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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reshaping the figure of the Shudra: Tukaram Padwal's *Jatibhed Viveksar* (Reflections on the Institution of Caste)

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Abstract

This article argues that the genealogy of modern anti-caste critique is incomplete without a contextualized and close reading of *Jatibhed Viveksar*, a nineteenth-century Marathi-language text written under the pseudonym *Ek Hindu* ('One Hindu' or 'A Hindu'). One of the first lower-caste commentaries in the Marathi print-world, the treatise clearly departed from the earlier iterations of non-Brahman caste politics in western India and laid the groundwork for what later came to be known as the 'anti-caste movement'. I demonstrate how *Jatibhed Viveksar* engaged with preceding expressions of caste politics in western India by disputing two commonly deployed concepts in early modern caste controversies: first, the received proscriptions against *varna sankara* (or the intermixing of castes) and, second, the idea that the Shudras were the progeny of the 'moral failure' of *varna sankara. Ek Hindu* argued that not just the Shudras, but the Brahmans too have mixed-caste ancestors and thus cannot claim purity of lineage. Moreover, the author wrested the Shudras from a constellation of negative meanings by deploying the 'Aryan invasion narrative'; he represented them as indigenous heroes who were vanquished by the Aryan-Brahmans. The conceptual innovations, intellectual sources, and frames of thought mobilized by *Jatibhed Viveksar* have significantly shaped the common sense of the ensuing articulations of anti-caste politics.

Keywords: Anti-caste politics; nineteenth-century Maharashtra; Shudra; *varna sankara*

Introduction

In 1874, the Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth Seekers Society), a well-known anti-caste collective of lower-caste activists in Maharashtra, in a village near Pune, distributed free copies of *Jatibhed Viveksar* (Reflections on the Institution of Caste), a book whose author is identified simply as *Ek Hindu* ('One Hindu' or 'A Hindu').[1] Adopting the text as an ideological resource for its activism, the Samaj took it to peasants and artisans, who

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

constituted the majority of the lower castes in Maharashtra. As they did with much of their early literature, it is likely that Samaj activists read the text aloud to them.

Anti-caste critics had recognized the potential of the text nearly a decade earlier. In 1861, the first edition of the text was published by Vasudev Navrange, a lower-caste publisher and an anti-caste activist; the second edition in 1865 received support from Jotirao Phule, the founder of the Samaj, and arguably the most prominent anti-caste activist in late nineteenth-century western India. The anti-caste activists' enthusiasm for *Jatibhed Viveksar* was propelled by the fact that the text was one of the first published critiques of caste from a lower-caste perspective.[2]

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

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

Although *Jatibhed Viveksar* illuminates how the first generation of lower-caste thinkers intervened in their contemporary political discourse and laid the groundwork for the articulation of caste politics in the future, there has been little historical

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

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

To my knowledge, Dhananjay Keer's 1964 biography of the anti-caste activist Jotirao Phule is our earliest confirmation that Tukaram Tatya Padwal was the author of *Jatibhed Viveksar*. Keer informs us that Tukaram Padwal, a Bhandari by caste, belonged to a network of first generation-educated lower-caste writers and reformers.[3] In their works on Jotirao Phule, both Keer and O'Hanlon suggest that Padwal's friendship with Jotirao Phule brought him closer to the anti-caste social network.[4] Padwal was among the first generation of lower-caste writers to participate in a vernacular publishing world that thus far had been dominated by Brahman writers. Hardly recognized as an anti-caste activist, Padwal inhabited the network of non-Brahman social activists.

We know very little about Padwal except that he was a moderately prosperous merchant and engaged in business for a European firm. Along with other small traders and merchants, Padwal was also at the forefront of an agitation against the levy of indirect taxes on commodity trading.[5] He organized adult education classes for peons, small shopkeepers, contractors, and workers, and opened schools for the children of artisan castes, 'Untouchables', and peasants.[6]

By 1880, he had joined the Theosophical Society and worked closely with its founders, H. S. Olcott and Helena Blavatsky.[7] Besides supervising the Bombay chapter of the society after its founders moved to Adyar, he contributed to the society by publishing copies of the Bhagwat Gita, Patanjali's Yogasutra, and compilations of Rajayoga and Sankhya Karika.[8] He continued to engage with vernacular publishing

[3]Bhandari is a non-Brahman lower caste in the caste hierarchy specific to western India. Members of this caste are native to the coastal region of Konkan and Bombay. They are known to practice toddy-tapping.

[4]Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley: Father of the Indian Social Revolution* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1974), pp. 93–95 and O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, pp. 42–43.

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

[6]Ibid.

[7]Critical of dominant interpretations of Christianity and the ways of 'Western civilization', Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott formed the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875. Tukaram Padwal must have been one of their earliest members in India. He was the general secretary of the South section of the society but resigned from the position in 1889 stating that he was inundated with work and his 'little command in English' made things all the more difficult. *The Theosophist*, no. 10, April 1889, p. Ixxix. Also see Kenneth W. Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India. Vol. III.1, Socio-religious Reform Movements in British India*. Cambridge Histories Online (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 168–169.

[8]'Theosophy in India', *Theosophy World*, https://www.theosophy.world/encyclopedia/india-theosophy, [accessed 5 September 2022].

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by establishing a publishing house called Tatwavivechana (An Inquiry of Truth).[9] Along with compiling the works of the seventeenth-century poet-saint Tukaram entitled *Tukarambaba ani Tyanche Shisya Yanchi Abhanga Gatha* (Tukarambaba and his Disciplines) in 1889, he also published *Eknath Maharajanchya Abhanganchi Gatha* (The story of Eknath's Devotional Poetry).[10] Tukaram Tatya was known as a generous patron in religious reformist circles. In a letter Helena Blavatsky refers to him as a 'positively extraordinary man: ready to throw thousands for a whim'.[11] Better known as a publisher, patron, and theosophist, we know very little about Padwal as a writer.

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

Padwal's foil

Almost as soon as it was published, *Jatibhed Viveksar* met with bitter hostility from upper-caste quarters. In 1862, the editors of *Dnyana Prakash* (The Light of Knowledge), a bilingual journal published from Pune with a predominantly Brahman editorial board, took issue with it for 'insulting their ancestors'. What makes the journal's ire all the more interesting is that this was a reformist journal: its editors saw themselves as critical of Brahman orthodoxy. The journal was among those that vehemently criticized the depraved character of the Brahman castes and questioned the validity of religious knowledge—a key source of Brahmanical superiority—and advocated for the

[9]Tukaram Tatya Padwal was not the first successful non-Brahman printer-publisher of the nineteenth-century Marathi print world. Veena Naregal's exhaustive study of the nineteenth-century Marathi literary field emphasizes how the participation of Ganpat Krishnaji and Javaji Dadaji, both figures belonging to non-Brahman castes, transformed 'the story of Marathi print'. Ganpat Krishnaji (1800–1860), who belonged to the Koli Bhandari caste, had developed the technique of manufacturing his own ink, and pioneered the production of Marathi font in 1846. Javaji Dadaji (1830–1882), who established the famous Nirnay Sagar Press, belonged to the Maratha community. Dadaji dabbled in printing and diversified his business to the casting and selling of Marathi types. Naregal mentions that Dadji's Marathi type cut was known for its precision and helped printers reduce excessive paper use. The involvement of non-Brahman figures in the profession of printing was no coincidence. Naregal points out that in the early nineteenth century, despite their engagement with modern technology and forms of knowledge production, literate members from the Brahman castes were disinclined to carry out the manual labour that accompanied the running of a printing press. Thus, with the bourgeoning print world in western India, members of semi-literate non-Brahman castes did not let this opportunity pass. Moreover, both Ganpat Krishnaji and Javaji Dadaji learned their trade at the American Mission Press. Unlike members of the Brahman castes, who might have viewed working closely with the missionaries as a violation of their ritual status, non-Brahman printers approached it as an opportunity for employment. See Veena Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere*. Permanent Black Monographs. Opus 1 Series (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), pp. 180–181.

[10]G. M. Kulkarni, *Marathi Vangmay Kosh*. Vol. 2, part 1 (Mumbai: Maharashtra Government, 1946), p. 90.

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

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reform of Hinduism. This raises the question: what made Padwal's intervention offensive not only to the orthodox Brahmans (this was only to be expected), but also to the reformists?

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

Padwal's proposition also caught middle-class Brahmans off-guard because it departed from the contemporary register of caste reform. The upper-caste liberal polemicists of the nineteenth century, such as Balshastri Jambhekar and Gopal Hari Deshmukh, among others, argued that the reasons for the degeneration of the Hindu religion in the present could be traced to the corrupt practices of the Brahmans.[12] As a counterpoint, they invoked an exemplary Brahman past, when their ancestors lived a virtuous, scholarly life and deserved their superior status. They invoked this pure past, untainted at the source, in order to provoke Brahmans into reclaiming a lost golden past, albeit within the frameworks of colonial modernity. While Padwal did not doubt the virtues and scholarship of the very first men—the *Rishi* (sages) to whom the Brahmans traced their ancestry and kinship with each other—he argued that, nevertheless, they had mixed caste origins. *Jatibhed Viveksar* stirred much controversy by casting 'aspersions' on the purity of Brahman lineage—the fount of Brahman exceptionalism and the very foundation of Brahmanical social reform.

