The British offered a high salary to attract the migrated untouchables to scavenging work. In Nashik, the sweeper was offered a monthly pay of 10 rupees, whereas the scavenger was offered 15 rupees per month. The need for employment, remunerative pay, and migration-induced loosening of caste-linkages led

to the acceptance of scavenger work by Untouchables. With hard work, they eradicated the effects of unhygienic surroundings in Bombay, and the standard of living improved. New businesses began and the city developed. Thus, it can be said that the Scavenger caste originated in modern Maharashtra based on professional needs.

Once the Bhangi community migrated to Maharashtra, it acquired a distinct social character. Its social practices and traditions within Maharashtra were developed under complex influences. In the social hierarchy, they received a status equivalent to the Mahars and Mangs. Bhangi sub-castes in Maharashtra are Bhasod, Changadi, Hela, Lalbegi, Makhiyar, and Shaikh. Of these, only the Lalbegi and Shaikh intermarry and inter-dine. These two groups were considered superior to the remaining four groups. Shaikh Bhangis profess faith in Islam, while Lalbegis follow both Hindu and Muslim traditions. Bhangis consumed all types of meat including cow meat, and sometimes even consumed dead cattle. However, like other castes of Maharashtra, Bhangis too avoid meat in the Shravan month (Kalelkar 1999: 138-139). Women in the Bhangi community are considered equal in family matters, participate in social and religious matters on an equal footing, and contribute to the family income (Singh 1999).

In a way, the origin and organisation of the scavenger profession are the products of the British administrative policies. The need for scavengers originated after the establishment of military cantonments and municipal councils. The British army would generally carry scavengers along with it to maintain hygiene in the camping area. In this manner, scavengers spread out all over India along with the British Indian Army. Enthovene also states that the scavengers must have arrived from the north, accompanying the British army. We can be certain about the correlation between the British military camps and scavenging profession, as the Supreme caste panchayat presiding over all the subordinate caste panchayats of scavengers living in various localities in Pune is called Brigadi Panchayat, and the word Brigadi has its origins in the British military system. Even the proclamation stated above notes that sanitation should be organised on the model of the military system. Thus, the need for scavenger workers must have originated with the military camp or cantonments, and the rise of new urban centres.

7. Conclusion

The rise of new urban centres in colonial Maharashtra was accompanied by the deterioration of sanitary conditions. The British introduced sanitary policies, often modelled on the methods followed in military camps, to improve hygiene in cities and towns. The establishment of municipal councils further systematised sanitary management. Manual scavenging was introduced during this period to address the problem of removal of human waste from inhabited areas. Better techniques and methods to improve sanitary management were proposed by the concerned individuals, but the real onus of keeping places free from noxious waste remained on the toiling Bhangi community. This community was not part of the traditional social structure of Maharashtra, and their migration

to there was prompted by the policies of the colonial government, leading to the institutionalisation of manual scavenging.

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Chapter 7

Who are the *Kolhāṭī*?: Development of Flexible Thinking on the Concept of *Jāti* among *Tamasgīr* in Maharashtra, India[1]

Reiko IIDA

1. Introduction

The study of caste is considered a 'gate-keeping concept' to understand Indian society (cf. Appadurai 1986). In earlier anthropological studies, academic scholars performed 'caste' analysis based on essentialism and substance (e.g., Dumont 1980; Ghurye 1932). After these studies were conducted, the perspective of caste studies shifted from essentialism to constructionism (e.g., Cohn 1996; Dirks 2001). These studies examined historical changes in the caste category. Recently, researchers have examined the fluid and dynamic transformation of one caste category into another. In my field research, many informants described themselves as accepting multiple caste perspectives and categories depending on the context. Therefore, based on several of their narratives, I identified the need to flexibly consider the concepts of caste and *jāti* and consider the context in diachronic studies. This paper focuses on the narratives of *tamāśā* practitioners (*tamasgīr*) and their *jāti* and describes their perspectives.

