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Conflict, Identity and Narratives: The Brahman Communities of Western India from the Seventeenth through the Nineteenth Centuries

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Conflict, Identity and Narratives: The Brahman Communities of Western India from the Seventeenth through the Nineteenth Centuries

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To Mummy and Baba

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Conflict, Identity and Narratives:
The Brahman Communities of Western India from the Seventeenth through the Nineteenth Centuries

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Popular perception and analyses of Hinduism and Indian society tend to focus on a largely monolithic image of the Brahmans. They emphasize the supremacy of Brahmans over other classes in social and religious domains, and attribute this supremacy mainly to their superior ritual status as members of the priestly class, as well as to their traditional access to learning and literacy. This dominant image has received most attention in scholarly approaches to Hindu-Indian society and religion. Scholars of religious studies have offered various theories to explain the ritual supremacy of Brahmans, while struggles of lower castes against Brahmans have been a persistent theme in historical studies. By stressing the dominance of Brahmans in the hierarchy of power, the theoretical and historical studies have adopted a generalized and hackneyed view of Brahmans. While doing so, they have largely ignored the power struggles *within* the

larger Brahman class. History notes the emergence of various Brahman communities in different regions at different times; it also indicates the dynamism and fluidity inherent in the formation of these communities through continually evolving affiliations with distinct factors such as region, language, sects, occupation, rituals, and ritual texts. Despite the transformations and complexities taking place within this class, the perception of their supremacist identity has persisted. How did multiple Brahman communities that shared space and prominence within a particular region engage one another? Were there any disputes among them as they shared claims to the highest social ranking in the societies of which they were a part? If any such conflicts indeed occurred, did the disputing communities create any hierarchy among themselves just as they have been positing a hierarchy between themselves and other classes? Finally, how did they define their identities as a response to these conflicts and hierarchies, and how do these identities relate to the monolithic and essentialist identity attributed to the Brahman class as such? These questions – despite their critical significance – have surprisingly escaped the scholarly gaze of the specialists in religious studies and historians.

This dissertation explores this largely uncharted area by focusing on the interrelationship and identities of the four Brahman groups situated in what we know today as states of Maharashtra and Goa, in the time period from the seventeenth century through the nineteenth century. During this period the four communities – the Chitpavans, the Karhadas, the Sarasvats, and the Deshasthas – engaged in intense mutual rivalry centered on gaining greater prominence in social, political and religious domains. This rivalry was largely due to contemporary political conditions under the Marathas in

the early-modern/pre-colonial period, and later under the British in the colonial period. This dissertation examines five narratives composed during this period that reflect the responses of these four communities to their mutual conflicts. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*, the *Śyenavijātidharmanirṇaya*, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*, and the *Daśaprakaraṇa* contain portrayals by a particular group of itself and its rivaling groups. This dissertation analyzes the discursive and the historical aspects of these narratives to understand the identities of these communities; it identifies the key notions that were integral to their identities and the socio-political circumstances under which they were articulated. Within the discursive aspect, I compare the narratives using the principle of intertextuality and explore how they relate to one another, the common themes they invoke and their textual modes that had a crucial bearing upon the ways in which they affected the identities of the four Brahman groups. Within the historical aspect I study the general and specific contexts within which the Brahmans produced and used the narratives to define their identities in the early modern and colonial eras.

This dissertation is divided in two parts; the first deals with the early modern period and the second part focuses on the colonial period. The early modern period was an exceptional period for the Brahmans in western India as they experienced unprecedented social and occupational mobility under the regional polities, in particular under the Maratha rulers. The Marathas offered great opportunities of patronage and employment to regional Brahmans, as well as encouraged them to take precedence in social, political, and religious realms as a way to consolidate their claims to Hindu kingship. As the Brahman class rose to prominence, various Brahman groups, in

particular these four prominent Brahman groups, competed against one another to obtain a greater share in patronage and employment. Asserting their own superior Brahmanical status while simultaneously denigrating the status of others was the prime means through which each of these groups staked claims to a greater social standing.

These intra-Brahmanical rivalries and the attempts of these groups to project a hierarchy of ideal Brahmanhood found expression in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*, the *Śyenavijātidharmanirṇaya*, and the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*. These narratives are essentially historical inasmuch as they contain accounts of origins and the pasts of these communities. This suggests that history was the chief site upon which these intra-Brahmanical rivalries were articulated. My analysis indicates that within this overarching scheme of history, the narratives invoked certain key themes in their accounts, which they used to project a superior status of the community that they endorsed and an inferior status of the community they wished to denigrate. These themes include diet, modes of occupation, right to *sannyāsa*, regional affiliation, right to the *ṣatkarma*, and a patron deity or an emblematic figure. I argue that these themes define a distinct set of criteria for ideal Brahmanhood such as a vegetarian diet, religious modes of occupation, entitlement to *sannyāsa* and to *ṣaṭkarma*, affiliation to a sacred region, and validation of status by an authoritative figure. These criteria define a frame of reference within which the Brahman communities projected a hierarchy of ideal Brahmanhood among themselves. I demonstrate that these criteria had a strong correlation with actual practices (diet, occupation) and associations (regions, deities) of the Brahman communities, and were embedded within distinct socio-political conditions. This suggests

that unlike the monolithic, static, and ahistorical notion of Brahmanhood projected in the ideological world of classical texts and 'Orientalist' studies, the Brahmanhood to which a Brahman in early-modern Maharashtra subscribed was a pluralistic and fluid notion embedded within a distinctly regional and temporal context. This dissertation also illustrates that far from being restricted to the discursive domain, this notion (and the narratives that constructed it) asserted its relevance and influence in the practical realities of the early modern era in various ways. In other words, the narrative discourse of Brahmanhood had a tangible impact on the identities of the Brahmans in question.

The second part of the dissertation examines the colonial period during which this pluralistic, fluid, and distinctly regional notion of Brahmanhood continued be invoked and redefined in debates among the Brahman communities. Triggered by contemporary social and political transformations, these debates mark the continuation of certain elements from the previous era, as well as the introduction of new elements drawn from the changing social and political order. In particular, the ways in which the narratives from the previous era were called upon and redefined in these debates reflect some of the crucial modalities in which a unique synthesis of the new and the old elements was constructed and adapted to these new disputes. By drawing attention to the discursive and the practical fluidities of Brahmanical rivalries and identities through its focus on the narratives, this dissertation calls for more nuanced attention to Brahman communities than they have received thus far.

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Note on Transliteration

This dissertation uses the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) for the lossless Romanization of the Devanagari script. In the context of this dissertation, this includes words in the Sanskrit and the Marathi languages. I have observed the following rules and exceptions:

1. Community designations such as Chitpavan, Sarasvat, Karhada and Deshastha and the names of sub-groups within these communities have not been transliterated. Exceptions include the community designations Śeṇavī and Koṅkaṇe.
2. Regions and personal names that appear as part of narratives have been transliterated using the above scheme, except for well-known figures such as Shivaji and Shahji. Well-known names of geographical features such as names of regions, mountains, and rivers have also been exempted from the transliteration scheme, in preference to their existing spellings in English.
3. Names based on hereditary professions such as Deshpande and Kulkarni have been exempted from the transliteration scheme.
4. For the sake of consistency, the name Gāgābhaṭṭa appears with diacritical marks throughout.

Introduction

This dissertation focuses on the distinct identities of Brahman communities in Western India from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century. In particular, I explore how the identities of four Brahman sub-castes: the Sarasvats, the Chitpavans, the Karhadas and the Deshasthas, were shaped in relation to each other. At the heart of the complex interplay between these communities was a conflict arising from the attempt of each community to assert its supremacy over the others. I examine the role of certain narratives that reflect these conflicts and the contending identities arising from them.

As such, this dissertation presents an image of Brahmans that departs from the one familiar to us through popular perception. This familiar/dominant image tends to be largely monolithic: it emphasizes the supremacy of Brahmans over other classes in social and religious domains, and attributes this supremacy mainly to their superior ritual status as members of the priestly class, as well as to their traditional access to learning and literacy. This dominant image has received most attention in scholarly approaches to Hindu-Indian society and religion as well. Scholars of religious studies have offered various theories to explain the ritual supremacy of Brahmans, while struggles of lower castes against Brahmans have been a persistent theme in historical studies.

Certain key sources have been influential in attracting attention to Brahman's ritual and social supremacy in the traditional hierarchical system of four *varṇas*: classical texts of Hinduism, the Orientalists who studied India under colonial auspices, and the

anti-Brahman discourse of lower caste movements. The classical scriptures – the Vedas as the primary revelation and Smṛtis as the secondary or remembered revelation – echo the self-serving identity of the priestly elite who composed them and preserved them. In their Brahman-centric ideological worldview, these texts unanimously hold that the maintenance of *dharma* (the eternal order that upholds and balances the social and moral spheres of human existence) relies upon the proper performance of sacrifice and the adherence to a distinctive social stratification. These scriptures presuppose the highest position of Brahmans in both these interlinked practices: in a central role, priests perform the sacrifice and act as the only link between gods and men. Their role as priests makes them walking gods on earth and the very embodiment of *dharma*. By their virtues as priests, Brahmans assume the top position in the social hierarchy, above other *varṇas*: *Kṣatriyas*, *Vaiśyas*, and *Śūdras*. As their ritual, moral, and spiritual worth surpasses that of these classes, they are to be given exceptional privileges such as those relating to punishment. Maintaining the superiority of Brahmans though these privileges is synonymous with the sustenance of *dharma* and the proper functioning of society.

In the colonial period, Orientalists played a key role in highlighting the supremacy of Brahmans. With a keen desire to acquire the systematic knowledge of Hindu religion and society, they turned to classical scriptures. They believed that these scriptures provided the ideological foundation to the real and practical workings of Indian society. Relying on the ideological hierarchical model of society and the depiction of priests in these texts, they concluded that Hinduism was a religion of priests whose

sacerdotal authority enabled them to occupy the central position in Hindu social and religious domains (Chuyen 2004: 12). An important factor dictated the Orientalists' dependence on scriptures and the position of Brahmans they emphasized: they were influenced by the Christian conception of religion in which scriptures and priests were the core elements of religion (Gelders and Derde 2003: 4611). Christianity was believed to be a god-given religion, revealed through scriptures, and corrupted through the course of time due to the machinations of priests. With this understanding, they blamed Brahmans for the "degeneration" of a once glorious Hindu religion: Brahmans perpetrated social injustice by preserving their own hegemony through the creation and sanctification of castes and by using scriptures to justify their actions. Even through this criticism of Brahmanical hegemony, the Orientalists inherently acknowledged the supreme position of the Brahmans.