Two to three decades before the publication of the *Jatibhed Viveksar*, the first generation of English-educated, middle-class natives contemplated the possibilities of an improved Hindu social life. Educated in colonial institutions such as Elphinstone College and Robert Money High School in Bombay, their reformist opinions bore imprints of European ideas of 'useful knowledge' and missionary criticism of Hindu institutions and practices. Particularly, they were convinced that European knowledge and skills were responsible for its civilizational advancement. This also meant that India's poverty, backwardness, and colonial rule were the result of its stagnant notion of knowledge.[13]

Thus, Balshastri Jambhekar, the editor of the first native newspaper in western India *Durpan* (The Mirror) and the director of Normal class,[14] argued that Indian antiquity

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

[13]Bagade, *Maharashtratil Prabodhan ani Varga Jati Prbhutva*, p. 165.

[14]Organized on the lines of L'Ecole Normale in France, Normal class worked towards training native teachers in modern educational practices.

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harboured an idea of knowledge restricted to its religious iteration. While Indian philosophers pursued abstruse branches like metaphysics and logic, useful only in religious debates and to gain victories in scholarly arguments, they overlooked the utility of knowledge in the 'common business of life'.[15]

The English-educated social commentators advocated 'new ways of knowing' the world, for they strongly believed in the newness of the present and its radical break from the past. Rejecting the purported timelessness of traditional Vedic knowledge, Jambhekar argued that the advantages of ancient forms of learning have to be understood in their own historical context. In his view, 'the certainty required for navigating the everyday business of life in the present could be guaranteed only by ways of knowing rooted in the evidence of the senses (*pratyaksha praman*)[16] and not by 'traditional' Vedic knowledge that drew its authority from faith and concerned itself with otherworldly knowledge (*paraloksambandhi shastra*).[17]

Marathi *Dnyana Prasarak Sabha* (The Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge) broadly shared Jambhekar's views.[18] The newspaper of the society, called the *Marathi Dnyana Prasarak*, published essays that highlighted the linkages between the furtherance of laicized knowledge and the welfare of ordinary people, economic and political development, and the enrichment of the seeker's inner life.[19] By calling for the institutionalization of vocational and practical knowledge systems as well as their diffusion among ordinary people, such liberal discussions on knowledge shook the foundations of Brahman claims to exclusivity.

But this new vision of Hindu social life, reconfigured by urban elites to keep pace with 'the unprecedented times', remained rooted within the narrow ambit of an upper-caste world view. A series of letters, together called *Shatapatre* (A Hundred Letters), published by Gopal Hari Deshmukh in the reformist newspaper *Prabhakar*, is symptomatic of this world view. Deshmukh's piercing critique of the Brahman castes' preoccupation with *Shastras* and the performance of rituals emerged from his concern that the Brahmans in the present had lost sight of 'duty proper to their *swadharma*' (or prescribed duties). Widely known as *Lokahitawadi* (A well-wisher of the people) in his letters published from 1848 onwards, Deshmukh emphasized that 'true Brahminness' was characterized by scholarly pursuit, practice of good deeds, and the ability to make reasoned judgements—that is, to distinguish truth from falsehood. But present-day Brahmans blindly followed customs, not once holding them up to the test of reason, reducing the complex intellectual imperative of the Brahman varna to the mere performance of *Puja* (worship). Deshmukh lamented that 'there remains no

[15] *Durpan*, 24 August 1832, pp. 52, 53.

[16] J. T. (James Thomas) Molesworth (trans.), *A Dictionary, Marathi and English*, 2d edn (Bombay: Printed for Government at the Bombay Education Society's Press, 1857).

[17] Bal Shastri Jambhekar, 'Dig-durshan (Direction)', in *Memoirs and Writings of Āchārya Bāl Gangādhar Shāstri Jāmbhekar 1812–1846*, (ed.) G. G. Jambhekar (Pune: G. G. Jambhekar, 1950), Vol. 1.

[18] The Society's membership included reformers such as Dadoba Pandurang, the author of books on Marathi grammar and an ideologue of the radical reformist organization *Paramhansa Mandali*, and Govind Narayan Madgaonkar, who wrote extensively in Marathi about domestic reform and the need for native improvement. Both men were involved in the British administration's educational activities in the Bombay Presidency.

[19] *Marathi Dnyana Prasarak* 5, no. 12 (1855), p. 372.

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difference between the *Bhatts* and the *Guravs* (Shudra priests)'.[20] The comparison was meant to deride the Brahmans and draw their attention to how 'low' they had plummeted. In his view their fixation with ritual performances and negligence of learning and righteous actions had reduced the Brahmans to '*majurdar*' (or labourers just like the Shudra).[21]

Deshmukh thus punctured Brahmanical arrogance by reinforcing Brahmanical values—the symbolic hierarchy between intellectual activity and manual labour and associating the Brahman with the former. Like Deshmukh, many liberal reformists concurred with colonial administrators and missionaries that the caste order was a relic from the Indian 'traditional past', but were unwilling to give up the moral meanings encoded in the varna hierarchy.[22] Rather, they sought a rational version of the caste order that would not impede the expansion of capitalist modernity. And so, caste entered reformist discussions as a foil, a symptom of degenerate Hindu morality. Its counterpoint was the ideal of a flexible varna hierarchy which, for them, had existed in the golden Indic past and had allowed for social mobility on the basis of merit.

In mid-nineteenth century liberal circles, social reform centred around undertaking sea voyages and consuming 'unclean food'.[23] Embarking on a sea voyage was perceived as not only a courageous act, but the traveller was also lauded for being an 'improved native' who embodied 'liberal sentiment'. The 4 July 1834 issue of *Durpan* reported that the return of Samuldas Desabhaee from England stirred such curiosity among the people of Bombay that many thronged to visit 'the Hindoo who [had] braved the prejudices of caste and the perils of the sea'. Similarly, the members of the *Paramhansa Mandali*, a reformist organization established in 1840, intentionally used transgressive practices to disavow their 'clean' caste status. In the secret meetings held by the *Mandali*, the members consumed bread baked in a non-Hindu bakery and sipped from a glass shared with other members.[24]

While these practices challenged existing caste norms, they remained deeply rooted in upper caste experiences. After all, only members of 'clean' castes—the upper caste, middle caste, and, in some cases, even the Shudras—ran the risk of violating their caste status. For the predominantly upper-caste member of the *Mandali*, caste was not an exploitative social relation, like the one experienced by the Shudra and Ati-shudra castes ('Untouchable' castes), but more a question of abandoning disciplinary regimes of the self-dictated by caste or family.[25] And in place of these practices, they wished to embrace new technologies of disciplining the self associated with 'liberal sentiments'. R. G. Bhandarkar, a social reformer and Indologist, recounted his initiation into the *Mandali* in 1853, and the internal turmoil that accompanied it: 'The moment they gave

[20]Gopal Hari Deshmukh, 'Jati Vishayi Vichar', in *Lokahitawadinchi Shatapatre*, (ed.) Narayan Raghunath Inamdar (Pune: S. R. Deshmukh, 1962), p. 243.

[21]Ibid., p. 246.

[22]Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics*, pp. 177, 178.

[23]Also see Lucy Carroll, 'The Seavoyage Controversy and the Kayasthas of North India, 1901—1909', *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 2 (1979).

[24]Anant Kakba Priolkar, *Paramahansa sasabha Va Tice Adhyaksha Ramacandra Baḷakrishṇa* (Mumbai: Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya, 1966), p. 10.

[25]For an analysis of the changing character of purificatory rituals and penance in early modern western India, see Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Narratives of Penance and Purification in Western India, c. 1650–1850', *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009), pp. 48–75.

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me the piece of bread, I broke into cold shivers. I felt as if I had done something wrong.'[26]

Against this backdrop, a new text challenging the very principle of 'purity' seemed radical. The first edition of *Jatibhed Viveksar* was published in 1861. By the second edition, published in 1865, the treatise was much thicker: there were just 59 pages in its 1861 edition; its second edition comprised 170 pages. The author cited heavily from Hindu religious texts and drew on religious mythologies from the *Puranas* in its second iteration. It sold a thousand copies (a huge number for the time), paving the way for the third edition in 1885.[27]

Although the publication of the second edition in 1865 chronologically followed the first (1861), conceptually it was already foreshadowed in the 1861 edition. The introduction to the first edition confessed that the author's desire for a protracted discussion was foreshortened by his fear of a poor reader response. But if the text elicited wide support, the introduction promised, the author would publish a more elaborate second edition which would include evidence from the *Shruti* and *Smriti*.[28] The introduction also appealed to readers to bring to the author's notice errors or inconsistencies that might have eluded him, and to come forth with excerpts from religious texts (*granthadhar*) that would further strengthen his arguments. Padwal thus viewed the publication of successive editions as a collaborative exercise with his audience.

While the second edition retained the thematic structure of the earlier version of the text, it bolstered its assertions with additional evidence from religious texts. For instance, both editions argue that later insertions in the *Manav Dharma Shastra* and other *Smritis* are conspicuous in venerating Brahmans above the gods.[29] While the first edition finds support for this argument in *shloka* from *Manav Dharma Shastra*, which he cites and translates, and provides a further list of references, the second edition replaces the list of references with extensive quotations of Sanskrit verses from these references, followed by their Marathi translations.[30]

The second edition is also more piercingly anti-Brahmanical. While the first edition is undeniably critical of Brahmanical manipulation of religious texts and the

[26]Priolkar, *Paramahansa sasabha Va Tice Adhyaksha Ramacandra Baḷakrishṇa*, p. 10.