Tamāśā is a style of folk art that originated in the state of Maharashtra in western India. A *tamāśā* performer possesses a singing-and-dancing repertoire called *lāvnī* and performs impersonations, burlesques, and comedies with sexually suggestive content. It is an art form that adopts what is fashionable at the time and performed using the steps and gestures followed in Indian classical dancing. Over the years, *tamāśā* has been developed and performed mainly in rural areas. It is often performed in rural thanksgiving celebrations and is as popular as wrestling, another star attraction in the rural areas of Maharashtra. *Tamāśā* is conventionally performed in villages, and the audience mainly comprises male farmers. As women who perform *lāvnī* often engage in prostitution, the urban elite tends to consider *tamāśā* as a vulgar, rural art form. However, in the 1990s, *tamāśā* performances were widely staged in urban areas, and the state of Maharashtra started investing in the development of *tamāśā* as the state's traditional folk art to secure it as a resource for the tourism industry and revitalise rural areas. Today, the latest developments in *tamāśā* are keenly followed by

[1] Unless otherwise noted, I have assigned fictitious names to research informants to maintain confidentiality and to protect their privacy.

print, television, film, and Internet media.

According to the article 338B of the Indian Constitution of India under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment National Commission for Backward Classes, *kolhāṭī* is a category of Nomadic Tribes-B (NTs). However, my field research indicated that the *tamāśā* group included various people belonging to different *jāti*. In this case, what is the meaning of *kolhāṭī* and who makes up the *kolhāṭī*? This paper attempts to answer these questions by reviewing contemporary caste studies.

2. Historical Development of *Tamāśā*

This section provides an overview of the historical background of *tamāśā*. It is generally estimated that *tamāśā* emerged between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see Abrams 1974; Pandit 2004). There are two main theories on the origin of *tamāśā*. One states that the art form originated in the military barracks of the Mughal Empire that ruled regions of the western part of India in the sixteenth century, whereas the other clarifies that it originated in the Maratha Empire that ruled the region in the seventeenth century. Therefore, *tamāśā* originated during the hegemony of a Muslim empire according to the former theory and during the reign of a Hindu state according to the latter. In addition, Abrams argues that there had originally been a *tamāśā* prototype that was developed into the *tamāśā* of the present day by merging the prototype with acrobatics which was the traditional discipline of *kolhāṭī* and indigenous dancing (Abrams 1974).

Although it is difficult to determine *tamāśā*'s exact date of birth, the art form clearly evolved in a hybrid manner by rapidly absorbing various artistic elements and fashions, including the physical movements, steps, and gestures followed in other Indian classical dance forms. Due to this background, there are wide-ranging views on the origin of *tamāśā*. Indeed, Vatsyayan argues that the current form of *tamāśā* originated only as late as the eighteenth century (Vatsyayan 1980: 169). Similarly, Abrams argues that during the reign of the Maratha Empire, *tamāśā* actors who had been secretly employed in the state service performed for the enemy in their military camps and engaged in intelligence gathering (Abrams 1990). During the spread of the *bhakti* movement, many saint-poets wrote devotional poems praising deities, which were subsequently acted out as *tamāśā.* In addition, various heroic epics were written during this period, and these were duly incorporated into *tamāśā*. According to Rege, more than 300 works were composed during the reign of the Maratha Empire (Rege 2002: 1041).

In any case, *tamāśā* developed under the patronage of Maratha peshwas (prime ministers). However, in 1817-1818, the Maratha state was defeated in the Third Anglo-Maratha war. With the disappearance of the peshwas' patronage, the golden age of *tamāśā*s came to an end. Subsequently, *tamāśā* became associated in the public mind with street performances. The *lāvnī*, song, and dance parts performed by women in such street performances and the relationships between *tamāśā* performers and various local politicians. Soon, *tamāśā* became an object of contempt in society.

From the late nineteenth century, *tamāśā* had a larger audience in Mumbai than in the rural areas. Travelling *tamāśā* companies also perform for Mumbai's working class (Bhandare 2006; Prakash 2010). Since the 1970s, the government of Maharashtra has been claiming to be striving to keep its folk theatre traditions alive by conducting activities such as succession workshops for *tamasgīr* to help them pass on their performance knowledge to their children. A government-sponsored *tamāśā* festival (*mohatsva*) and competition was held in Akruj, Solapur district, Maharashtra. However, the meagre, token support given by the state government to these activities has more political than cultural value.