The anti-Brahman lower caste movements that emerged in the nineteenth century, most notably in Maharashtra (O'Hanlon 1985), was yet another influential source perpetrating the notion of Brahmanical hegemony. The long-standing perception that Brahmans were the agents of social injustice who had deprived the lower castes of social and economic progress found a political platform through this movement. Lower caste leaders vociferously denounced the oppressive beliefs and practices of Brahmans that under the pretext of ritual impurity and pollution humiliated lower castes and hindered their progress. Like the Orientalists, they blamed the Brahman-centric Hindu scriptures for providing ideological foundation to Brahmanical tyranny. Thus, despite their distinct

backgrounds, the Orientalists and the anti-Brahmanical lower-caste movements were instrumental in emphasizing the supremacist image of the Brahmans in classical texts and the idea of Brahmanical dominance over other classes. As such, they left their mark on the theoretical and lay opinions regarding Brahmans.

These nineteenth-century views have impacted the theoretical opinions regarding Brahmans and have been influential in attracting the attention of scholars to the hegemony of the Brahmans in religious and social spheres. Van der Veer (1989) notes the influence of the Orientalist perspective on the anthropological studies on Hindu society in the 1950s and 1960s: anthropologists in this era sought to understand the sociological core of Hindu values and practices through interpretations of classical texts. Ignoring the nuanced economic and political conditions underlying the structures of power in the Hindu society, this generation of anthropologists gave precedence to classical texts written from the perspective of a Brahmanical ideology. Their methodological preference dictated their narrow view of Hindu society as a static and unified system governed by a fixed hierarchy. Consequently, these studies emphasized the supremacy of the ideal Brahman-priest to be a real and permanent fixture of Hindu society; they explained the hierarchy between Brahmans and others through theoretical principles (1989: 67). The most influential models among these was Dumont's (1970) bi-polar notion of purity and impurity as the organizing principle of Hindu society: Brahmans, as priests, occupied the highest rank in the caste hierarchy due to their ritual purity and non-Brahmans were ranked lower according to their level of impurity. Later Indologists such as Harper

(1964), Babb (1975), Marriott and Inden (1975), and Heesterman (1971) rarely departed from the view that the Brahmans' ritual purity – whether as priests or as renouncers – entitled them to hold a supreme rank in the Hindu society (1989: 69). Well into the 1980s, as van der Veer notes, the Orientalist conception of an ideal Brahman who stood at the acme of social and religious dominated the study of contemporary Hinduism.

Historical studies steer away from the ideological representation of Brahmans in classical texts; instead, such studies examine the predominant role of the Brahman class in the hierarchical power structures in social and political orders. Studies exploring the interrelationship between the state and society have explained how Brahman-priests were crucial in ritually legitimizing the status of kings in the medieval period. Apart from the focus on sacerdotal roles, Bayly (2001) and Thapar (2002) chart the occupational mobility of the Brahmans in the late medieval and the early modern period. These studies focus on the secular vocations of Brahmans as skilled literati that participate in the consolidation of the state power. Zelliot (1982) and Wagoner (2003) highlight the active role played by Brahmans as intelligentsia that controlled traditional knowledge systems in pre-colonial and colonial India. Perspectives on the origins and the development of castes have analyzed how caste identities were shaped in relation to Brahmans and Brahman-centered codes of social hierarchy. Placed at the opposite ends of social and ritual hierarchy, Brahmans and lower castes (in particular untouchables) have shared a history of mutual hostility. The class struggles between these two groups and the identity of lower castes formed in antagonism to Brahmans have in particular dominated this line

of inquiry (O'Hanlon 1985, Jaffrelot 2003). Despite their distinct emphases, consciously or unconsciously, these scholars have still projected the hegemony of Brahmans in political and social domains.

By stressing the dominance of Brahmans in the hierarchy of power, the theoretical and historical studies have adopted a generalized and hackneyed view of Brahmans. While doing so, they have largely ignored the power struggles *within* the larger Brahman class. Surely, for a class that enjoyed a privileged position in the society for a very long time, internal power-struggles must be inevitable, not despite its traditional association with power, but *because* of it. History notes the crystallization of various Brahman communities across different regions and different periods. How did these multifarious spatially and temporally co-existent communities engage with one another? Were there any conflicts among them as they shared space and power in religious and social domains of societies in which they lived? What were the modalities in which these conflicts manifested themselves? How did the concerned Brahman-groups define their identities in response to these conflicts? An investigation into these questions is sure to reveal heretofore-overlooked dimensions of the monolithically understood Brahmans.

My dissertation addresses these questions by focusing on four Brahman communities from what are today termed the states of Maharashtra and Goa in Western India – the Chitpavans, the Deshasthas, the Karhadas, and the Sarasvats. In the early modern and the colonial periods, in particular from 1600s until 1870s, these communities engaged in intense mutual conflicts that arose from contemporary social and political

pressures. In this dissertation, I examine how these Brahman communities expressed their identities in the context of these conflicts. Five narratives composed during the early modern and the colonial period: *viz.* the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*, the *Śyenavijātidharmanirṇaya*, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*, and the *Daśaprakaraṇa* serve as excellent resources to examine how these Brahmans defined their identities. By examining these narratives, I identify various factors that they deemed integral to their identities. A key fact that we cannot ignore is that though these communities had distinct identities, they were essentially Brahmans; by identifying the key factors in their identities, I wish to see if there emerges a distinct conception of Brahmanhood to which these communities subscribed.

I demonstrate that all the narratives (except the *Daśaprakaraṇa*) were primarily historical, that is, they contained accounts of the past. This indicates that history was the overarching factor which was central to the Brahmans' identities. Within this overarching factor, the narratives emphasize certain key factors. These factors indicate various criteria of Brahmanhood that defined a distinct framework of reference; within this framework the Brahman communities pursued the answer to the questions: who is an ideal Brahman, and who has the superior Brahmanical status? By answering these questions for themselves and for others, the Brahmans created a hierarchy among themselves. Furthermore, I also show that the criteria of ideal Brahmanhood and the framework that these criteria created were embedded within distinct socio-political conditions. In other words, I argue that the notion of Brahmanhood to which these communities subscribed

had a unique spatio-temporal dimension – it was a distinctly regional notion influenced by contemporary conditions, and *not* a generic and ahistorical concept it is generally understood to be.

As they had a correlation with their contemporary socio-political conditions, the narratives, because they indicated these criteria were also used in practice, affected the Brahman communities in the practical domain. In other words, going beyond their discursive realm, these narratives were influential in shaping the identities of these groups. Accordingly, I analyze two inter-related aspects of narratives. I first discuss the discursive aspect dealing with the structure of the narratives, common themes, and narrative strategies. Secondly, I address the historical aspect that deals with the socio-political milieu within which they were embedded, and the impact of the socio-political conditions on the discourse in the narrative, as well as instances indicating the role of these narratives in shaping the identities of the Brahman groups in the early modern and colonial period.

The Discursive Aspect

To understand the discursive aspect better, let me first explain what I mean by the term "narrative" and how I intend to analyze these aspects in the five narratives. In simplistic terms, a narrative is a story. However, whereas the term story generally denotes a sequence of events, the term narrative emphasizes modes of narration in which a story is told. These modes may include such aspects as the specific tropes and motifs in narratives, the genre in which the narrator chooses to frame his narrative, and the

strategies that he uses to narrate his story in a particular manner. As these modes of narration are closely related to the tastes and cultural preferences of the audience that listens to it or reads it, the audience is another crucial factor indicated in the term narrative. Similarly, the attitudes and preferences of the narrator also affect the form and content of his narrative. Thus, I understand the term narrative to encompass within its scope the speaker/ narrator and the audience (reader/listener), in addition to the tropes and the strategies used in the act of narration. As such the term narrative distinguishes itself from the term text, which denotes any verbal or written message or sets of messages.

My analysis is based on narratives, not on texts. Therefore, rather than focusing only on their thematic content, I will also consider their narrative modes, strategies, their genre and how the intended audience received it and responded to them. Consideration of these factors is important because, far from being passive literary works, these narratives were actively read, interpreted, and used in various contexts. They played a key role in defining the identities of the Brahman groups and their impact on practical realities was apparent through various instances. To a large extent, their relevance in the practical domain and their acceptance in the intended audience derived from their narrative features. In a bid to enhance the acceptability within a niche audience, their authors chose certain narrative features and formats over others. For instance, most of these narratives were written in Sanskrit, the prestigious language of classics and scriptures, the veritable language of gods, the use of which itself lent an aura of authority to a text. Similarly, they

were cast in genres and formats akin to that of Sanskrit scriptures in order to be understood as legitimate scriptures. As such, their authors envisaged them to be distinct from, for instance, folk poems written in Marathi that had popular appeal, but not from the authoritative appeal of scriptures. As the response of the intended audience indicates, these strategies of legitimization were successful in portraying some of the narratives as authoritative and authentic sources of knowledge. However, narratives that did not comply with these strategies were understood and received differently from those that did.

In addition to the analysis of the above aspects, the principle of intertextuality will form a significant part of my methodology. Intertextuality refers to the synchronic relationship between two or more texts; it explains how texts refer and respond to one another (either directly or indirectly) and derive their meaning from this interrelationship. The concept of intertextuality is a particularly useful tool to understand the individual and collective significance of the narratives, because, as we will see, the narratives *did* resort to certain common themes and strategies. Each of the narratives sought to validate the identity of a particular group; yet, regardless of their distinct and mutually conflicting affiliations, they drew upon a shared pool of themes, which indicates the centrality of certain criteria in the definition of Brahmanical identities. Their common discursive ground indicates the particular nodes along which the Brahman groups chose to construct and express their identities. Thus, largely, the narratives lend themselves to be analyzed through the notion of intertextuality; without its use, this analysis will remain incomplete.

The Historical Aspect

In addition to the discursive aspects, this study will also take into account the historical aspects of the narratives. The historical aspect of the narratives constitutes another dimension of their meaning, which will explain *why* the Brahman groups composed the narratives to articulate their identities, *why* the narratives focused on certain themes and criteria of Brahmanhood, and what the contexts were in which the narratives were invoked. In other words, the historical investigation will shed light on the *functional* aspect of the narratives.