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

[28]The *Shruti* are the sacred texts comprising the central canon of Hinduism, namely Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads. On the other hand, *Smriti* literally means 'that which is remembered', and it is the entire body of the post-Vedic Classical Sanskrit literature.

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

[30]He further signals that dictum of similar tone and tenor are found in 'the *Manusamhita Adhyaya* (Ad.) 1. *Sholka* (Sh.) 100, 101, 105, Ad 8. Sh. 112, Ad.9 Sh. 317 ... *Bramhavaivartapurana* Ad.5, *Mahabharata Adiparva* Ad.18, and *Vanaparva* Ad. 199 and Padma Purankriyayugasagar…'.

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dominance of Hindu morality, the second edition's criticism of Brahman duplicity and the inconsistency in their words and deeds brims with rage and derision. In the first edition the author laments:

> Caste distinction (*jatibhed*) is not only meaningless (*nirarthaka)* but it is also catastrophic (*anarthaka*). From it [*jatibhed*] emerged nuisance like malice and strife. The upper-castes (*varishta jatis*) get a little respect from the poor, but besides that there are no gains…The Yavana, Mleccha etc are strangers, but the upper castes (*varkad jatiche lok*) treat the lower castes too as strangers, in fact they keep the lower castes farther away than they keep the others (*parake*). Is there no end to this injustice?[31]

In the second edition the author replaces the above section with sharper remarks still:

> The Brahmans in the present not only dabble in usury, but they also sell milk, butter, oil, seeds, grains, lacquer substances that they were prohibited from trading [by the *shastras*], and that jeopardized their Brahminess. Despite this the present-day Brahmans not only continue their trade, but they also conjure fake papers to plunder people's homes. From the shastric point of view, it appears that neither do they deserve the Brahman status, nor can they call themselves Brahmans. They are the lowest of the low, lower than the Chandala.[32]

By the second edition, Padwal also anchored his anti-Brahmanical politics in an attack on *varna sankara*. While the mixed-caste lineages of the Kshatriya and Vaishya castes surface fleetingly in the first edition, the concept of *varna sankara*, its historical context, and political implications are properly introduced only in the second edition.[33] Padwal says

> According to the texts (*granthadhar*) and common knowledge (*sadharan janasruti*), there are no pure lines of descent among the Vaishya and the Kshatriya, but in my opinion, out of the four varnas that the shastras mention, none of them are of pure descent, in recent times all castes including the Brahmans are born out of varna sankara.[34]

[31]Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 1st edn (Bombay: Printed and published by Messrs. Wassudeo Babaji and Co., Booksellers, 1861), p. 31.

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

[33]In the first edition Padwal argues: 'According to the texts (*grantha*) and common knowledge (*sadharan* janasruti), among the Vaishya and the Kshatriya there are no traces of the original lineages, from this it can be inferred that the Vaishaya and the Kshatriyas of the recent times are a fabricated (*banau*) lot.' Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 1st edn, p. 31.

[34]Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd edn, p. 35.

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The assertion that the age of Kali is comprised only of two varnas—the Brahman and the Shudra—is an old one. Puranic stories arrive at this inference by way of the mythology of Parashurama—a Brahman livid with vengeance, who eliminated Kshatriyas from the face of the earth. While debates, which erupted in the seventeenth century with the coronation of Shivaji, have questioned the validity of the assertion that no Kshatriya lineages survived in the Kaliyuga, the status of the two extremes in the varna hierarchy—the Brahman and the Shudra—remained relatively unchallenged.[35] And so Padwal's argument that not only the Shudra castes but all four varnas, including the Brahmans, are of mixed-caste origins struck at the very root of Brahman pride.

With the introduction of *varna sankara*, the second edition also prised open a Pandora's box of 'sources'. Padwal introduced to his readers to the world of early modern caste disputes and a field of liturgical and mythological caste scholarship. He engaged in detail with two key texts to illuminate the *varna sankara* origins of Brahmans in western India—the *Sahyadri Khanda*,[36] a section of the *Skanda Purana*, and the *Shudrakamalakara*, from the *Shudra dharma nibandha* genre.

The use of *Sahyadri Khanda* is unsurprising because the text, dated at the latest to the thirteenth century, is a compilation of stories about how Brahman subcastes local to the Konkan region fell from virtue because they engaged in 'illicit' sexual relations and menial occupations, and failed to perform caste appropriate rituals.[37] Besides the *Sahyadri Khanda*, Padwal also invoked *Mumbai chi Bakhar* (A History of Mumbai) by Robert Murphy to prove the mixed-caste origins of the Palshe Brahmans.[38] Murphy, an Irish Indologist, argued that while the Palshe are recognized as Brahmans in Bombay, their history could be traced to a Shudra ruler called Bhimaraja. Padwal found support

[35]Madhav Deshpande, 'Ksatriyas in the Kali Age? Gāgābhatta and His Opponents', *Indo-Iranian Journal* 53, no. 2 (2010), p. 97.

[36]While the *Skanda Purana* is dated to the ninth century CE, the *Sahyadri Khanda* is a compilation of manuscripts produced at different points in time and in different regions. Madhav Deshpande notes that the text makes references to figures both from 345–370 CE and also to those from the thirteenth century such as Madhavacharya, a key figure of the Vedanta school with Saraswat Brahman following. The disparate parts of the text were first compiled in 1877 by Gerson De Cunha who claimed to have organized 14 manuscripts together in one place. Deshpande, 'Ksatriyas in the Kali Age?', p. 97.

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

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

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for Murphy's assertion in the *Skanda Purana* that attributes to the Palshe an ancestry born from the union of a Golak Brahman woman and a Bhil man.[39]

Although one of the earliest, Padwal was not the only nineteenth-century social observer who mobilized *Sahyadri Khanda* to problematize the caste question. Ramchandra Bhikaji Gunjikar drew heavily on the text for his controversial 1884 work *Saraswati Mandal*. Himself a Shenvi, Gunjikar composed *Saraswati Mandal* by assembling Puranic references, myths, and legal correspondence to affirm the Brahman status of the Shenvi caste.[40] However, unlike Gunjikar, Padwal drew on the *Sahyadri Khanda* not to claim an upper-caste status, but to demolish Brahmanical hubris by underlining their fallible origins.

Padwal also did not easily let scribal and artisan castes, who yearned for upper caste status, off the hook. The second edition of *Jatibhed Viveksar* drew upon *Shudrakamalakara* to assert the Shudra caste status not only of Shenvi and Sonar castes, who claimed Brahman status, but also of the Kayastha, Patane Prabhu, Bhatye, Pachkalshi, Maratha, Khatri, and Bhandari castes, all of whom claimed Kshatriya status. *Shudrakamalakara* (Kamalakara on the Shudra),[41] dated between 1610–1640 CE, is an authoritative legal digest that defined the duties and rituals appropriate for the Shudra castes. It is likely that Padwal was drawn to its detailed discussion of various combinations of mixed-caste parentage of Shudra castes, ritual performances, and professions befitting them.[42]

The *Shudrakamalakara* had earlier played a crucial role in the adjudication of caste disputes that began in the seventeenth century and continued into the middle of the nineteenth century. Home to the text was the illustrious Bhatta family of Banaras, which included the author and his nephew Gaga Bhatta, the Banaras jurist who affirmed Shivaji's Kshatriya status and consecrated him in 1674.[43] The text retained

[39]Padwal notes that according to the *Manusmriti* the Golak Brahmans themselves were the progeny of their earliest ancestor who was born to a widow. He notes that texts such as the *Smrityarthasara, Bramha Purana, Prayoga Parijata* claim that since Golak Brahmans have Brahman parentage, they can practise rites meant for Brahmans. Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd edn, p. 42.

[40]Nineteenth-century Shenvi intellectuals often drew on the *Sahyadri Khanda* since it glorified their past and was less indulgent towards the Chitpavan, Kirvanta, and Karkhade Brahmans, the other competing Brahman castes of the Konkan region. The text spoke of them as newer Brahman groups with a depraved ancestral history. Narendra Wagle proposes that Shenvi intellectuals often argued that they were a branch of Bengali Brahmans who had migrated to the western coast. This was a desirable association because Bengali Brahmans were perceived as the foremost native participants in colonial modernity, the earliest members of the colonial bureaucracy, and the source of 'new ideas' and reformist societies. See N. K. Wagle, 'The History and Social Organization of the Gauda Sarasvata Brahmanas of the West Coast of India', *Journal of Indian History* 48 (1970), p. 12. Also see Frank F. Conlon, 'Caste by Association: the Gauda Sarasvata Brahmana Unification Movement', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 33, no. 3 (1974), pp. 351–365.

[41]Ananya Vajpeyi (trans.), 'The Sudra in History: From Scripture to Segregation', in *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*, (eds) Y. Bronner, W. Cox and L. J. McCrea (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2015), p. 338.

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

[43]Benke, 'The Sudracarasiromani of Krsna Sesa', p. 13. The Bhatta family was 'home' to this text because, as Benke argues, its composition was a collaborative family enterprise. Kamalakara Bhatta's text drew heavily on the works of his father Narayana and his cousin Nilakantha. The Bhatta family, originally

its importance throughout the nineteenth century.[44] Finally, in the colonial period it was the only *Shudra dharma* text translated into Marathi and published by the Bombay-based Nirnaya Sagar Press, first in 1880 and then in 1928.