3. Background of *Tamasgīr*

Locals and academic scholars consider *tamasgīr* to belong to the *kolhāṭī* (Brandon and Banham 1997). As described by Edwardes, the *kolhāṭī* of Bombay depends largely on the prostitution of their women for their livelihood (Edwardes 1924). A *kolhāṭī* girl, on attaining puberty, can choose the profession and appears before the caste assembly. Further, with the consent of the members of the assembly, the girl becomes a prostitute. The *kolhāṭī* has been known to kidnap high-caste girls and bring them up as prostitutes. Therefore, they were often kept under police surveillance (Edwardes 1924: 85). Meanwhile, Russell reported that the *kolhāṭī* voluntarily commit to a life of crime (Russell 1916: 531). Through such discourses, academics and colonial administrators consolidate a negative image of the *kolhāṭī*, which assigns them a low social position. This stigma affects the image of *tamasgīr* as well. However, various *jāti*s other than the *kolhāṭī* exist in the *tamāśā* community, such as *mahār*, *māng*, *dombārī*, and *maratha*. How did this social image emerge?

The *kolhāṭī* is considered as an ancient nomadic tribe. They set up tents outside villages, where the male members give acrobatic performances and the female members help attract crowds by singing and dancing. Subsequently, they move on to a new village with their tents and other possessions strapped to their donkeys' backs (Badhare 2006: 30). Their nomadic nature and ability to adapt to various cultures make the *kolhāṭī* ideal for *tamāśā* performers. Moreover, any individual performer has a multifarious religious and caste background. Many *tamāśā* performers belong to other backward classes (OBCs), scheduled castes (SCs), and *mahār* or *māng*, which are Dalit castes designated by the Constitution of India. There is also a small but significant minority of upper-caste performers as Brahmans, Marathas, Muslims, and Buddhists. *Tamāśā* is a very flexible, hybrid performance art that, unlike classical dance forms such as *bharatanatyam* and *kathak*, freely incorporates the characteristics of other Indian classical dance forms, such as steps and body motions. In particular, the *lāvnī* borrows steps from *kathak* and hand gestures from *bharatanatyam*[2].

The fact that *tamāśā* is not performed by a single *jāti* but is acceptable to many *jāti* and religious communities makes it possible to introduce new knowledge and technology in this art form

[2] The typical original gesture in the *lāvnī* is called the *mujurā.*

and enables the 'incorporation' of entertainment into the world of *tamāśā*. Originally, the *lāvnī* was passed on among generations as an oral tradition; however, cases have been recorded where information on the *lāvnī* was left as letters in notebooks, which indicates the presence of literate people within the *tamāśā* community. From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, Patthe Bapurao, who was a Brahmin, wrote many *lāvnī* and *vāg* scripts. These cases can be seen from the above that *tamāśā* is not only carried by a single *jāti* but various peoples from many different backgrounds. It is clear that tamasgir is a person who is not part of the local society and enter into the *tamāśā* community for several reasons. Generaly, *tamāśā* was performed by people who were marginalised from the local society. Indeed, the collective principle of *jāti* that underlies *tamāśā* performances is an extremely dynamic concept.

4. Various *Jāti* Narratives by *Tamasgīr*

Regarding to the diversity of their backgrounds, I will examine about the *Tamasgir*'s perception and recognition of own *jātī* with some cases. The first narrative is extracted from an interview with a famous actress who is currently appearing in a Marathi movie. She was asked about *jāti* to clarify the fluidity of the *jāti* perspective within the *kolhāṭī* tribe.

Case 1. Uma (52 years old at the time of the interview, in 2012)

Iida: Do you belong to the *kolhāṭī* tribe?

Uma: Yes, I'm *kolhāṭī*. Uh, one second please. Mum! We are *kolhāṭī* right? Which is the better answer?

Uma's mother[3]: *Kolhāṭī* is the better answer. Yes, we are *kolhāṭī*.

Iida: Do you have another *jāti*?