My preference to consider discursive and historical aspects of the narratives reflects changes in the way narratives have come to be used in the social sciences over the last few decades. The study of narratives has witnessed certain key trends since "Narratology" as a distinct field of inquiry emerged in the 1970s. In its initial phase, this field was restricted to the study of mostly fictional and autobiographical literature. Scholars generally understood the term narrative as a piece of written literature in a narrow philological sense. Initial studies contained the theoretical overtones of French structuralism with a heavy emphasis on finding structures or semantic and formal similarities through formal analyses of clauses. Towards the nineties, narrativists found the limitations of the structuralist and philological approach. They felt that the studies based on this approach were fraught with positivist claims, reductionist explanations and technical jargon, and that the potential of Narratology was not adequately realized due to its exclusive focus on written literature. In the nineties, therefore, a new generation of

narrativists began to understand narratives by taking into account phenomena such as communication, audio-visual dimensions, visual and performing arts, material artifacts, and cultural and historical contexts. This discursive shift was also evident in the way narrativists began applying the study of narratives to a variety of fields such as psychology, sociology, history, anthropology and ethnography. Concurrently, the meaning and scope of the term narrative also underwent a radical change. Now the meaning of the term narrative encompassed not just literary works but also the cognitive, the behavioral, the visual, the oral, the cultural, and the historical works. In other words, narrativists began to focus on "cultural analyses of forms through which and in which stories are told" (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001: 7). In accordance with these trends, the idea that "narratives give 'voice' to social relations and locally embedded cultural meanings" (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001: 7) has continued to emerge stronger in disciplines such as anthropology, ethnography, and history. Consequently, there has been a growing trend to investigate social and cultural phenomena through contemporary narratives. Most significantly, scholars in the above disciplines are increasingly turning to various kinds of narratives (such as orally transmitted folk songs or historical accounts) to understand the interrelationship between narratives and the construction of community identities. How narratives reflect a community's conception of itself and others, how they act as powerful means to foster a sense of shared identities among various communities in history and practice, and thereby affect group dynamics in a particular society are questions that have been persistently posed.

Adhering to this new approach, historians of South Asia have been increasingly focusing on narratives to understand the formation of community identities based on social, political, and religious affiliations. Scholars have explored community identities based on religious, social, linguistic, gender, and cultural affiliations by studying narratives associated with the concerned communities (Pollock 1993, Gottshalk 2000, Figueira 2002, Chakrabarti 2001, Deshpande 2002.) My study is a continuation of this line of inquiry, and yet in its approach and scope it differs from a large number of these studies. These studies largely focus on the role of narratives in the creation of a sense of shared identity in a particular community of individuals who subscribe to that identity. For instance, Deshpande's study (2002) demonstrates how Maratha heroic folk-ballads called *povāḍas* were instrumental in creating a feeling of pride in martial valor for the ethnic Maratha group in the pre-colonial period. My study, however, highlights a more dynamic function of narratives where they did not simply celebrate the identity of a group by evoking shared ideals, but also underscored the difference between the ideals of two distinct groups. It indicates that, more often than not, denigrating other groups was as crucial to these narratives as extolling the groups that they patronized.

Similarly, my use of the notion of identity in my analysis also reflects the trend in the larger field of social sciences to use this notion as an analytical tool. At a basic level, the term identity denotes a person's or a group's conception of itself. It is the way an individual or a community thinks of its individuality and defines that individuality. Various disciplines such as psychology (Cote and Levine 2002), philosophy (Ricoeur and

Blamey 1995), sociology (Leary and Tangney 2003), literary studies (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997), and history have been using this term variously in their investigations of relationship of an individual with a group, or that of one group with another. In South Asia studies, we see a reflection of the growing popularity of the notion of identity in the proliferation of social and historical studies dealing with the identities of various communities. Scholars have explored the processes of identity formation in various South Asian communities with regard to their religious, social, linguistic, gender, and cultural affiliations.

Within the larger rubric of the notion of Identity, the notions of the Self and the Other have emerged as key constructs in studies exploring the formation of individual and community identities. There is consensus among various disciplines that the identity of an individual or a group, the "Self," always defines itself in relation to other individuals or groups, the "Other." The Self is the vantage point from which an individual or a group reacts to the Other and based on that reaction defines its Self as part of the process. The Self and the Other, though diametrically opposite to each other, always presuppose each other (Talbot 1995, Chattopadhyaya 1998).

Although the notion of the Self and the Other is used in disciplines such as psychology and literature studies with regard to individual identity, it is more commonly used in anthropological, sociological, and historical studies that focus on collective identities. This can be attributed to the fact that the tendency to assert the self-identity in relation to others (by challenging, subordinating or excluding others) is usually more

acute in a societal setting with multiple interacting groups. Groups generally construct roles for themselves and look after their own interests less often by cooperating and more often by challenging others, due to the very nature of group-dynamism. As such, the mutual oppositeness – and interdependence – that the notions of the Self and the Other indicate becomes more evident in the way groups define their identities.

I find the notions of the Self and the Other to be relevant to my investigation because the process of identity-formation implied in these two notions is evident in the way the Chitpavans, the Karhadas, the Deshasthas, and the Sarasvats defined themselves. Each of the four Brahman communities defined its Self by challenging and undermining the Other. However, unlike most studies that define one community as the Self and the other community as the Other and maintain this distinction, my analysis will largely consider each of the four Brahman communities alternatively as the Self and the Other. While community A defined its superior identity by denigrating community B, community B or C claimed to have a superior identity by denigrating community A – this multi-dimensional pattern of identity formation emerges when we consider the narratives collectively.

The Brahman Communities

The Chitpavans, the Karhadas, the Deshasthas, and the Sarasvats are recognized as major Brahman castes (endogamous groups) in Maharashtra state, home to around sixty Brahman castes. Ascertaining their exact time of crystallization into distinct caste groups is a very difficult task because of the lack of sources containing objective

information. Prior to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, no reliable sources mention any distinct community-names. Inscriptions in the Deccan region from an earlier period record donations made to Brahmans by local kings. These inscriptions identify the distinctions among Brahman recipients on the basis of two factors. These distinctions, which originate in ancient times, associate Brahmans with their *gotras* and their affiliation to one of the four Vedas, the particular *śākhā* (recension) and *sūtra* of that Veda. *Gotras* are smaller exogamous groups or clans within endogamous caste-groups. *Gotras* are named after ancient sages believed to be progenitors of the *gotras*. Members of different *gotras* claim to be descendants of their respective progenitors. The other important marker of distinction, namely affiliation to a particular Veda and its branch, means that *mantras* from that particular Veda and its recension are used in the rituals performed by and for the associated Brahmans. Brahmans with various permutations of these two factors may have crystallized themselves into distinct communities, although we do not know the precise time-frame of this crystallization.

The earliest mention of the Brahman communities with distinct designations appears in some of the narratives that we will be discussing. The earliest probable time when these narratives were composed is the sixteenth century, which indicates that at least by this period, some of these communities were known by distinct names. As we will see, these narratives indicate that around the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, region was an important factor identifying the distinctions among various Brahman groups. They also indicate certain customs and practices that were prevalent among these

groups, and we will review them in the course of this study. However, the narratives wove accounts describing the origins and the ancient past of the communities using elements, the nature and content of which would be usually considered mythical. We can consider these accounts as the earliest "histories" of these communities, if we use the term history in a general sense of accounts of the past, and not in the sense of academic narratives written from a rational and objective point of view.

Any attempt to write a systematic and academic history of the Brahman groups began in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century with the initiative of British Orientalists and ethnographers to understand the histories and practices of indigenous communities. Similar information was recorded in district gazetteers and census reports that were compiled as systematic digests of information about the Indian empire, its resources and its inhabitants. These colonial accounts were not truly objective as they drew upon narratives from an earlier period in their descriptions of the ancient "history" of the Brahman communities. Similarly, the Brahman groups themselves played a critical role in the construction of the colonial accounts, as they served as indigenous informants and collaborators supplying information to colonial scholars. These informants and collaborators shared selective information that bolstered the status of their own community and denigrated other Brahman groups. Thus, despite the authoritative status that these state-sponsored colonial works enjoyed, the sources they used (both textual and personnel) affected their objectivity.

From the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards, Brahman scholars wrote academic histories of their own as well as about other communities that were modeled upon colonial accounts. Their works had the appearance of objective scholarly works in their use of a wide range of sources such as epigraphic records, royal decrees, and official letters, emphasis on a chronological order, and the overall treatment of the subject. Yet, these works could not help but reveal the deep-seated biases of their authors whose ultimate agenda was to prove the superior history of their respective communities to the detriment of others. In a bid to present an ancient and glorious past of their own communities, the Brahman historians made a number of anachronistic and imaginative claims based on insufficient data. Moreover, in addition to the above sources, the Brahman historians also cited the narratives and the colonial accounts that were themselves rooted in the contentious relations among the Brahman groups. In other words, the historical discourse – whether in the form of mythical narratives, colonial accounts, or indigenous scholarly works – was itself a reflection of the conflicting identities of the Brahman communities.

Yet, if we set aside the problematic portions related to ancient history, the works of colonial and Brahman scholars along with census reports and gazetteers serve as useful sources of objective information. Their descriptions of various regional Brahman groups mention various distinguishing factors that these groups used for demarcation from other groups. For instance, the 1880 Gazetteers of two districts in the Bombay Presidency – Poona in the hinterland and Ratnagiri in Konkan – refer to factors such as *gotras*,

affiliation to the Vedas, sectarian affiliation, occupations, titular deities, and regions of origin.

Among the factors noted above, regional affiliation served as the most primary and commonly used unit of identification to distinguish among Brahman communities. The four Brahman groups shared space with various minor Brahman groups in various parts of the coastal strip in the west, identified as Konkan, and in parts of the hinterland region in the Deccan Plateau (commonly known as Desh). Geographically, the Konkan coast, lying along the Arabian Sea, encompasses a large area stretching from Maharashtra to Kerala. It covers from north to south, the present-day coastal districts in Maharashtra (Thane, Mumbai, Raigad, Ratnagiri, and Sindhudurg), the state of Goa, the coastal districts of Canara, Shimoga, and Udupi in Karnataka, and the plains of west Kerala. Today Konkan is also an administrative sub-division of the Maharashtra state. The Sahyadri Mountains, running inland from north to south parallel to the Konkan coast, separate Konkan from the hinterland in the Deccan plateau. Also known as the Western Ghats, these ranges extend from the border of Maharashtra and Gujarat to Kerala, running through the states of Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The Deccan plateau, which spans the most area in the southern part of the Indian peninsula, is bounded by the Western Ghats to its west, the Eastern Ghats to its east, and the Vindhya and Satpura mountain ranges to the north. It is home to important rivers, most of which flow from the west to the east, arising in the Western Ghats and emptying themselves into the Bay of Bengal. The Godavari River and its tributaries drain the northern portion of

the plateau, the Krishna River and its tributaries (such as the Koyna and Bhima Rivers), and the Tungabhadra River drain the central portion of the plateau, while the Kaveri River flows in the southernmost part. Two major rivers, the Narmada and the Tapi, flow from east to west in the northern part of the Deccan plateau and empty into the Arabian Sea.