The second edition also came with an appendix. It included a *nirnay patra* (judgement letter) from the Shankaracharya of Shringeri,[45] signed in 1788 by the Resident of Benares, Jonathan Duncan, affirming the *varna sankara* origins of both the Shenvi and Palshe Brahmans, as well as a letter signed by both the secretary and the undersecretary of the Bombay presidency denying Brahman status to the Sonars of Bombay. The inclusion of this evidence, so to speak, made Padwal's assertions about *varna sankara* more difficult to refute.

Why *Ek Hindu*?

Through the treatise's multiple iterations and discussions about it, the author retained the pseudonym *Ek Hindu*. The decision to adopt a pseudonym was deliberate. From the preface to the second edition, we can infer that readers and reviewers of the text had requested him to reveal his name. In response *Ek Hindu* stated, 'If revealing my name adds further import to this book, then I surely will; but from what I know my name makes no difference to the import of this book, and so I continue to write the second edition under the name Ek Hindu.'[46]

What did this pseudonym enable? Most of all, it allowed the author to present his critique as internal, as autocritique—distinguishing it from the criticisms of colonial officials and Christian missionaries. The internality of the critique marks the very way the treatise proceeds. It invoked canonical religious texts like the *Shastras* and the *Puranas* in order to criticize the traditional notion of caste division. The autocritique bears the imprint of *Vajra Suchi*, a Buddhist text dated to the ninth century CE and attributed to a Brahman convert to Buddhism called Ashwaghosha. Once a Brahman, Ashwaghosha used his background of Brahmanical knowledge and access to the *Shastras* and the Sanskrit language to critique the caste order.[47] *Vajra Suchi*, though a Buddhist text, is an extraordinary commentary because it drew on Hindu religious texts in order to refute the principles underlying the caste order that are endemic to the Hindu scriptures themselves.

from Paithan, the centre of Brahmanical religion and learning in the Deccan region, migrated to Banaras. Multiple generations of the Bhatta family were predominantly interested in demarcating the ritual life of the Shudras. Their participation in scholarly production of legal digests, adjudication of caste disputes, and, in the case of Gaga Bhatta, a jurist who performed consecration of a 'Shudra' king, both facilitated and responded to the changing political conditions in the early modern period. Vajpeyi, 'The Sudra in History', p. 339.

[44]Widely cited, *Shudrakamalakara* was also mentioned in the 1779 Brahman judgment letter that affirmed the Kshatriya status of the Kayastha caste in western India. Moreover, in 1730, the peshwa, the eighteenth-century Maratha power of Pune, ordered the use of *Shudrakamalakara* as a directive for Shudra conduct in their newly extended empire in central India. O'Hanlon et al. 'Discourses of Caste over the Longue Dureé', p. 115.

[45]One of the four leaders of the Hindu monastic tradition of Advaita Vedanta.

[46]Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd edn, p. 1.

[47]Meera Vishwanathan suggests that the attribution of Vajra Suchi to Ashvaghosha is disputed. See Meera Vishwanathan, 'Cosmology and Critique', in *Insights and Interventions: Essays in Honour of Uma Chakravarti*, (ed.) Kumkum Roy (New Delhi: Primus Book, 2011), p. 159.

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Padwal found this method of internal critique persuasive. This is clear from his response to the missionary critics of *Jatibhed Viveksar*, who decried the treatise for citing the Hindu *Shastras* to argue against the caste order, in the process retaining its allegiance to the religious texts.[48] 'I thought it was a good idea to fight the adversary with their own weapons.'[49] He argued that it is essential in a debate to engage respectfully with the textual sources (*granthadhar*) of one's adversary, especially when the intention is to dismantle the opponent's premise. The aim of his essay, he added, is to

> [P]ersuade the Hindu minds to see the disconnect between the representation of caste discrimination (*Jatibhed*) in the *Shastra* and that which prevails in the disposition of the people (*lokanchya pravruttit*)…[and] to share with my countrymen the outcomes of my investigations (*shodh*)'.[50]

This assumption that a debate is most effective when it draws on categories internal to the object of critique steered Padwal's dialogue.

The pseudonym also allowed Padwal to distance himself from criticisms such as those made by the Christian missionaries. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, in addition to the few educated natives who were passionately driven to cultivate a vernacular print culture in western India, Christian missionaries also contributed to the shaping of a new public realm in Maharashtra. Convinced that proselytization could best be achieved by publicly challenging the cultural authority of the Hindu world view and religious scriptures, they made the most of the press, public pulpits, and open debates.[51] Bilingual and Marathi missionary periodicals like the *Dnyanodaya, Satyadipika* (The Light of Truth), and *Prabhodaya* (Lord's Mercy) advanced their evangelical project by denouncing Hinduism as a religion that deceived its followers into believing that caste—an ascribed status conferred by this-worldly social processes—was actually a divine prescription.

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

Although such ridicule exaggerated matters, there was some proximity between missionaries and lower-caste reformers. The first generation of lower-caste reformers shared a sense of affinity with the missionaries in western India on many counts. First, missionary schools opened their doors to pupils from castes that were traditionally prohibited from acquiring education. Many lower-caste reformers, including Padwal, were educated in missionary schools, and some even looked up to missionary teachers and thinkers such as John Wilson and Murray Mitchell.[52] Second, before the rise of non-Brahman publications like *Din Bandhu* (Friend of the Poor) in 1877, native presses run by upper-caste editors refrained from publishing the writings of lower-caste authors. But missionary newspapers like *Dnyanodaya* and *Satyadipika* were among

[48]Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd edn.
[49]Ibid., p. 2.
[50]Ek Hindu, 'Prastawana', *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd edn.
[51]O'Hanlon. *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, pp. 50, 65.
[52]Ibid., p. 64.

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the very few publications that acknowledged lower-caste efforts, such as Phule's endeavour to 'set up schools for low caste Hindus'.[53] Impelled by the desire to grab every opportunity to highlight dissenting voices and activities within Hindu religion, *Satyadipika*, a missionary periodical from Pune, often published Phule's work, reported activities of the Satyashodhak Samaj, and published essays written by lower-caste students.[54]

Padwal was surely aware of the close interface between social reformers and missionaries, and, moreover, that the discontent of non-Brahman converts with canonical Hinduism emerged, to a large extent, from humiliating caste experiences. Baba Padmanji was one such non-Brahman convert and a prominent public figure in western India.[55] In his autobiography he wrote that the hypocrisy of the Brahmans, exploitation of the lower castes under the guise of religious rituals, and the Hindu religion's inability to converge morality and religious merit persuaded him to seek conversion.[56]

Although Padmanji and Padwal did not explicitly mention each other, they inhabited overlapping social networks. They were both close associates and friends of Jotirao Phule. Besides, with only a handful of educated non-Brahmans trying to dip their toes in the Marathi public realm, it is hardly likely that Padmanji and Padwal would have been strangers. Besides Padmanji's conversion, the furore caused by the excommunication of Shreepat Sheshadri for sharing a room with his convert brother Narayan Sheshadri in 1843 must have still been a recent memory for Padwal.[57]

By retaining the name *Ek Hindu*, Padwal differentiated himself from non-Brahman dissenters of caste who perceived conversion out of Hinduism as the only way to escape caste humiliation. Indeed, Padwal made explicit his disagreement with conversion as an act of dissent against the caste order. He argued that embracing ostracism and abandoning one's family were not the only touchstones of breaking the fetters of caste (notably, this would be the way that caste would be broken by those who converted to Christianity). '[Caste can also be forsaken] by practicing good conduct (*sadachar*), abandoning untruth and by reposing faith in one Supreme Being, all the while inhabiting a domestic life'.[58] Padwal found recourse in a form of social reform that challenged caste without necessarily dismantling Hindu religion; this form of social reform was itself one of the phenomena that constituted a modern Hinduism. This dimension of reform called for a religion that located morality and ethical conduct at its heart, one that assumed an equality of all in relation to the divine, and that advocated a transparent relationship between the scriptures and the individual. To put it differently, this reformist perspective called for the remaking of the Hindu religion.

[53] *Dnyanodaya*, 15 August 1853, pp. 262–263.

[54] Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere*, p. 160.

[55] Padmaji, originally from Belgaum, joined the institution of the free church of Scotland in Bombay in 1848. He converted to Christianity in 1854 and wrote several books comparing Hinduism and Christianity.

[56] Baba Padmanji, *Arunodaya. The Autobiography of Baba Padmanji, Containing a Description of His Former Life as a Hindu and the Causes Which Led to His Conversion* (India: Bombay Tract and Book Society, 1888), p. 2.

[57] See Kenneth Jones, *Religious Controversy in British India* (Albany: State University of New York, 1992), p. 25.

[58] Ek Hindu, 'Prastawana', *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd edn, p. 3.