Uma's mother: I am from Maratha. However, my parents were freedom fighters. So, they were doing *tamāśā*. My cousin (*chulat bhau*) is still doing agriculture in Solapur. They did not perform *tamāśā*. After independence, my parents remained in the *tamāśā* troupe. I was born and raised in the *tamāśā* community, and I gave birth to children (one son and three daughters) in the *tamāśā* community. This is why we are *kolhāṭī*.

Iida (to Uma's mother): Did you marry a *kolhāṭī* man?

[3] Uma's mother's name is Mayabai; Mayabai was 82 years old at the time of the interview. Her parents belonged to the Maratha community and joined a *tamāśā* troupe to maintain their freedom of movement under British colonial rule. They remained in the troupe even after independence. Two of Mayabai's daughters are *nāchi* (dancers). On marriage, Mayabai said, 'the concept of marriage is totally a reverie. (There are) more important things in the world than marriage. It has very unfree thinking (in the) marriage system, and we don't want to be dominated by one man.' It is conventional for such people to consider themselves *kolhāṭī*, because many Maharashtrians think that all *tamāśā* performers are *kolhāṭī*.

Uma: Nope! She never got to marry[4] a man!

In this narrative, Uma and her mother seem to understand that their *kolhāṭī jāti* is linked with *tamāśā*, although their original *jāti* is different. They were born and raised in the *tamāśā* community and actively define themselves as *kolhāṭī*.

Case 2. Yamunabai Waikar (98 years old, in 2012)

Yamunabai is famous as a *lāvnī* artist not only in Maharashtra but also across the country. In 2012, she received a Padma Shree award—India's fourth-highest civilian honour. She is from the *dombārī* community, and her parents conducted acrobatic rope and fire performances on the street. When she was a child, Yamunabai and her mother sang *lāvnī* from door to door. She obtained much of her *lāvnī* knowledge (including old *lāvnī*) from her mother. She recognises her own *jāti* as *dombārī,* because she had conducted *dombārī* panchayat duty in the 1960s. Further, many *dombārī* people consider *dombārī* and *kolhāṭī* to be similar.

Case 3. Kirtibai (in her 50s at the time of the interview, in 2011)

Kirtibai is a famous *lāvnī* dancer and well-known Marathi film actress. She defines her *jāti* as *kolhāṭī*, although her father was an Arab and she does not know her mother's *jāti.* Recently, she started actively encouraging *tamāśā* as a folk performance art and the advancement of its practitioners in Maharashtra through her political and media networks. In newspaper and magazine articles and on TV, she describes herself as *kolhāṭī*. Moreover, Rege indicates that numerous famous Marathi actresses are *kolhāṭī* (Rege 1995: 33). However, the reality is more complex; successful film actresses from the *tamāśā* community introduce newcomers to film production and staff as their cousins or sisters, due to which the filmmakers believe that the newcomers belong to the same *jāti*. In the *tamāśā* community, such group relationships are more important than blood relationships. Therefore, we could say that a *tamasgīr* becomes a *kolhāṭī* by appearing in the media.

Case 4. Reshmabai (in her 40s at the time of the interview, in 2009)

Reshmabai lived in the Aryabhushan Theatre, Pune City with her group members, from 2000 to 2011. I asked her about her *jāti* when she was talking about her life story. After thinking for a while, she replied, 'My father was Muslim and my *jāti* is … *kalawant.*' However, *kalawant* is not the name of a *jāti*; it means 'performer' in Marathi. This narrative indicates that she did not know her own *jāti,* because *jāti* was not important for *tamasgīr*'s life. In 2012, I interviewed Reshmabai's younger sister[5] who also did not recognise her *jāti*. In addition, Reshmabai and her sister worship the local Hindu god and Dargah (an Islamic shrine built on the grave of a Sufi

[4] Her reference is to legally binding marriage.

[5] She moved from a rural *tamāśā* group to the theatre group following Reshmabai's retirement.

saint) in the Aryabhushan Theatre. They did not have the opportunity to recognise their own *jāti* through ordinary caste-based rituals and events. However, in a TV interview in 2010, Reshmabai described her own jāti as *kolhāṭī*, indicating that she is a 'practitioner of Maharashtra's tradition.