Part of the Konkan strip running through Maharashtra and Goa and certain key towns located along the confluence of rivers and their tributaries in the hinterland regions in Western Maharashtra were home to most of the Brahman groups. The gazetteers of Ratnagiri and Poona note that Ratnagiri district contained the highest population of Chitpavans. They were commonly found in coastal regions north of Ratnagiri, indicating that this portion of Konkan was the main hub of the community. The original homeland of the Karhadas was generally considered to stretch along the Krishna River – from its point of merging with the Koyna River in the north to its merging with the Varana River to the south. However, they were widely found throughout Konkan, particularly in the town of Rajapur in the Ratnagiri district. A large population of Karhadas was also found in Goa. The Deshasthas dominated a large part of the Deccan Plateau, particularly the region extending from the Narmada River in the north to the Krishna and Tungabhadra Rivers in the south. The Sarasvats constituted the largest Brahman community in Goa, and also had a sizeable presence in parts of Konkan lying to north of Goa; however, they were a minority in the hinterland. In addition to being a major Brahman community in Maharashtra and Goa, they claimed to be a faction of a larger Sarasvat community found

in Kashmir, Punjab, and Bengal. They believed that a section of this larger community migrated to the south in ancient past and settled in Goa. A popular theory suggests that in order to commemorate their northern origins, the southern Sarasvats named themselves Gauda Sarasvats, where the term Gauda denotes a region in the north, close to Bengal. The gazetteers note that although these Brahman groups were based primarily in Maharashtra and Goa, they also had a presence in other regions, most notably in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.

Besides regional affiliation, the gazetteers indicate the continued significance of the traditional system of *gotra* and affiliation to a particular Vedas as important distinguishing factors. Chitpavans were divided into fourteen *gotras* (Atri, Kapi, Kaśyapa, Kauṇḍinya, Gārgya, Kauśika, Jamadagni, Nityundana, Bhārgava, Bhāradvāja, Vatsa, Vasiṣṭha, Viṣṇuvardhana, and Śāṇḍilya); a majority of the Chitpavans were affiliated to the Taittirīya branch of the Ṛgveda, while very few followed the Yajurveda. They adhered to the Smārta sectarian tradition that propounded the monistic view that all deities are manifestations of one supreme God (often termed *Brahman*); this view was in contrast to the Vaiṣṇava sects, which believed in Viṣṇu as the ultimate god and considered other gods to be subordinates. As Smārtas, the Chitpavans considered the Śaṅkarācārya[1] as their chief preceptor with the highest spiritual and religious authority. In case of the Deshasthas, the exact names and numbers of their *gotras* were unknown. They

[1] Śaṅkarācārya is a title of the heads of monasteries that adhered to the Advaita tradition. The title derives from the eighth-century philosopher Śaṅkara, who propounded the Advaita view that the universal self and individual self were ultimately one. Śaṅkara established four monasteries in the north, south, east, and west India for the propagation of this view.

were affiliated to both the Ṛgveda and the Yajurveda; the Ṛgvedi Deshasthas followed the Śākala recension and the Yajurvedi Deshasthas followed the Mādhyandina and Kāṇva ones. They were divided into Smārtas and Vaiṣṇavas; the Vaiṣṇava Deshasthas followed monasteries in the Mādhva tradition, which embraced the philosophy of dualism propagated by the thirteenth-century theologian Madhva. The Karhadas were Smārta Brahmans affiliated to Aśvalāyana branch of the Ṛgveda. Similar to the Deshasthas, the names and numbers of their *gotras* are not recorded in the gazetteers. The Sarasvats were both Smārtas and Vaiṣṇavas and were divided into ten *gotras*. Curiously, none of the sources records their affiliation to a branch of Vedic learning.

Each community also worshipped distinct *kuladevatās* (clan-deities) whose shrines were situated in various places in both Konkan and the hinterland. The Chitpavans worshipped deities that were believed to be local manifestations of Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devī, and Gaṇeśa. The shrines of these deities were located in Konkan as well as in the hinterland, indicating the Chitpavans' migration from and into these two regions that must have occurred at some point of time in history. The Karhadas were worshippers of goddesses Durgā and Lakṣmī, whose shrines are also found in Konkan and the hinterland, suggesting a similar hypothesis. The Deshastha deities were concentrated mainly in the hinterland, while those of the Sarasvats – localized forms of Śiva, Viṣṇu, Brahmā, and Devī – were found mainly in and around Goa, indicating the stable presence of this community in this region.

Early-modern India and Maharashtra: an overview

What was the socio-political context within which the intra-Brahmanical rivalry and the narratives reflecting that rivalry emerged? I will review the specific conditions under which the Brahman groups clashed with one another later in this dissertation; here I present a picture of the larger political currents in India and Maharashtra during the early modern period (c. 1500 to 1800). Knowing these macro political processes is important, as Maharashtra was a microcosm that mirrored these larger trends. Historians are unanimous in their acknowledgement of early modern India as a site of extraordinary political and social activity: the latter half of the sixteenth century saw the rise and expansion of the imperial rule of Mughals under Akbar's leadership. Until around 1700, the Mughals controlled a large part of the Indian subcontinent – from Bengal in the east to Balochistan in the west; from Kashmir to the north to the Kaveri basin in the South. The empire was distinctive for its highly centralized administration that connected different regions.

In the early sixteenth century, various smaller states succeeded the Bahmani sultanate and the Vijayanagar kingdom in southern and central India. These smaller states engaged with one another and with the Mughals in complex ways – some of these states forged alliances with the Mughals, some competed with them, while some alternated between these two policies. Nonetheless, whether large or small, these polities presented significant opportunities for employment and patronage. For the consolidation of their administration, they relied on literate classes with various skills such as legal and

accounting skills, ability to maintain records, proficiency in one or more languages, and technical expertise. Local classes of skilled literati that already possessed these skills as well as those who acquired them anew strived to offer a wide range of services as administrators, envoys, interpreters, record-keepers, scribes, and accountants. The imperial and local courts also offered patronage to the scholarly and the creative talent from diverse regions and disciplines, leading to a cross-cultural exchange of ideas and trends of innovation in various knowledge systems (see Pollock 2001; Bronner 2002 and 2004; Wujastyk 2005; Ganeri 2009). Similarly, these polities forged new networks of patronage with religious institutions, temples, and priests in local and pan-Indian centers or reinforced pre-existing networks of patronage. This was particularly true of the nascent small polities whose rulers were keen to legitimize their rule through religious sanction.

Enterprising and ambitious intellectuals, priests, and specialists moved within f and all-India networks of patronage and employment. The migrations of these classes into imperial and regional centers led to an extraordinary social mobility that was unsurpassed in its extent: new aspirants constantly sought to enter this network, while the existing beneficiaries strove to ascend still higher in their respective fields. New social and occupational classes emerged to share resources with the pre-existing ones leading to the formation of new social orders and hierarchies. These social processes forced the new and old classes to define themselves in relation to one another, usually through the means of literary expressions of various kinds. Autobiographical narratives of courtly elites, prescriptive textbooks and digests on administrative duties, historical

genres containing accounts of origin, and formal compendia defining the ritual entitlements of various classes were some of the common modes in which competing elites from distinct social and political orders conceptualized themselves and others (see Rao et al 2003, Alam and Subrahmanyam 2004, Vajpeyi 2005, O'Hanlon and Minkowski 2008).

The social dynamism in early-modern Maharashtra exemplifies several of these processes. Important centers and ports of trade in Konkan afforded a crucial access to inter-continental trading networks that were thriving during this period. Such ports and fertile lands in the Desh – in particular, basins of the Godavari, the Krishna, and the Vainganga Rivers – were a coveted possession of various mutually-competing, big and small rulers who had reigned over the region since the sixteenth century. After the fall of the Bahmani sultanate (1347-1518), the five Shahs dominated the Deccan: the Nizam Shah of Ahmadnagar, the Adil Shah of Bijapur, the Qutub Shah of Golkonda, the Bidar Shah of Bidar, and the Imad Shah of Berar.

The latter half of the seventeenth century marked the rise of the Maratha state founded by Shivaji, the son of Shahaji Bhonsale, who was a military general who had allied with Adil Shah, the Nizam Shah, and the Mughals at various points of time. An ambitious king, Shivaji confronted the Mughals and the Adil Shah to claim an independent rule with a disciplined army and a well-structured administrative system. He was crowned as the sovereign king (Chatrapati) in 1674. By the time of his death, the Maratha state controlled most of Maharashtra and some parts of Gujarat. Shivaji's sons

Sambhaji and Rajaram succeeded to the throne upon his death and continued their father's expansionist politics. In the first decade of the seventeenth century, Sambhaji's son Shahu declared himself as the legitimate heir to the throne. During Shahu's reign (1708-1749), a line of Brahmans dominated the post of Peshva (Prime Minister) which was initiated under Shivaji's rule. The Peshvas played a key role in expanding the Maratha rule in northern and central India and in further consolidating the military and administrative systems. While the Marathas fought with various local chieftains and rulers, the Angrias and Afghans were their major adversaries. Their wars with the British east India Company, however, proved to be fatal. After three Anglo-Maratha wars between 1777 and 1818, the Maratha kingdom was finally annexed in 1818.

These distinct political orders had a deep impact on the literate communities, most notably on Brahmans as they experienced remarkable social and occupational mobility due to their long-standing connection with literacy and learning. The administrative needs of the regional polities created numerous employment opportunities for them. The Bahmani sultanates employed many Brahmans as administrators, revenue-officers, scribes, accountants, and record-keepers at the village level and at higher levels of state bureaucracy; most of these jobs were hereditary offices. The employment of Brahmans as service specialists continued in the Deccan sultanates, and a number of Brahman families began to rise to prominence as a result. Various families ventured into agriculture and functioned as landlords, while local priests also acquired land rights and grants in return of their priestly services. With the hope of obtaining employment and patronage, a

steady flow of Brahman families started to gravitate towards administrative and religious centers in both Konkan and Desh. The migrating groups hailed not just from within Maharashtra, but Brahmans from the neighboring region of Goa also immigrated to Maharashtra, in particular after the Portuguese took over Goa in 1510. As various Brahman groups began to co-exist, they became increasingly aware of their mutual presence and social standing. This marked the beginning of rivalries that were soon to escalate to a full-blown scale.