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Padwal's intellectual resources

What makes *Jatibhed Viveksar* noteworthy is also its careful curation of extracts from shastric texts and its identification of voices from the Indic past critical of caste. By drawing on both Buddhist criticism of a Brahmanical world view as well as puranic myths, and subversive verses of lower-caste poet-saints from the thirteenth and the seventeenth centuries such as Saint Namdev and Tukaram, *Ek Hindu* shaped his narrative into a 'device to tell a history of the new present moment'.[59] This insurgent past allowed Padwal to both insert himself within a longer genealogy of anti-caste culture and to elevate the present reformist moment as a necessary one, by noting that anti-caste efforts in the past 'achieved little success', despite their significance.[60]

In the introduction to the text the author mentioned that his arguments against caste divisions had roots in the *Vajra Suchi*. By incorporating a translation of the Buddhist text in *Jatibhed Viveksar*, the author firmly installed *Vajra Suchi* in the constellation of modern anti-caste thought.[61] True to its name—'A Needle with a Diamond Tip'—the *Vajra Suchi* mounted a clear and a sharp critique of caste division. The text questioned the legitimacy of the *Purusha Sukta*, a Vedic hymn explaining the birth of the varna order, by asking: if all four varna were born out of the body of the *Purusha* or the cosmic man, how is it that they belong to distinct varnas? The texts anchored its arguments in the social and physical world that surrounded it in order to dismantle the justifications for varna differences.[62]

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

Roy had planned to successively publish and circulate Bengali translations of the *Vajra Suchi* and the first issue of the project was printed in 1829. However, this venture came to a halt and was eventually abandoned.[63] A few years later, in the 1835 issue of the *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, B. H. Hodgson, an ethnologist and the British Resident to Nepal, published an English translation of the Sanskrit text. In an 1829 letter addressed to the secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society, Hodgson mentioned that from his 'learned old Bauddha friend' he had received a copy of a rare Sanskrit text that was replete with 'wit and wisdom'.[64]

[59]I draw this phrase from Novetzke's work. See Christian Lee Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 194.

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

[61]Find a similar discussion in O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, pp. 226–227.

[62]Vishwanathan, 'Cosmology and Critique', p. 16.

[63]R. C. Dhere, *Sanatan Sahitya ani Lokasahitya, Kahi Anubandh* (Pune: Shrividya Prakashan, 1978), p. 117.

[64]B. H. Hodgson, *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Murray and Parbury, Allen and Co., 1835), Vol. III, pp. 1–2.

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The circulation of the text in the colonial period is not the only route by which *Vajra Suchi* entered the Marathi public realm. Bahinabai, the seventeenth-century poet-saint, incorporated translations of the *Vajra Suchi* in 18 of her *abhangas* (verses). Bahinabai faced bitter opposition from her husband for proclaiming that she had accepted the poet-saint Tukaram, a member of the lower castes, as her Guru. A Brahman woman becoming a disciple of a Shudra saint was perceived as going against the grain. Bahinabai questioned this presumption by invoking the *Vajra Suchi:* 'who is a true Brahman? How can one call Tukaram, who has experienced the divine, who is an exemplar, a Shudra? Can we call ourselves Brahman because we were born into brahmindom?'[65]

By annotating *Jatibhed Viveksar* with excerpts from the Buddhist text, Padwal was, in fact, locating himself within two intersecting intellectual traditions—the social reformist tradition that had galvanized the minds of an English-educated middle class in Bombay and the *warkari* tradition of Maharashtra.

The author locates the conflict between Buddhism and Vedantic Hinduism at the forefront of an insurgent past:

> professing that it is unjust to view our countrymen (*deshabandhav*) as lowly and defeated, some of our thoughtful (*sudnya*) and beneficent (*paropakari*) countrymen of the past, persuaded many to the path of Buddhism. They launched a trenchant attack on the Dharmashastra that justified the caste order. With more people embracing Buddhism, peace began to prevail in the country (*desh*) …there were signs that the country was returning to a state of prosperity. In the meantime, a pandit from the south by the name of Shankaracharya emerged to reinstate the authority of Vedic dharma. On convincing a few rulers to joined hands with him, the Shankaracharya forcibly re-established the rule of the Dharmashastra and an even stronger reinforcement of the caste order.[66]

Padwal presents the Buddhist past as a time when the virtues of equality, justice, brotherhood, deep thinking, and benevolence shaped social relations. For him, it was Buddhist ethics that enabled the rejection of the caste order.

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

Although much of Padwal's caste commentary was moored in local caste relations, specifically drawing on Puranic stories and caste histories local to the Konkan littoral, his imagination of an insurgent anti-caste past was an expansive one, stretching across the subcontinent. In his discussion of the work of heterodox saints who had departed from canonical Hindu religion, the author presents short sketches of the

[65]Dhere, *Sanatan Sahitya ani Lokasahitya*, p. 104.
[66]Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd edn, p. 104.

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twelfth-century devotional saint Basava in Karnataka,[67] Nanak from fifteenth-century Lahore, and Ramananda, a fourteenth-century devotional saint who had migrated to Banaras after departing from his southern devotional sect on the question of caste hierarchy. Padwal then crosses into Bengal to mention Chaitanya, a Vaishnava poet saint, and returns to Maratha country to mention the fourteenth-century Gorakhnath, a key figure of the Nath monastic order who also established the Kanphatya sect.[68]

While Padwal was among the earliest social observers to draw on the works of poet-saints in order to compose his caste critique, the linkages between socio-religious reformism and Bhakti ethics were already being explored by Scottish missionaries working in western India. Reverend Murray Mitchell of the Free Church of Scotland in Bombay likened Bhakti devotionalism in western India to Protestant Christian doctrines in his 1849 essay 'The Life of Tukaram as given in Bhaktalilamrita of the Marathi Poet Mahipati'. Nineteenth-century missionaries constructed Bhakti tradition as a reformed version of Hinduism, by finding moral parallels between Protestantism in their preclusion of priestly mediations and social inclusiveness.[69]

For Padwal, who inhabited the cultural field of social reform shaped by missionary writers and upper-caste thinkers alike, the juxtaposition of *warkari* morality and modern reformist ideas was not a stretch of imagination. In his 1864 letter to *Prabhakar*, Gopal Hari Deshmukh underlined how the *warkari sampradaya* transformed dominant social practices: 'they [the *warkaris*] recognize themselves as belonging to one Vaishnava caste. The Brahmans and the Shudra both touch each other's feet.'[70]

In another regard too, it is unsurprising that a lower-caste intellectual like Padwal viewed himself as the modern heir to the 'anti-caste' tradition of the *warkari* saints. I say this because the social network of lower-caste professionals, writers, and activists that both Phule and Padwal inhabited, had firm grounding in the *warkari* culture. O'Hanlon's pioneering work on Phule mentions how multipronged conversations critical of Hindu orthodoxy electrified this social circle, which in turn contributed to laying the intellectuals foundations of the Satyashodhak Samaj.[71]

[67]Ibid. Padwal records, 'In the *shalivahan saka* of the tenth or the eleventh century in Tailangana a wise man by the name of Bhasavaswami came along. He noticed that members of the Shudra castes too demonstrated *guna* (virtues and attributes) but the caste order impeded their potential to flourish. And so, in order to break caste distinction he established a Shaivaite sect.'

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

[69]Philip Constable, 'Scottish Missionaries, "Protestant Hinduism" and the Scottish Sense of Empire in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century India', *Scottish Historical Review* 86, no. 2 (2007), p. 301.

[70]Sadanand More, 'Ekonisavya Shatakatil Warkari Sampradaya', in *Adhunikta ani Parampara*, (ed.) Rajendra Vohra (Pune: Pratima Prakashan, 2000), p. 30.

[71]Ibid., pp. 42–43. Many of Phule's lower caste associates came from families that were intergenerationally steeped in the *warkari* tradition. Tukaram Pinjan, one of Phule's associates and Samaj activist, recounted how a few friends, including Phule, would assemble at Pinjan's shop and have animated conversations about Kabir's poetry. These gatherings were attended by a Kabir panthi mendicant, Dnyangiri Bua, who would read Kabir's *beejak* to the group and translate them into Marathi. Gyanoba Krishnaji Sasane, born in 1851, was one such acquaintance. Sansane's grandfather was a devout follower of Kabir, the

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For lower-caste writers like Padwal, who consolidated a new anti-caste discourse, a familiarity with the poetic labour of the *warkari sampradaya* offered an indigenous lens through which to understand the social world, and a public realm that it had constructed by way of devotional practices, performances, and music.[72]

Padwal was particularly drawn to the *abhangas*[73] of his namesake poet-saint, Tukaram, the seventeenth-century figure from Dehu near Pune. The stinging criticism of caste practices, Untouchability, and empty ritualism of Tukaram's *abhangas* offered Padwal a clear line of continuity between his own enquiry and religious unorthodoxy in the past. However, while Padwal was one of the key figures to usher the *abhangas* of Tukaram from the realm of performances and popular religious memory into the publishing world, he was not the only one. Selections from Tukaram's *abhangas* were first published in Marathi by Parshuram Tatya Godbole, the chief translator of the British government in Bombay, as a part of a School Anthology in 1854.[74]

Besides contextualizing a selection of Tukaram's *abhanga* in *Jatibhed Viveksar* and locating the seventeenth-century iconoclast-poet in the linear history of an anti-caste past, in 1889 Padwal published a two-volume compilation of Sant Tukaram's work. Sadanand More, a scholar of the *warkari sampradaya* and Tukaram's opus, mentions that Padwal travelled across the villages of Maharashtra and compiled over 8,000 manuscripts that bore the signature 'says Tuka'.[75] Thus, heterodox devotional poetry made a segue into the world of print through the intertwined channels of reform and revivalism, and Padwal was a key figure in this process.