Case 5. Sushimabai (in her 40s at the time of the interview, in 2009)

Although Sushimabai's parents converted from Hinduism to Buddhism, she described her own *jāti* as *mahar* in 2009. She said that her former husband was Muslim, whereas her second husband was Brahmin. Despite having two daughters, Sushimabai maintained no interaction or connection with them. She frequently appeared on TV and in magazines and described her position to have been changed by context. If she appeared as a traditional folk art practitioner, for example, under the auspices of the government, she introduced herself as *kolhāṭī*; however, in the context of social development and as an advocate for the betterment of the life of lower castes, she presented herself as *mahar* or Dalit. In other words, she changed her caste self-representation to satisfy social expectations.

5. Liquid group logic

The *kolhāṭī* status is not reproduced by the principle of in-marriage, as seen in ordinary *jāti*. Rather, it is attributed to a group formed by individuals of various origins. The liquidity of the collective principle in *tamasgīr* is linked to the flexibility of the entertainment succession system and the form of the entertainment and artistic discipline itself. Usually, Indian music and performance arts operate under a *gharānā* system. Even in the world of classical music and classical performance art, the teacher-student relationship is emphasised, and, in the schools called *gharānā*, studying under a guru and acquiring knowledge on arts and crafts is the norm (cf. Mehta 2011; Neuman 1990 [1980]; Tamori 2000). In other words, in *gharānā*, arts and crafts are passed on from a master to a disciple through instruction and viewed as being 'handed over'. Indeed, it is forbidden for a person belonging to one *gharānā* to learn from another *gharānā*.

However, *tamāśā* does not adhere to this type of system[6]. It has its own unique group formation logic. *Tamasgīr* says, 'For example, *kathak* has Delhi *gharānā*, Banaras *gharānā*, and Lucknow *gharānā*. However, *tamāśā* and *lāvnī* have no *gharānā'*. It is a good way to get the performing skills for various repertories and different types of *lāvnī* from many gurus instead of belonging to a *gharānā*. *Tamasgīr* reveres the group called *Phad*. The members of the group are instrument players (*jelkari*), dancers (*nāchi*), and comedians (*songaḍya*). In the *phad*, most of the group leaders are women. Many *tamasgīrs* progress in their careers by moving from one group to another, for example, from a rural group to an urban group, based on the connections made through their relatives and former group members. The main function of the group leader is to decide which

[6] There are gurus in *tamāśā*; they are teachers and experts who do not follow any additional special roles.

pieces to perform and how to avoid any trouble with other groups, as well as securing stages. In addition, the group's income is always disclosed in front of its members within the stage performance day. Further, one-third of all income is used to fund group needs (for food, medicine, and everyday sundries). This special group logic aims to help people of different origins live together.

6. Conclusion

Tamasgīrs often say, 'We have an opinion that differs from the opinion of Brahmins', 'We don't mind (being) anyone's eating companions', and 'We have no rule about the touching taboo'. Further, they express similar comments that reflect their freedom from *jāti* constraints. In particular, the *tamasgīr*'s narrative that 'we are free' has triggered social criticism and discrimination against this community.[7] *Tamasgīr*'s flexible perspective of *jāti* enables them to change the narratives about their own *jāti* according to contexts, social occasions, and social expectations. It seems that studies based on fixed and static definitions of caste and *jāti* are limited in that they cannot clarify these concepts from the *tamasgīr'*s perspective. Changing their narratives flexibly is a strategy followed by *tamasgīr* to survive and develop their status under challenging social conditions.

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[7] Every *tamasgīr* has had experiences of discrimination. One woman, Ms. MH, narrated the following story: One day, Ms. MH and her group went to a village for a *tamāśā* performance. They pitched a tent on the edge of the village (they were not allowed in the village centre). Since Ms. MH had some time before the start of the *tamāśā* performance, she walked around the village. Suddenly, a stone struck her head—a villager had thrown a stone at Ms. MH. While narrating this story, she attempted to act cheerful, but she appeared sad.

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