Although these social processes with Brahmans in the center commenced in the sixteenth century, it was only during the Maratha period that they dramatically gathered momentum. The Maratha rulers, like Hindu kings elsewhere, were keen to consolidate their credentials as authentic Hindu kings by promoting traditional Brahmanical norms in social and religious realms. They demonstrated their allegiance to these dhārmic modes of religiosity by sponsoring Brahmanical royal rituals, patronizing holy centers and priests, maintaining Brahmanical caste conventions, and encouraging the participation of Brahmans in important walks of social and political domains (Bayly 2001: 65). These policies had a consequence on Brahmans unsurpassed in its extent and intensity: scores of Brahmans excelled as military commanders, scribes, administrators, merchants, moneylenders, and ritual specialists either with or without ties to the royal court. Intellectuals with scholarly and creative talent sought patronage in return for rendering services to the royal court. Migration of Brahmans within and into Maharashtra increased manifold.

New aspirant groups with hitherto humble background and those who had some previous experience and background tussled with one another in a bid to secure a lion's share in the shared network of employment and patronage. The most significant groups in this respect were the Chitpavans, the Karhadas, the Deshasthas, and the Sarasvats. The new conditions forced these groups to assert their superiority with respect to one another in distinct ways. Their rank and status came into sharp focus as important factors determining entitlement to prominence in ritual and social spheres. Claiming the superiority of one's own status and the inferiority of the other – in other words, insinuating a hierarchy of status – became crucial. New modes of staking claims to supremacy in this hierarchy emerged, the most articulate of which were the narratives written in various genres. Either created anew or inscribed within larger, pre-existing ones, the narratives were a prime resource used not just to articulate the Brahman groups' mutually conflicting perspectives on one another's status, but also to also effectively *manipulate* that status. In conjunction with judicial and religious authorities, the narratives embodied the textual authority deployed to verify the Brahman's respective claims. The authority of the narratives manifested fully during the colonial period, which brought its own set of challenges (explained in further detail in the introduction to Part II of this dissertation). Within the dramatically new conditions of the colonial period, the Brahman groups were yet again forced to assert their identities through appeals to the narratives. The deployment of the narratives in the colonial era was a direct result of their

significance in the early modern period, and yet it was marked by distinct factors derived from contemporary developments.

Outline

This dissertation is broadly divided in two sections: Part I deals with narratives in the early modern period and the second section focuses on the developments and narratives in the colonial period. Part I includes chapters 1 through 4, while Part II consists of chapters 5 and 6. Each chapter focuses on a particular narrative, except chapter 5. Chapter 1 discusses the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, a Sthalapurāṇa (Purāṇa of Region), which was the most significant narrative to influence later narratives. This chapter highlights the core notions and motifs that became central in later narratives and the narrative features that were critical to the reception of the *Sahyadrikhaṇḍa* as an authoritative scripture in discursive and practical domains. In its historical section, it delineates specific social realities reflected in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, the judicial setting in which it was invoked, and its politically significant audience. The interrelationship between the Chitpavans and the Deshasthas and also between the Sarasvats and the Karhadas will be another important theme in the historical section. Chapter 2 is largely discursive; it investigates a Sanskrit historical treatise, *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*, and its complex interrelationship with the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* in the light of enquiry regarding intertextuality. It highlights a particular structure in which the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā* casts its accounts of various Brahman groups. Some of these accounts challenge the discourse in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*; nonetheless they draw upon the themes and tropes in

the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, implicitly reinforcing the authority of the latter. The chapter explains how the similarity of themes and tropes between these two narratives exemplifies their centrality in the discourse of identities. It focuses on the identities of the Chitpavans, Karhadas, and Sarasvats. Chapter 3 explores the *Śyenavijātidharmanirṇaya*, a Nirṇayapatra (letter of decision), composed in Sanskrit, which illustrates the importance of theoretical discourse on Brahmanhood (in particular from the Dharmaśāstras) as a hermeneutic framework with reference to which the history of Brahmans was interpreted. This chapter also discusses the reiteration of previous themes and the introduction of certain new themes in the narrative. As this is the first narrative insinuating contemporary political realities through various symbols, there will be an elaborate description of the socio-political conditions in Maharashtra and Goa within which the intra-Brahmanical rivalries (in particular between the Sarasvats and other groups) intensified. Chapter 4 deals with the *Konkaṇākhyāna*, a Marathi caste-chronicle of the Sarasvats. This chapter delineates the Sarasvats' viewpoint as reflected in this narrative: the ways in which they constructed their own identity and the factors at the core of this identity. It also analyzes how the *Koṇkaṇākhyāna* relates to the previous three narratives.

Part II begins with an introduction describing significant shifts in socio-political conditions in Maharashtra with the onset of colonial rule and concurrent shifts in the ideologies and concerns of the Brahman groups. It delineates various facets of colonial modernity manifesting in the form of a new system of education, improved channels of communication, and emergence of public associations; it focuses in particular on the

impact of colonial education policy on traditional resources supporting Brahmanical learning. It then assesses the distinct responses of the Brahman groups to these changes – a development which resulted in the emergence of distinct ideologies and identities. This introduction will serve as a background to the final two chapters, chapters five and six. Rather than focusing on a particular narrative, Chapter 5 investigates a series of public debates between the Chitpavans and the Sarasvats that were triggered in the context of the social changes around them. As the narratives were a crucial part of these debates, a significant theme of this chapter is the Brahman groups' varied responses to the narratives and the comparison between their use in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Additionally, it explores various continuities and discontinuities between the disputes in the colonial and pre-colonial periods. Chapter 6 focuses on the *Daśaprakaraṇa*, a narrative in Sanskrit defending the identity of the Sarasvats in response to the above disputes. Similar to other chapters, it also analyzes the response of this narrative to all the previous narratives, but the chief focus here is on the formal and discursive strategies used in the narrative and on the analysis of how these strategies are integral to the identity it seeks to define. Accordingly, it will pay special attention to the primary and secondary audiences of this narrative.

PART I: EARLY MODERN MAHARASHTRA

Chapter 1: Myths of Identity in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*

The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* is the most significant narrative of all of those which echo the contentious interrelationships and conflicted identity-politics of Brahman groups in Maharashtra and Goa. Containing the earliest signs of the intense rivalry among these groups, the controversy that this narrative generated and the influence it wielded on later discourse remains unmatched. Its portrayals of the Chitpavan, Karhada, Sarasvat, and Deshastha communities never failed to incite controversy in the narratives which followed. Whether in agreement or disagreement with these portrayals, however, these responses rarely departed from the *modality* in which the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* constructed the "history" of these communities: by making the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* their primary reference-point, these other narratives acknowledged its normative status – irrespective of their distinct ideologies and agendas. The influence of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* went beyond the discursive realm of narratives: for more than a century (from the early-eighteenth through the late-nineteenth centuries) its impact was just as pronounced in the socio-political domain, for socio-political authority figures responded to it in distinct ways. Though mutually distinct, the discursive and the practical often fed into each other, strengthening the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*'s tradition.

In this chapter, we will focus on two important aspects of this text: the discursive and the historical. In discussing the discursive aspect, we shall analyze the depictions of Brahman groups and note the shared motifs and other significant themes which created a normative template for the later narratives. Prior to this, we shall investigate why the

Sahyādrikhaṇḍa assumed a seminal status by considering the significance of its genre and the modes of its self-legitimization. The historical inquiry interrogates the historical conditions of the text's production and the power relations among the different Brahman groups; this, ultimately gives some suggestive insight in understanding why certain communities were portrayed the way they were. The concluding section focuses on an episode which demonstrates the invocation of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* in the judicial setting of the Maratha court. This incident illuminates how the text assumed the status of scripture in the political realm and how it was deployed to ascertain the history and ritual status of certain Brahman groups.

PUBLICATION AND DATE OF THE *SAHYĀDRIKHAṆḌA*

Surprisingly, we do not possess a reliable critical edition of this important text; instead, we have two inadequate editions: they are our only means of access. An Indo-Portuguese scholar, Gerson Da Cunha brought out the first critical edition in 1877. The editor mentioned that the critical edition was based on fourteen manuscripts found in various parts of India (mostly Western India, with several other manuscripts found in the possession of various "gentlemen in Bombay" – presumably Brahmans). This edition is far from satisfactory and leaves much scope for improvement in grammar and the ordering of sections. Levitt (1977) has noted various problems with the Da Cunha edition, remarking that the omission of multiple manuscripts by the editor has resulted in serious inconsistencies of ordering and content. Levitt's study surveys a number of manuscripts claiming to be a part of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and points out the complexities

involved in the task of compiling a critical edition: he maintains that different sections of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* come from different sources or may have come from different sections of the same source; he also argues that the text as we have it may have been extremely corrupt by the time it was identified as the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*.

Ninety-four years after the publication of this edition (in 1971), Sarasvat grammarian Gajanana Gaitonde published an extended edition of Da Cunha's edition. He noted similar problems in the Da Cunha edition. Gaitonde reasoned that the original edition had become extremely rare and contained a number of grammatical errors which necessitated another edition (Gaitonde 1971: 6). He consulted various manuscripts that the earlier edition had skipped over and incorporated some material from them. Though the new and improved edition is better than the earlier edition, it is still incomplete and omits a large portion from the earlier edition. It also includes the Marathi translation, making it more accessible to Marathi speakers.

Ascertaining the date of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* is extremely difficult: the text as we have it today is an amalgam of various layers composed at different points in time; Levitt suggests that these may have been parts of different texts. While searching for the exact year of composition is a daunting task, we can suggest a broad time-frame within which different parts of the text may have been composed. The critical edition can give us some useful pointers, yet the timeframe suggested is very broad. The text mentions king Mayuravarma, founder of the Kadamba dynasty in 345 CE; elsewhere, it refers to the thirteenth-century dualist philosopher Madhva: this marks a span of almost a thousand

years. With the help of later narratives, we can ascertain the lower end of the time-frame. The two manuscripts of the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā* (written in 1577 and 1690) mention the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* (composed in 1721) refers to the descriptions of regions and Brahman groups described in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa.* This suggests that the portions mentioned in these two narratives, at least, were composed before the late-sixteenth and early-eighteenth centuries.

CONTENTS AND GENRE

The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* is a Sthalapurāṇa: a Purāṇa eulogizing the origin and glory of regional *sthalas* or *tīrthas* – sacred sites and deities. It deals with various *sthalas* around western Maharashtra and Goa, particularly with those along Konkan, the western coast. The very name of the text derives from the Sahyadri mountain ranges, which divide coastal Konkan and inland Desh. Although a large portion extols various sacred sites and temples, the narrative consists of accounts dealing with various other themes. The following outline of its contents will bear out this variety. The text is divided in two halves; the first half is termed *ādirahasya* and the second half is termed *uttararahasya*.[2]

The first half focuses on some theological themes commonly found in the Purāṇas: the origin, expansion, and dissolution of the universe; descriptions of Hell and the Seven Worlds; the performance and efficacy of rituals and the glory of mantras; some metaphysical aspects of yogic practices; and speculative metaphysical notions similar to those in the Upaniṣads. It also features narratives of origination concerning the *Kṣatriyas*,

[2] This outline and all the subsequent citations are based on Gaitonde's critical edition.

the Moon-god, and the lunar race of kings. The text exhibits a distinct Śaiva orientation: a number of its accounts extol Śiva's abode, his greatness, his exploits, and the origin and greatness of the *śivaliṅgam*.