Padwal's construction of a literary canon by inlaying a mosaic of *warkari* poetry and popular oral forms such as the *lavani* was an act of careful curation. I call this 'careful literary curation' because he selectively cited works of Brahman poet-saints such as the thirteenth-century saint Dnyaneshwar and Ramadas from the seventeenth century as voices of dissent against caste practices. While they criticized the 'empty rituals' and rules of *Ovale-Sovale* (pure and mundane) that structured the Hindu social world,

fifteenth-century weaver-poet from North India. At a young age Sasane too was drawn to the *warkari* tradition and renounced home for a mendicant's life. After three years of giving up on his life as a mendicant and embracing the temporal world, he met Phule. Prior to engaging in the activities of the Satyashodhak Samaj, Krishnarao Bhalekar, a young associate of Phule, was thoroughly accultured in the *warkari* tradition by his family. He developed an astute critique of Brahmanism by way of his conversations with Jangali Maharaj, who recited and interpreted Tukaram's *abhanga*. O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, pp. 28–29.

[72]Christian Novetzke, 'Bhakti and Its Public', *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 3 (2007), pp. 255–272.

[73]*Abhanga* is poetry composed in verse form by *warkari* saints for the deity Vitthala. *Abhanga* in Marathi literally means 'unbroken'. Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory*, p. 275.

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

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

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these works constituted only one dimension of their immense corpus. They did not exclusively inhabit the subversive register.

C. L. Novetzke refers to this curious division of the Brahman figure into one that is critical of caste orthodoxy, but simultaneously seeks to maintain his Brahman privilege as the 'Brahman-double'.[76] By selectively quoting compositions that deployed the voice of caste criticism from among the sea of diverse, and often contradictory, works of Brahman poets, Padwal splits off one portion of this Brahman double and constructs a seamless, uninterrupted anti-caste tradition.

Recasting a new Shudra identity

Padwal's enquiry is also crucial to a genealogical mapping of the anti-caste discourse because it is one of the first to attack the concept of *varna sankara*. This concept gained prominence after the emergence of the genre of *Shudra Dharma Nibandha* (essays on the duty of the Shudra) between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries. The genre dealt with various permutations and combinations of *varna sankara* parentage responsible for the birth of Shudra progeny, prescribed the appropriate ritual life and social conduct for the Shudra, and suggested occupations befitting them.[77]

Although an early discussion of *varna sankara* is found in *Manav dharma shastra*, a religio-juridical text composed in the first millennium CE, the concept entered wider orbits of circulation with Gopinatha's *Jativiveka* (Discernment of Castes), one of the earliest texts from the *Shudra Dharma Nibandha* genre. The authoritative framework of *varna sankara* allowed Gopinatha, a fourteenth-century Brahman scholar from western India, to make sense of local caste dynamics in the Maratha country. Disappointed by the fact that Sanskrit texts and the *Dharmashastra* provide only a schematic framework to understand the social world, he composed a detailed guide to the mixed castes of the Maratha country. While the author worked with dharmashastric categories, he simultaneously used vernacular equivalents for Sanskrit caste names, and specified their parentage and the proper occupation and ritual practices befitting them.[78] With the writing of the *Jativiveka*, Gopinatha made local Shudra service communities legible in the dharmashastric discourse.

Jativiveka and key *Shudra Dharma* texts continued to be relevant well into the colonial period.[79] British administrators and missionaries keen on understanding Hindu law and social organization in western India too turned to these texts.[80] Although

[76]Christian Lee Novetzke, 'The Brahmin Double: The Brahminical Construction of Anti-Brahminism and Anti-caste Sentiment in the Religious Cultures of Precolonial Maharashtra', *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2011), pp. 246–247.

[77]Out of the 49 texts on *Shudra dharma* that we know of today, some of the most prominent ones are: Sesakrishna's *Shudracharasiromani* dated to 1581 CE, Kamalakarabhatta's *Shudrakamalakara* approximately composed between 1610–1640 CE, and Gagabhatta's nibandha titled '*Sudradharmodyota*' attributed to the years between 1640 and 1700 CE. See Benke 'The Sudracarasiromani of Krsna Sesa' and Vajpeyi, 'The Shudra in History from Scripture to Segregation'.

[78]O'Hanlon et al., 'Discourses of Caste over the Longue Durée', pp. 103–104.

[79]Early modern texts produced by the scholarly Brahman households of Benares, such as the Sesa and the Bhatta family, relied heavily on Gopinatha's interpretation of the social world. See ibid., pp. 114–115.

[80]O'Hanlon et al., 'Discourses of Caste over the Longue Durée' and Benke, 'The Sudracarasiromani of Krsna Sesa', p. 298. John Wilson, a prominent missionary from the Free Church of Scotland, too, draws on *Jativiveka* in his 1877 text titled *Indian Caste.*

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Padwal did not mention Gopinatha's *Jativiveka*, the similarity of the titles suggest that the author could have been implicitly situating his work as a counter-discourse to the *Shudra Dharma Nibandha* tradition.[81]

Why engage with the concept of *varna sankara*? Canonical religious texts characterized the 'Shudra' as a social status generated by a 'failing', be it the moral failure of inter-varna marriages or the Shudra as originally a *dwija* (upper-caste) varna, who fell to Shudradom by failing to follow varna-appropriate rituals. *Shudra dharma nibandha* portrayed the Shudra as a figure saturated by negative meaning. The *Shudrasiromani*, the sixteenth-century *nibandha* detailing *Shudra Dharma*, referred to the Shudra as *apasada* meaning 'low-born'.[82] Krishnesana, the author of *Sudrasiromani*, cited the *Manusmriti* as he made this association. Similarly, historian Ananya Vajpeyi suggests that the word 'Shudra' is constituted by the union of two Sanskrit verbal roots, namely *suc, soka* (meaning grief), and *adravana* (meaning running or falling). Grammatically put together, the Shudra, Vajpeyi argues, is a melancholic figure that runs about in grief on hearing words of contempt against them (*anadarasravana*).[83]

Although negligence towards the ritual observations suitable to one's varna status could be classified as an act of *varna sankara*, inter-varna marriages and 'illicit' sexual unions were the foremost reasons for the confusion of the social order.[84] The confusion of the varnas was not an absolute rejection of inter-varna marriages and their progeny. *Anuloma* (with the grain) marriage alliances were reluctantly accepted in the varna order because they involved women marrying upwards, that is, into a varna with a higher status. But *pratiloma* (against the grain) marriages, in which women of a higher varna marry into a varna lower than their own, were considered an absolute abomination.[85]

Padwal understood that if the figure of the Shudra was to be extracted from its textual saturation by negative meanings, then the dominant notion of *varna sankara* (or intermixing of varna) must be upended. He argued that 'in the past' the meaning of *varna sankara* was vastly different from its present sense of the confusion or intermixing of the varna. Citing the *Bhagwata Purana*, Padwal posited that in the past, when the varna order was a benign four-fold division of occupation and conduct, *varna sankara* meant the failure of correspondence between varna status and its coterminous occupation. *Sankara*, or confusion, in the erstwhile idea of varna order began to arise when those in the position of power—the Brahmans—increasingly conducted themselves in ways that violated their varna status, and yet they continued to enjoy a superior

[81]O'Hanlon et al. 'Discourses of Caste over the Longue Durée', p. 116.

[82]Benke 'The Sudracarasiromani of Krsna Sesa', p. 93.

[83]Vajpeyi, *The Shudra in History from Scripture to Segregation*, pp. 337–338. Theodore Benke argues that the grammatical fusion of the two separate elements, namely grief (*suc)* and running away and falling (*adravana*), to construct the meaning of the word 'Shu-dra' as 'one who runs aggrieved by his lack of Vedic knowledge' and could be traced to the Shankaracharya. However, drawing on S. G. Kane's scholarship on the *Dharmashastra* (a canonical religio-legal text), Benke proposes that the Shankaracharya and his ilk's etymology of the word 'Shudra' is farfetched. Benke argues that this etymological deconstruction of the Shudra is a forced ideological move by the Vedanta philosophers deployed to circumvent the earlier ambiguous prospects of a Shudra accessing Vedic knowledge. See Benke, 'The Sudracarasiromani of Krsna Sesa', p. 262.

[84]O'Hanlon et al., 'Discourses of Caste over the Longue Durée', pp. 104 and 105.

[85]Ibid.

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standing. By contrast, despite their consistent virtuous behaviour, members of the fourth varna found themselves fixed to their 'lowly status'. The rigidity that the varna order acquired in the age of *Kali*, when the varna status remained static, despite the changes in the corresponding practice of occupation, conduct, and virtues, is called *varna sankara*.[86]

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

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

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

In order to disengage varna order from the idea of lineage and birth, Padwal cites a conversation in the Mahabharata between Yudhishthira and Nahusha, a king cursed by a sage to live the life of a serpent:

> Nahusha asks: 'is caste determined by birth or by conduct?' Yudhishthira clarifies that, 'caste can no longer be determined by birth or lineage because of varna sankara… because men from all varnas bear children from women of all other varnas. [And that] speech, sexual desire, birth and death are experienced by people of all castes alike'.[87]

[86]Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd edn, p. 31.
[87]Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd edn, pp. 15–16.

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This conversation allowed Padwal to assert that, 'out of the four original varna that the shastras speak of … in the present, none of the varna exist. All of them are varna sankara.'[88]

By asserting that not only the Shudra but people of all castes have *varna sankara* origins, Padwal emphasized that the purity of lineage cannot be a point of differentiation between the Shudra and the Brahman varna in the present. In fact, if anything, it is a point of equality between the two. Padwal explained his argument by offering a list of *rishis* (seers) who were originally born into the Shudra or the Ati-shudra caste status, but by way of their excellent conduct, learning, and scholarship, achieved the superior status of Brahman ascetics. He gives some examples: 'Valmiki rishi was born into the Koli (fisherman) caste, Sankya rishi, Kabilar and Parashar rishi were Ati-Shudra at birth, and Kaundinya and Dirghatam rishi were born out of wedlock'. The argument that most *rishis* were born out of a *varna sankara* union weakens the Brahman claim to purity of lineage because it upends the Brahmanical assumption that all Brahmans, among other upper castes, are descendants of the eight 'original men' or *rishis*. These families of descent or clans, named after the first *rishis*, are called *gotras*. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* propounds that castes belonging to Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya varnas could be traced back to one of these eight *rishis* by way of an unbroken patrilineal bond of descent. By implication, *Jatibhed Viveksar*'s emphasis on the *varna sankara* birth of the sages highlights the mixed caste origin of Brahmans who claimed to be of pure descent. Padwal's argument that at birth all men are equal is significant because in this case the claim to equality between the Shudra and the Brahman are rooted in their equal failure to maintain purity of lineage. Thus, the figure of the Shudra and the Brahman are equal in their human condition of being flawed and fallible.

Another way in which Padwal argued for the equality of the Shudra and the Brahman was by drawing on the *Bhagwata Purana* to suggest that people across all varna, at birth, enter the world first as Shudra, but that the rituals performed after the child's birth order them into the varna of their parents. He argued: 'the scriptures prescribe that for a newborn, caste rituals have to be performed before the umbilical cord is severed. Until then, according to the Vedas, the child is considered to be a Shudra.'[89] Padwal used this justification in order to establish that in the past caste was not determined by birth nor was it crystallized at the very instant a child was born. Padwal's emphasis on the equality at birth between the Shudra and the upper castes is significant because it offers a fitting counterpoint to the notion of hierarchy at birth espoused by the Brahmanical theory of varna. By emphasizing that caste status can be traced to rituals performed by human actors, that is, the social and political processes that unfold in the material world, Padwal argued that the transformation of caste hierarchy too can be sought in the same this-worldly realm.

Nevertheless, the question remains: who were the Shudras, if they were not born into the fourth varna? Padwal's answer to this question provides the template for later and more famous answers in the twentieth century, such as that associated with Ambedkar. Padwal places the origin within a story of political conflict:

[88]Ibid.

[89]Ek Hindu, *Jatibhed Viveksar*, 2nd edn, p. 16.

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> when the Aryan people (*arya loka*) took hold of this land from its original inhabitants (*mulche loka*), the conquerors kept the vanquished people at a distance, regarded them as lowly, and prohibited their access to the Vedas and knowledge (*vidya*). With subsequent political depredation, the subordinated people, reduced to indigence and ignorance, finally surrendered to the Aryan people (the ancestors of Brahmans, Kshatriya and the Vaishya) and resigned to a life of servitude. This is when the makers of the varna order began to call the vanquished people the 'Shudra'.[90]

If the Shudras were the vanquished original inhabitants, how did they become entangled in the concept of *varna sankara*? Padwal argued that the subordination of the Shudras, triggered by the event of the Aryan invasion, was further compounded by the Brahmans' rendering of the event: '…what's more, the writers of the *Dharmshastra* made a dreadful move! They lumped both the vanquished original inhabitants and the progeny born out of illicit sexual relations into the category of the Shudra.'[91] This, Padwal implied, led to the Shudras, the vanquished inhabitants, being falsely accused of having emerged from 'illicit' sexual relations.

Why mobilize the Aryan invasion narrative? The dominant meaning of *varna sankara* encompasses the whole range of sexual unions that deviated from the ideal conjugal practice of endogamy. In addition to inter-varna marriages, *varna sankara* also included progeny born out of 'illicit' and non-conjugal sexual unions. In this light, Padwal wrested the Shudras from the complex of *varna sankara*. He is concerned to offer readers a new figure of the Shudra, one that is 'untainted' by origins in 'dubious sexual morality'. The narrative of Aryan conquest allowed Padwal to argue that the suffering of the Shudras can be traced back to a political conflict in the past, and not to the failure of their ancestors' morality.

Padwal is likely to have encountered the Aryan invasion narrative through the vehement debates taking place around that time between European ethnologists on the question of what constituted the Aryan identity. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was accepted as an incontrovertible truth that a collision between two opposed groups—the Aryans from central Asia and the original inhabitants of the subcontinent—was the precipitating event of Indian civilization.[92]

Working on translating the *Rig-veda* between 1849–1874, Max Muller concluded that the castes belonging to the first three varnas—the Brahmans, Kshatriya, and the Vaishya—are the descendants of Aryan tribes. And the Shudra and the Ati-shudra castes, belonged to the *anarya* (non-Aryan) or the *dasa* (servant) varna, were the aborigines of the subcontinent.[93] The Aryan invasion theory, used by Max Muller to explain the caste order, offered nineteenth-century reformers objective information about the this-worldly origins of the varna order which they, in turn, used to fortify their arguments against conservative social commentators.[94]

[90]Ibid., pp. 24–25.
[91]Ibid., p. 25.
[92]Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 197.
[93]Ibid., pp. 196–197.
[94]O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and ideology*, p. 59.

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Among those inspired by the works of Wilson and Max Muller were missionaries like John Muir and John Wilson Muir, a Sanskrit scholar and an Indologist, who wrote a multi-volume work entitled *Original Sanskrit Texts.* O'Hanlon suggests that Muir's work, written in a manner accessible to the curious educated layman, popularized the Aryan invasion narrative.[95] John Wilson, the author of *India Three Thousand Years Ago* published in 1858, stated that the Brahmans were the descendants of invaders, who seized resources from the original inhabitants—the Shudras—thus offering a narrative of loss, deceit, and historical exploitation to Shudra thinkers. The suggestion that the Aryans entered the subcontinent wielding Sanskrit texts implied three things: one, the Hindu religious texts are an alien imposition on the original inhabitants, the lower castes and the 'Untouchables'; two, the Shudras, historically, have nothing in common with the upper castes; three, the Hindus were never a homogenous religious community. Padwal, among other non-Brahman writers, was convinced by John Wilson's proposition. By representing Brahmans as outsiders, who seized what was not rightfully theirs, Padwal appropriated Wilson's argument for his own agenda—that of challenging the Brahman caste's legitimacy as social and religious leaders of the Hindu religion.

After-life of the Shudra

Padwal's reconstruction of the figure of the Shudra was not without contradictions. On the one hand, he traced the schism between the first three varnas and the Shudras to a difference in racial stock and culture. But on the other hand, he also complicated the *dwija*-Shudra binary by contending that the Sonars (Goldsmith caste), Lohars (Blacksmith caste), and Sutars (Carpenter caste) were erstwhile Kshatriyas who had turned to artisanship in a time of crisis and, as a result, lost their varna status.[96] This narrative from the *Sahyadri Khanda* allowed him to claim that the Sonars shared the circumstances of their origin with the Sutars and Lohars—two artisan castes commonly known to belong to the Shudra varna. How can the Shudra-artisan belong to the non-Aryan aboriginal inhabitants and also have Kshatriya lineage? This divergence is especially pronounced because, according to the Aryan migration narrative that is espoused by Padwal too, the Kshatriya belong to the Aryan stock.

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

[96]The author draws on the *Sahyadri Khanda.* The Puranic myth traces the origin of artisan castes to a clash between Parashurama, a Brahman, and the Kshatriyas. Sworn to wipe out all the Kshatriya from the face of the earth, Parashurama begins his search for Kshatriya households. On hearing of his intentions, some Kshatriya families abandoned their homes and took refuge in the sage Vishwakarma's hermitage. The sage decided to protect the Kshatriya families by gathering all their weapons of war and recasting them into tools of workmanship. On arriving at the hermitage, Parashusrama encountered a group of 'artisans' engrossed in working with their tools. Convinced that he had truly eliminated all the Kshatriyas, Parashurama left the hermitage, thus sparing the lives of the Kshatriyas posting as artisans.

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A possible resolution of this incongruity can be found in Jotirao Phule's conceptualization of the Shudra in his 1873 treatise titled *Gulamgiri* (Slavery). Phule, who had surely read Padwal's text, assigned a Kshatriya past to the Shudra and the Ati-shudra, but in his conception, the Kshatriyas were not of Aryan stock. In fact, although Phule, like Padwal, demonstrated the emergence of the Shudras from the conflict between Parashurama and the Kshatriyas, he did not attribute an upper-caste status to the Kshatriyas. Phule, instead, contended that the Kshatriyas derived their name from the word *kshetria* meaning 'the people of this land'.[97]

While Phule drew on the Aryan invasion framework, he modified it to explain the social conditions that led to the formation of the Shudra and the Ati-shudra castes. On emerging victorious in the battle, the Arya-Brahmans imposed rules of Untouchability, especially against the most valiant warriors among the *kshetria* people. While the warriors segregated as 'Untouchables' went on to form the Ati-shudra communities, the remaining *kshetria* consolidated themselves into the present-day Shudra castes. In his view, the Brahmanical imposition of Untouchability drove a wedge between the *kshetria* peoples. Phule laments that, unaware that 'all Shudras belong to the same fraternity', the Shudras who 'proudly' call themselves Mali (gardener caste), Kunbi (cultivator caste), Sonar, Shimpi (Tailor caste), Lohar, and Sutar practise Untouchability against the Mahars and Mangs 'under the influence of the Brahmans'.[98]

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

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

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

Historically, the term 'Maratha' has been resistant to a fixed meaning. Since the early modern period the category has come to be identified, on the one hand, with a warrior heritage, a geographically rooted military ethos, a linguistic identity of Marathi speakers, and a precolonial political formation exemplified by the leadership

[97]Jotirao Phule, *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule*, (ed.) G. P. Deshpande (New Delhi: Leftword, 2002), p. 28.
[98]Ibid., pp. 45, 169.