The second half justifies its nature as *a* Sthalapurāṇa. It is divided into seven large sections entitled *Reṇukāmāhātmya*, *Sahyādrikhaṇḍam*, *Candracūḍamāhātmyam*, *Nāgāvhyayamāhātmyam*, *Varuṇapuramāhatmyam*, *Śrī Kāmākṣīmāhātmyam* and *Śrī Maṅgīśamāhātmyam*. These sections deal with various topics. The first section contains a large selection of accounts concerning the well-known legend of Paraśurāma (the sixth incarnation of Viṣṇu). There are various accounts describing his parents Reṇukā and the sage Bhṛgu and their saga: the slaying of Reṇukā by Bhṛgu's order, her subsequent revival by Bhṛgu, king Kārtavīrya Arjuna's murder of Bhṛgu, and the ultimate revenge of Paraśurāma wherein he kills the king and all of the Earth's *Kṣatriyas* twenty-one times. The second section links the Paraśurāma legend with the creation of Konkan and Gomāñcala (Goa) and the establishment of Brahmans in these regions. After slaying the Earth's *Kṣatriya*s, the repentant Paraśurāma is said to have come near the western ocean to perform penance. He makes the ocean retreat from the point where his arrow lands and creates the coast of Konkan (named Rāmakhaṇḍa after Paraśurāma). The legend reappears several times in the subsequent chapters. A few accounts describe how Paraśurāma establishes various deities, temples, and Brahman communities in Konkan and Goa. The text recounts the past of major Brahman communities: the Chitpavans, the Karhadas, and the Sarasvats; it also refers to various minor Brahman groups like the

Haviks and the Padyas. The subsequent sections glorify sacred sites in these regions: Candracūḍa, Kāpilatīrtha, Varuṇapura, Śaṅkhāvalī, and Saubhatīrtham; they also glorify regional deities: Saptakotīśvara, Maṅgīṣa, Śāntādurgā, and Mhālasa. Chapters dealing with a wide range of themes are peppered throughout the second half. Some of these themes include: descriptions of peoples in Konkan and the inland regions, the establishment of villages and Brahmans by king Mayuravarmā, the Kadamba king from the fourth century, *pātityagrāmas* (fallen villages) created due to the corrupt behavior of their residents, the origins of various communities through *varṇasaṃkara* (the mixing of *varṇas*) and so on.

The reason why a regional text such as the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* assumes the status of a scripture in later discourse lies in its genre. Its self-representation as a Purāṇa endows its accounts with an unmistakable aura of authenticity and sacredness. Before we look at how it legitimizes itself as a Purāṇa, let us consider the significant aspects of the genre. The Brahmanical tradition recognizes the Purāṇic accounts to be distinct from those in the literary *kāvya* genre. Literary accounts of the past are considered to belong to the *laukika* (worldly) domain and intend to delight the reader; those in the Purāṇas are deemed veritable accounts composed not to entertain the reader, but to bestow distinct material and *alaukika* (other-worldly) spiritual merit upon them. This distinctive feature became embedded in the genre from its very inception. Storytelling was an integral part of ritual performance in ancient India: since antiquity, the material and spiritual benefits of a ritual or of hearing a mantra (*phalaśruti*) were explained through stories; the

narratives thus formed were termed Purāṇa-Itihāsa (Brown 1986: 74). Gradually the scope of topics became much wider and included accounts of cosmogony, philosophy, theology, genealogies of kings, virtues and heroic deeds of deities, temples, and sacred sites. The stories in the Purāṇas – initially meant to validate a ritual – assumed the character of the Holy Word themselves. Brown maintains that the scriptural status of the Purāṇas indicates a development in the nature of scriptural authority. In the initial phases of the Brahmanical religion, scriptural authority was ensconced in the *śabda* (sound) of the Vedic mantras. *Śabda* was deemed superior to mantra's *artha* (meaning). The Purāṇas signify the stage when *artha* came to be recognized to be equally as authoritative as *śabda*: readers considered the Purāṇas to be venerable accounts full of spiritual merit (Brown 1986: 75-76).

By presenting themselves as authoritative scriptures while constantly accommodating new themes, the Purāṇas obtained "the character of mantric efficacy, but not the mantric immutability (Brown 1986: 76). In their periodically-expanding scope and variety they sought to assimilate emerging pantheons, cults, mythologies, and communities into the Brahmanical fold. Constantly encouraging improvisation, they extended, altered, and erased existing accounts. Their scriptural appeal, combined with their greater flexibility in encompassing a wide range of themes, made them the most-preferred medium for new accounts. This explains why the Purāṇas continued to thrive and multiply in the form of Upapurāṇas and Sthalapurāṇas.

Eventually, this expanding tradition made attempts from within to present itself as a canonized whole. Certain features were identified as the distinguishing characteristics of the genre; emulating these features was essential for later Purāṇas to be legitimate. The foremost among these features was the notion of the *pañcalakṣaṇa* (the five distinguishing signs). These constituted five topics: *sarga* (the creation of the universe), *pratisarga* (the re-creation of the universe after annihilation), *vaṃśa* (the genealogies of gods and sages), *manvantaras* (the epochs of Manu, the first human), and *vaṃśānucaritam* (the histories of the solar and lunar dynasties). Narayana Rao argues that whether or not actually present in a Purāṇa, the *pañcalakṣaṇa* create a distinctly Brāhmanical ideological framework in which the time and space of events in the Purāṇa are viewed: they "create a world and a worldview" (Rao 1993: 89).

This Brahmanical *weltanschauung* presupposes a distinctive notion of time as a cyclical – and not a linear – construct appearing in the form of four *yugas* (ages) named Kṛta, Dvāpāra, Tretā, and Kali. Each *yuga* is morally inferior to the preceding one, making Kṛta the most moral and Kali the most immoral age. These *yugas* follow one another until the end of the universe and start anew with the creation of the universe. Space in the Purāṇas is a systematically organized and hierarchical whole comprising mutually permeable parts. It comprises the infinite universe: the celestial heavens and the abodes of various deities at the top and the netherworlds and hells situated below. The human-populated earth lies in the middle. Divided into *khaṇḍas* (continents) and *dvīpas*

(islands), the earth is supported by the mythical mount Meru. The residents in these spaces often interact with one another.

A distinct narrative format characterizes the Purāṇas. Narratives unfold as a chain of dialogues between different – often disjointed – sets of interlocutors. These interlocutors include important deities such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Skanda, Devī, and Gaṇeśa, and reputed sages such as Nārada and Śaunaka. This pattern stems from the Purāṇas' self-projection as the embodiment of knowledge passed down from an *apauruṣeya* (trans-human) source; this implies their infallibility in contrast to perishable and flawed texts of human authorship.

How does the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* – a recent Purāṇa of small stature – legitimize its relationship with the greater Purāṇic tradition and draw upon its authority? First and foremost, it claims to be part of the mammoth *Skandapurāṇa* – one of the largest Mahāpurāṇas. The clearest indication of this strategy is evident in the colophon at the end of every chapter, declaring the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* to be within the *Skandapurāṇa*. For instance, the colophon of the twenty-eighth chapter reads: *iti śrī skānde sahyādrikhaṇḍe reṇukāmāhātmye aṣṭāviṃśatitamo' dhyāyaḥ* (thus ends the twenty-eight chapter of *reṇukāmāhātmya* in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* of the *Skandapurāṇa*). It is a generic tendency in Brahmanical texts to inscribe themselves within larger textual traditions and postulate a common origin; they thus de-historicize their creation and present themselves as repositories of shared, pre-existing knowledge (Pollock 1985: 499-516). Wendy Doniger adds that the *Skandapurāṇa* was a particularly preferable medium for local Purāṇas to

enter the mainstream Brahmanical tradition: in fact, the Tamil tradition referred to it as a 'scrap-bag' (*Kantalapurāṇa* in Tamil) that could be conveniently used to add material over time (Doniger 1993: 59). Just as oral narrators ascribed several verses of unknown origin to this Purāṇa, several Sthalapurāṇas and Upapurāṇas claimed to be part of the *Skandapurāṇa* to project themselves as links on the unbroken chain of authoritative texts (Doniger 1993: 60).

As another tactic of legitimization, the *ādirahasya* of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* incorporates three themes related to the *pañcalakṣaṇas*. Chapters one, two and thirteen deal with the origin and dissolution of Brahmāṇḍa (the cosmic egg). The thirty-first and thirty-second chapters describe the origin and genealogy of the Somavaṃśa (the lunar dynasty) of kings. Furthermore, the accounts unfold as a chain of dialogues between different divinities. Skanda (Śiva's elder son) – the chief interlocutor in most of the accounts – engages in conversations with prominent sages such as Jamadagni, Nārada, and Śaunaka. Other important narrators include the gods Śiva, Indra, Agni, Gaṇeśa, and the goddesses Kāmākṣī and Pārvati. Similarly, the text abounds in references to Brahmanical notions of time and space – the cyclical *yugas* and the layered and systematically-ordered universe. The accounts of the places and peoples of Western Maharashtra and Goa derived their legitimacy by incorporating this framework of Purāṇic features. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* legitimization was a success: the text was frequently invoked – in both discursive and practical domains – as a true source of information about the past.

THE *SAHYĀDRIKHAṆḌA* AND THE JĀTIPURĀṆAS

If we understand the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* solely as a Sthalapurāṇa, we fail to fully account for its dynamic nature. Judging by the later responses, its accounts of distinct Brahman castes became much more famous and notorious than its descriptions of sacred *tīrthas*. These caste-narratives function similarly to another Purāṇic subgenre: the Jātipurāṇa. As the word indicates, a Jātipuraṇa legitimizes a particular *jāti* (caste). Like the Sthalapurāṇas, Jātipuranas appeared as a distinct genre relatively recently in the sixteenth century and became more common in the early twentieth century. We lack a specialized study of this genre; studies by Das (1968) and Bapat (2001) – conducted from a sociological perspective – offer useful insights into this understudied genre. These analyses are particularly relevant in understanding the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* nature and function; they also create a useful background to the forthcoming discussion. Bapat's study focuses on the early-twentieth century Jātipurāṇa of the Guravs (a priestly caste in Maharashtra); it attempted to justify the Guravs' claims to a higher caste-status by tracing their origins to the god Śiva. Bapat argues that such texts were written in response to the colonial enterprise of collecting, compiling, and classifying ethnographic data about castes. This enterprise inspired various caste-groups to stake claims to a higher caste-status and accrue socio-political benefits. These caste-groups either commissioned Brahmans to compose Purāṇas describing their divine origins or appointed caste-assemblies to trace their roots to the hoary past. They then presented these Purāṇas to colonial officials as a testament to their higher caste-status.