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of Shivaji; and on the other hand, it has also been identified with an elite, closely bound caste formation.[99]

Narayan Meghaji Lokhande's consistent efforts to identify the content of the term 'Maratha' and who could be included in it was a recognition of the multiple ways in which the social category could be imagined. His articles in *Din Bandhu* chastised both the Brahmans for identifying themselves as Marathas as well as the aristocratic middle castes who sought to include only those clans who could claim an upper-caste Kshatriya status. He insisted on including lower-caste Kunbi cultivators, artisan castes, and other agrarian lower castes within the category.[100]

Lokhande's notion of the Maratha was shaped by an astute understanding of contemporary nationalist and anti-Brahman politics. By excluding the Brahmans, he wrested the Maratha identity from Brahman nationalists who claimed to be the rightful political heirs of the early modern Maratha exemplar, Shivaji. For instance, in 1890 Brahman conservative-nationalists like B. G. Tilak likened contemporary anticolonial struggles against the British empire to Shivaji's consolidation of the Maratha empire in the face of Mughal power.[101] By including the lower-caste artisan, peasant, and labouring communities within the category of the Maratha, Lokhande demonstrated an awareness that the non-Brahman movement was divided between one that coalesced around the labouring castes and the other that asserted an Aryan-Kshatriya identity.[102]

At the turn of the twentieth century, an increasingly bitter confrontation between the aristocratic Maratha rulers and the Brahmans of the Kolhapur princely state further energized non-Brahman politics in western India. The discontent between the Kolhapur royalty, Chatrapati Shahu, and the Brahmans of Kolhapur had begun to brew before the acquisition of the throne in 1894, and it had turned acrimonious by 1900. Furious on finding out that the chief royal priest (or the *Rajaopadhyaya*) was performing rituals meant for the Shudra varna for the royal family, Shahu demanded that his lineage be recognized as one belonging to the Kshatriya varna.[103] The *Rajopadhyaya* refused. As a result, his *inam* lands and the hereditary property of the Kolhapur Shankaracharya (who supported the former) were confiscated by the Kolhapur court.

The Vedokta conflict set in motion the Kolhapur royalty's anti-Brahman tirade. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Shahu Maharaj made provisions for

[99]Prachi Deshpande, 'Caste as Maratha: Social Categories, Colonial Policy and Identity in Early', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 41, no. 1 (2004), pp. 7–9.

[100]Ibid., p. 15 and O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, p. 246. In the 3 June 1894 issue of *Din Bandhu,* Lokhande contended that Brahmans cannot be included in the category of the Marathas because 'their surnames, ways and manners, habits and customs are different from the remaining (*itar*) castes'.

[101]Deshpande, 'Caste as Maratha', p. 14.

[102]Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Issue of Widowhood in Colonial Western India', in *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, (eds) Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 71.

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

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reserving at least half of the administrative posts for members of the non-Brahman castes and donated land and grants to encourage education among them.[104] Moreover, he also joined hands with the British government to suppress anticolonial activities in Kolhapur, which were predominantly spearheaded by Brahmans.[105] Shahu's policy invoked trenchant criticism from both the Brahmans in Kolhapur, as well as their caste brethren in Bombay and Pune who held the reigns of the vernacular publishing world.[106] But this politically charged anti-Brahman environment galvanized a new demographic of non-aristocratic lower-caste youth who had found employment and education under Shahu's patronage.

The wandering activists of the Satyashodhak Samaj brought their own version of non-Brahman discourse in conversation with Shahu's Vedokta politics. The new generation of non-aristocratic Marathas now found a new vocabulary rooted in their own lifeworlds.[107] In 1911, non-Brahman employees of the Kolhapur state—Bhaskarrao Jadhav, A. B. Latthe, and M. D. Dongre—organized the first Satyashodhak Samaj Conference of Kolhapur. Influenced by the samaj, several Kunbi and non-aristocratic Maratha families across the state performed curious ritual ceremonies that mixed the *satyashodhak* tradition of officiating marriages without Brahman priests and the Vedokta practice of wearing the sacred thread (a ritual dominantly meant only for the first three varnas). While Shahu Maharaj shrank from openly supporting the politics of the Satyashodhak Samaj, his patronage sheltered the flourishing of a radical non-Brahman politics inspired by the *satyashodhak* tradition.[108]

The Satyashodhak Samaj's ethical imperative, its notion of democracy in a caste society, coupled with the growing legitimacy of global egalitarian politics were responsible for the gradual infusion of liberal elements into Shahu's caste conservatism. The change in his politics was palpable. At the turn of the century, Shahu's anti-Brahman rhetoric was fuelled by the need to avenge the insult of his lineage and an urgency to set the record straight that the royal family had Aryan-Kshatriya ancestry. His work in the field of education too was rooted in the culture of aristocratic patronage

[104]Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non Brahman Movement in Western India, 1873 to 1930* (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976), p. 128. Between 1901 to 1920 Chatrapati Shahu built hostels for non-Brahman students from communities such as: the Jains, Marathas, Muslims, Lingayats, Namdev-shimpis, Sonars, Saraswats, Kayastha Prabhus, and the 'Untouchables'.

[105]Copland, 'The Maharaja of Kolhapur and the Non-Brahmin Movement 1902–10', p. 221. Professor Bijapurkar of Rajaram College in Kolhapur was arrested for sedition. Shahu also targeted the Shivaji club, a youth outfit galvanized by the writings of Tilak and in which mostly Brahmans participated.

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

[107]Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*, p. 128. Bhaskarrao Jadhav named his newspaper *Maratha Dinabandhu*, perhaps after the popular Satyashodhak publication the *Din-Bandhu.*

[108]Ibid., p. 128. The Satyashodak Samaj's non-Brahman caste critique left a lasting imprint on Shahu Maharaj's other programmes too. For instance, in 1911 the Kolhapur royalty inaugurated a school for the Patils of the village. The notion that the Patils, who often belonged the Kunbi-Maratha caste complex and were the headmen of the village, were swindled by the Brahman accountant, or the Kulkarni, of the village guided this endeavour. And so Shahu Maharaj envisioned that literacy and education would train the Patils to hold their own. However, this vision of non-Brahman upliftment was undergirded by caste conservatism.

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that encouraged social progress of distinct caste without questioning the hierarchical power structure.[109]

Towards the end of his life, Shahu Maharaj's non-Brahman politics became increasingly democratic and sought to include the non-aristocratic Marathas. The maharaj, who until then had closely guarded the category of Maratha for aristocratic Kshatriya families, now reached out to include those considered to be of 'common Kunbi origins' as well as Maratha sub-castes accused of varying degrees of 'illicit' mixing such as Kadu, Akkarmashi, and Kharchi Marathas. He also mingled with Maratha families who were believed to have 'impure origins', treated them as kin, and encouraged marriages between aristocratic and *varna sankara* Maratha clans.[110]

B. R. Ambedkar's 1946 work *Who were the Shudras?* recentred the figure of the Shudra, albeit momentarily, in the anti-caste discourse. While Ambedkar inscribed the book to the memory of Jotiba Phule and referred to him as 'the greatest Shudra of modern India', he departed significantly from Phule and Padwal's genealogy of the Shudras. Unlike Tukaram Padwal, who argued that the present-day Shudras were the descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of the subcontinent, Ambedkar contended that the Shudras were Aryan-Kshatriyas who were degraded by Brahman refusal to perform the *Upanayana*.[111] By asserting that the Shudras belonged to the Aryan stock, Ambedkar departed from Phule's contention that the Shudra and the Ati-shudra both belonged to the same historical community of the indigenous inhabitants. This assertion further implied that the Shudras were historically and racially distinct from the Ati-shudra or the 'Untouchables'. This distinction between the non-Brahmans and the 'Untouchables' is made plain in the preface to *Who were the Shudras?*: 'that I should be wanting in respect and reverence for the sacred literature of the Hindus should not surprise anyone if it is borne in mind that I am a non-Brahmin, not even a non-Brahman but an Untouchable'.[112]

Ambedkar marks the 'Untouchable' past as a radically different one from that of the Shudras by tracing a 'Buddhist genealogy' exclusively for the 'Untouchables'.[113] He speculates that in ancient India 'Untouchables' were men broken away from the aboriginal tribes of the subcontinent as a result of tribal clashes and conflicts. These 'broken men' gravitated towards Buddhism and valiantly resisted the violent advances of Brahmanism. On emerging triumphant, Brahmans treated them with contempt and imposed rules of Untouchability on them.[114] By seeking a different genealogy for the 'Untouchable', one that is rooted in Buddhism, Ambedkar reconfigured them as both a political and an ethical subject.[115]

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

[110]Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*, p. 133.

[111]B. R. Ambedkar, *Who were the Shudra?* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1970), p. 117. The *Upanayana*, also called the sacred thread ceremony, is a rite of passage ritual performed on behalf of upper-caste boys. The ceremony denotes the inauguration of Vedic learning in the life of young men.

[112]Ibid., p. xxi.

[113]Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 155.

[114]B. R. Ambedkar, *Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables* (New Delhi: Amrit Book Company, 1948).

[115]Rao, *The Caste Question*, p. 150.

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

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

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