Das's work is more relevant here as it studies early-modern Jātipurāṇas from Gujarat. She analyzes the *Mallapurāṇa* (composed between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries). This text was written to authenticate the caste-status of the Jethmallas – a sub-caste of the well-known Gujarati Modh Brahmans. Although the Jethmallas claimed to be Brahmans, their traditional vocation was wrestling. By analyzing the text's inner logic, Das explains how it resolves the apparent incompatibility between the Jethmalla claim to Brahmanical status and their vocation. She also explains how the text validates its Purāṇic identity by emulating the formal and discursive elements of the Purāṇas and by declaring itself to be a part of the *Skandapurāṇa* (Das 1968: 148). She adds that it was a common practice in pre-colonial Gujarat for castes to be summoned to the courts of kings or political heads in order to settle disputes of rank and ritual privilege. The usual process of adjudication involved the submission of scriptural evidence concerning the manners, customs, occupation, and/or origin of the concerned castes to the king. These scriptures often included Jātipurāṇas and similar historical narratives written in scriptural style. The king consulted learned Brahmans to ascertain the validity of the scripture, interpret it, and arrive at a decision (Das 1968: 156).

In the following sections we will observe how the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* was written similarly to legitimize (and delegitimize) the status of certain Brahman groups. We have already discussed legitimization tactics in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* – similar to those in the *Mallapurāṇa* – that lent authority to its accounts. We will see that the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* was called upon – under similar judicial settings as the Gujarati Jātipurāṇas – to ascertain

the rank and privileges of a particular Brahman group. It suffices to say – for now – that by inscribing caste accounts into the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, their authors were not engaging in an innovative enterprise: they operated within a trans-regional, shared milieu in which origin-myths were used to validate the caste-status of various communities through appeals to political authorities.

Although the caste-accounts in the Jātipurāṇas and those in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* share certain features, they depart from one another in one important aspect: while the former are made into independent Purāṇas, the latter appear as part of a pre-existing Purāṇa. Why did the authors of the caste-accounts in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* not write independent Jātipurāṇas? Why did they inscribe these accounts in one Sthalapurāṇa? The subsequent analysis suggests that the caste-accounts in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* were meant to be an integral part of a larger – and distinctly regional – narrative. These accounts defined the identity of Brahman groups in terms of their residential region: *region* was a crucial theme in these Brahmans' legitimization of themselves and their concomitant delegitimization of their Others. They sought to postulate a geographical hierarchy that was coterminous with the Brahmanical status-hierarchy: the notion of region functioned as a measuring stick to evaluate Brahmans of different regions. In this concatenation of region and caste, it was inevitable that the Brahmans' historical accounts of caste be inscribed within a narrative of places.

SITUATING BRAHMANS IN REGIONS

How does the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* conceptualize the relationship between space and its residents? In what follows we first consider a general overview of this relationship: this forms the background to a more specialized inquiry concerning the text's definition and comparison of distinct Brahman residential communities. Residents are integral to the text's notion of region: here, a region is part of an ordered whole – it is differentiated from another region not just by geographical boundaries, but also by social boundaries formed by the different peoples who reside therein. The microcosm of the coastal Konkan region lies within the macrocosm of the universe: designated as Rāmakhaṇḍa, it sprawls across a hundred *yojanas* and is one of the nine *khanḍas* (continents) that constitute the entire Earth along with the seven *dvīpas* (islands). The seven islands are: Jambu, Śaka, Śālmali, Plakṣa, Kuśa, Krauñca, and Puṣkara.[3] The text defines geographical units of measure in ascending order: four fingers make a fist, sixty fists make a hand, four hands make a *dhanu*, two thousand *dhanus* make a *krośa*, four *krośas* make a *yojana*; one hundred villages make a *deśa*, four *deśas* make a *maṇḍala*, one hundred *maṇḍalas* make a *khaṇḍa*, and nine *khaṇḍas* make the Earth (II.4. 35-37). Peoples of various sectarian affiliations inhabit the meritorious Rāmakhaṇḍa (II.4. 38). A land of religious harmony, it is populated by devotees of the gods Viṣṇū, Śiva, Śakti, Sūrya, and Gaṇeśa, as well as by atheists; they speak various languages and practice various customs (II.4. 47-49).

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[3] *navakhaṇḍā saptadvīpā pṛthvī deśasamākulā| jambudvīpaṃ śākadvīpaḥ śālmalī plakṣa ucyate||* *kuśaḥ krauñcamahādvīpaḥ puṣkarīdvīpa ucyate| saptadvīpā ca yā pṛthvī navakhaṇḍā ca jāyate||* (II.2.4. 33-34)

The *Sahyadrikhaṇḍa* defines various other regions in terms of the moral character of their Brahman residents. It identifies the region at the confluence of the Narmada and Krishna rivers as the Madhyadeśa and extols its Brahmans as gods incarnate (IV. 40). Those living in the city of Trihotra (east of the Madhyadeśa) are also likened to gods (*kevalāh devarūpiṇāḥ*, II.4. 43). Brahmans east of the Madhyadeśa are devotees of Śiva, well-versed in all the sciences. Brahmans of the western Gauḍa region are full of *rajas*.[4] The text mentions the Tailaṇga Brahmans from Andhra and the Draviḍa Brahmans from the Draviḍa country as compassionate people on Earth (II.4. 46a). While the text celebrates the good character of these Brahmans, it censures those outside the circle formed by these regions: they are demonic and heartless atheists (II.4. 45). Brahmans from Karṇāṭa (Karnataka) are merciless; the Koṅkaṇa Brahmans are evil (II.4. 45).

The text defines two significant notions that best illustrate the interlinked identity of regions and their Brahman residents: these two notions also come to form an important theme in the later narratives and debates. The first notion appears in a section of the *uttrararahasya* titled *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and subdivides Brahmans into the *daśavidha* (ten-fold), a categorization based on regions located in the north and south. Skanda exhorts Śiva to elaborate on the ten-fold Brahmans. Śiva first enumerates the *pañcadraviḍas* (the five Dravidas) from the southern regions: Drāviḍas (from the Draviḍa country), Tailaṅgas (from Andhra), Karnāṭas (from Karnataka), Madhyadeśagas (from Madhyadeśa), and

[4] *rajas* is second among the three *guṇas* (qualities), the other two being *sattva* (goodness) and *tamas* (darkness). Rajas generally denotes activity.

Gurjaras (from Gujarat).[5] Śiva then describes the *pañcagauḍas* (the five Gauḍas) from the northern regions: Sārasvatas (from the banks of the Sarasvati River), Kānyakubjas (from Kanauj), the Utkalas (from Orissa), the Maithilas (from Mithila), and finally, the Gauḍas (from the Gauḍa region).[6] The very next verse presents a somewhat confusing variation in the enumeration of the *pañcagauḍas* as Trihotras (from the Trihotra region), Agnivaiśyas, Kānyakubjas, Kanojas, and Maitrāyaṇas.[7] (It is unclear why this verse separately mentions Kānyakubja and Kanoja.) Additionally, the names Agnihotra and Maitrāyaṇa are not regionally-derived. Śiva extols the ten-fold Brahmans by describing them as those who are "remembered to be descendents of *ṛṣis,*" "devoted to the Gāyatrī mantra," "abiding by the rituals and mantras prescribed in the Vedas," and "engaged in the six-fold actions (II.1. 5-6).[8]

The second important notion is that of *deśadoṣas* (regional flaws). A *deśadoṣa* is a custom acceptable *only within* a particular region: practicing that custom beyond its regional boundaries is considered a sin; therefore these are considered *doṣas* (flaws). Immediately after describing the ten-fold Brahmans, Śiva describes the various *deśadoṣas*: Gurjara Brahmans drink water out of animal hides; visiting prostitutes is the

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[5] *drāviḍāś caiva tailaṅgāḥ karnāṭāḥ madyadeśagāḥ| gurjarāś caiva pañcaite kathyante pañcadrāviḍāḥ||* (II.1.2)

[6] *sārasvatāḥ kānyakubjāḥ utkalā maithilāś ca ye| gauḍaś ca pañcadhā caiva daśa viprāḥ prakīrtitāḥ||* (II.1.3)

[7] *trihotrā hy agniveśyāś ca kānyakubjāḥ kanojayāḥ| maitrāyaṇāś ca pañcaite pañcagauḍāḥ prakīrtitāḥ||* (II.1.4)

[8] The six-fold actions are privileges of Brahmans, and they include performing a sacrifice and officiating a sacrifice, learning the Vedas and teaching the Veda, giving and accepting ritual donation. Of these rights, the three actions of performing sacrifice, learning the Vedas, and giving ritual donation are common to Brahmans, *Kṣatriyas*, and *Vaiśyas*. The remaining three are exclusive privileges of Brahmans.

southern region's defect; Karnāṭa's Brahmans do not clean their teeth; Kāśmira's fail to wash their clothes; Brahmans from Tailaṅga ride cows; in the Draviḍa country, Brahmans consume food without doing their morning ablutions; Gurjara Brahmans also don't wear the lower garment and bodice; Kanoja's Brahmans eat meat, while those in Trihotra eat fish; there are cross-cousin marriages in Kānyakubja. Śiva also declares that every region has its *doṣa*; practicing that *doṣa* in another region is sin. The narrative imagines region as defined by more than just its physical boundaries: symbolic moral boundaries bind its residents together as well.

How do these two notions interrelate? The text does not state explicitly the connection between the ten-fold Brahmans and the *deśadoṣas*: their content and context strongly suggest correspondences. The description of the ten-fold Brahmans is followed immediately by the description of the *deśadoṣas*; the regions listed in the *deśadoṣas* – Karṇāṭa, Draviḍa, Trihotra, Kanoja, Gurjara , and Tailaṅga – are also mentioned in the description of the ten-fold Brahmans: Kanoja, Trihotra, and Kānyakubja are included in the *pañcagauḍas* division, while the Karnāṭa, Draviḍa, and Gurjara regions are part of the *pañcadraviḍas*. Nonetheless, it is curious that the *deśadoṣa* theory enumerates the regional customs of only *six* regions, leaving out the rest. Furthermore, the *deśadoṣa* theory mentions Kāśmira though it is not listed in the *daśavidha*. It is difficult to surmise the reasons behind these selections. Nevertheless, the overlap between the regions mentioned in both is striking and suggests that the theory of *deśadoṣas* mainly refers to the ten-fold Brahmans. The narrative highlights the susceptibility of Brahmans from

Karnāṭa, Draviḍa, Trihotra, Kanoja, and Gurjara to the *deśadoṣas* of their respective countries, underscoring that the regional customs therein are an inseparable part of these Brahmans' identity. In subsequent chapters we will see the incredible significance of the connection between these two notions in later discourse. In particular, the *deśadoṣa* of eating fish was associated with Trihotra's Brahmans: this practice came to represent the regional association and restriction implied in the notion of the *desadoṣas*; it also became a prominent theme in narratives either supporting or denouncing Sarasvat Brahmans.

Let us now examine the history of the *pañcagauḍa/pañcadraviḍa* classification to delineate its significance to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. Although the most well-known source for the two-fold distinction, the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* is not its only reference: the distinction likely emerged even before the text's composition, during the migration of Brahmans from the North to the South. Upinder Singh suggests that it appeared subsequent to the migration of Brahmans from the Gangetic plains into regions such as Maharashtra, Bengal, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh starting around the fifth century CE and intensifying around the eighth century. A tenth-century inscription of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas mentions this classification (Singh 2009: 162, 173). Madhav Deshpande (2009: 29-58) discusses the history of the *pañcagaḍa/pañcadraviḍa* notion at length, noting the hypotheses of two earlier scholars – Vaidya (1926) and Raychaudhuri et al (1953) – both of whom suggest that this distinction had not emerged prior to the twelfth century, for the expression appears in inscriptions dated around 1200 CE. He also mentions a more recent study by Swati Datta (1989), who suggests that the classification occurred around the tenth

century. She considers two inscriptions: one – from 810 CE – which mentions the migration of a Brahman from the Gauda country to Baroda; the other – a Rashtrakuta inscription from 926-27 AD (the same one which Singh references) – refers to a *pañca-gauḍīya-mahāpariṣad*, an assembly of Brahmans held at Thane. Datta remarks that the Gauda region comprised a large area of northern India: the Brahmans' migration may have occurred anywhere within this region. Clearly, this classification was well-known and formed part of the background from which the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* drew.

However, the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* is unique: it deployed this classification in an intra-Brahmanical rivalry and profoundly influenced the identity of Brahman communities by creating an interpretive framework with reference to which these groups understood the accounts of their past. The ten groups assumed the status of ideological categories – much like the notion of *varṇa* – within which the Brahman groups sought to situate their individual castes. Being part of this schema validated claims to a superior status, while the failure to demonstrate such a link indicated the group's inferiority.

Two groups articulated their identities in these terms: the Sarasvats and the Maharashtrian Brahmans (the Deshasthas, Chitpavans, and Karhadas). While the Sarasvats placed their community within the *pañcagauḍas*, the other three communities claimed to be within the *pañcadraviḍas*. Based on the interpretation of an account in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* (examined shortly), the Sarasvats claimed that the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* was explicit in recognizing them as one of the *pañcagauḍas*: they identified themselves as the Trihotra Brahmans, while the Maharashtrian Brahmans claimed to belong to the

Madhyadeśa Brahmans among the *pañcadraviḍas*. As we will see in the subsequent chapters, these claims had significant implications in disputes between the two. Such disputes were common in pre-colonial times, but intensified in the colonial period.

Deshpande (2009: 29-58) describes variant readings of the *pañcadraviḍa* category, suggesting that attempts to validate the status of Maharashtrian Brahmans by reference to this category were well underway. The *pañcadraviḍa* category in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* mentions the Madhyadeśa region, but not specifically Maharashtra: although the boundaries of Madhyadeśa (described elsewhere in the text) cover a large part of Maharashtra, this is a vague term. Deshpande points to texts such as the *Kanyakubjavaṃśāvalī* and others (cited in encyclopedias and dictionaries) which replace the problematic *Madhyadeśagāḥ* (Madhyadeśa-residents) with *Mahārāṣṭrāḥ* (Maharashtra-residents). Moreover, he adds that these sources explicitly mention the Vindhya mountain range as an imaginary line dividing the northern *pañcagauḍas* from the southern *pañcadraviḍas*; this necessitates Maharashtra's inclusion in the South. This imaginary line's existence is all the more remarkable as the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* does not refer to any such line. Even great scholars like P.V. Kane uncritically accepted the inclusion of the Maharashtrian Brahmans within the *pañcadraviḍas*. Gajanana Gaitonde (the translator-editor of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*) deemed the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*'s exclusion of Maharashtrian Brahmans problematic: these castes – he reasoned – were conventionally considered to be part of the *pañcadraviḍas* (Deshpande 2009: 36). Here, it is important to note that James Grant Duff's *History of Marhattas* – an influential colonial account – also

refers to the Vindhyas as the geographical boundary dividing the *pañcagauḍas* from the *pañcadraviḍas*; he includes the Maharashtrian Brahmans as *pañcadraviḍas* (Duff 1826: 10). Just like other colonial works, Duff's book was based primarily on information from his Brahman collaborators. We may infer the conscious effort of these collaborators to make normative the category of Maharashtrian Brahmans by inscribing it into this important text.

I have personally experienced the extent to which Goa's Sarasvats consider themselves as one of the *pañcagauḍas*: a prominent Goan folklorist even defined the *pañcagauḍas* as comprising *five sub-groups of the Sarasvats* – the Bardeshkars, the Kudaldeshkars, the Sasashtikars, the Śaivas, and the Vaiṣṇavas. These instances demonstrate how both in history and practice, in scholarly and popular discourse, this categorization remains deeply contested. Although not unique to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and Maharashtra, I wonder if this notion has a similarly contentious history elsewhere. Against this background, let us now turn to the accounts in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* which were both the result *and* cause of intra-Brahmanical conflict. First, we examine the representations of Brahman groups in detail to mark their thematic similarities; then we turn to their historical aspects.

CORPSES AND CURSES: THE DEPICTION OF THE CHITPAVANS

The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* gives the Chitpavan story the most elaborate and repetitious treatment; it is also the tale which attracted the largest share of controversies and debates. Connected to the Paraśurāma narrative, at least three different versions appear within

various chapters of the *uttararahasya*. In the first version (found in the first chapter of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* section of the *uttararahasya*, which also contains the description of the ten-fold Brahmans and the *deśadoṣas*), Śiva narrates the story of the creation of Konkan: after slaying the Earth's *Kṣatriyas* twenty-one times, Paraśurāma donated the Earth to Brahmans. He created a new region called *Śūrpāraka* (Konkan): ensconced between the Sahyadri mountains to the east and the ocean to the west, and between the Vaitaraṇi River to the north and the Subrāhmaṇi River to the south (II.1.22- 24). He also created several *tīrtha*s (sacred regions) such as Khadira, Harihareśvara, Vālukeśa, Bāṇagaṅgā, and Mukteśvara. Atop the Gomāñcala Mountain, the sage founded several excellent villages and *tīrtha*s: Gorakṣa, Kumārija, and Rāmakuṇḍa (II.1.28). He hewed the interior of this mountain into his residence (II.1.30). In order to feed Brahmans during the *śrāddha* ceremony (the ceremony of paying homage and offering rice-balls to the ancestors), he invited all the local Brahmans. However, only a few showed up and the sage was enraged. He thought angrily: "I created this new region. Then why have the Brahmans not come? What may be the reason for this (II.1.31-32)?"

Having resolved to create new Brahmans, Paraśurāma went to the ocean to bathe after sunrise. Suddenly, he saw a few people at a funeral pyre and asked them of their caste, *dharma* and residence.[9] They replied: "O noble one, our caste is that of fishermen.

[9] *citāsthāne ca sahasā hi āgatān cābravīt muniḥ | kājātiḥ ko bhavad dharmaḥ kva sthāne caiva vāsanam||* (I. 35)

We have stayed at the banks of river Sindhu, and we are experts in hunting." [10] The sage learned of their sixty-six families and sanctified them all. He bestowed unto them the qualities of Brahmans, knowledge, and lore.[11] Since he had purified them at a *citā* (a funeral pyre), they were named Citapāvana: those purified by a *citā*.[12] The sage blessed them with a boon: he would manifest before them whenever they remembered him. Unto the new Brahmans he also gave fourteen *gotra*s of different titles and settled them in region's interior.[13] All those Brahmans were fair-hued, with beautiful eyes and pleasant in appearance.[14]

Yet there arose a suspicion in their minds regarding the truth of the sage's promise: they summoned him needlessly.[15] Paraśurāma – keeping his promise – appeared instantly and was furious to find that the Brahmans had no reason to call. Angrily he cursed them: they would become censurable, contemptible, poor – forever in the service of others.[16] Śiva proclaims this to be an historical account and announces that those who hear it obtain the merit of bathing in the Ganges; the tale ends (II.1.45).

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[10] *kaivartakā ūcuḥ: jñātim pṛcchasi he rājan jñātiḥ kaivartakīti ca| sindhutīre kṛto vāsaḥ vyādhakarmaviśāradāḥ||* (I.35b, 36a)

[11] *teṣām ṣaṣṭikulam śrutvā pavitram akarot tadā| brāhmaṇyam ca tato datvā sarvavidyāsulakṣaṇam||* (I.36b, 37a)

[12] *citāsthāne pavitratvam citapāvanasaṃjñākam||* (I.37b)

[13] *sarvakāle smṛtaś cāyam kāryārtham āgamiṣyati| evam tadāśis tebhyo dattvā nu bhārgavo muniḥ|* (II.1. 38)

[14] *caturdaśagotrakulaḥ sthāpitāś cāntaraṇgake| sarve ca gauravarṇaś ca sunetrāś ca sudarśanāḥ||*(II.1. 40)

[15] *kucodyam caivam ādāya svāmibuddhiparīkṣaṇāt| akāryam kurvate karma smarante bhārgavam munim||* (II.1. 42)

[16] *śāpitās tena ye viprā nindyāś caiva kucitsakāḥ| śāpaś ca prāpyate tasmāt kutsitāś ca daridriṇaḥ||* (II.1. 44)

sevām sarvatra kartāra idam niścayabhāṣaṇam| itihāsakathā devi tavāgre kathitā mayā|| (II.1.45*)*

A more detailed version of the above occurs in the *Pṛthvīdānam* (the sixth chapter), narrated by Śiva to Skanda. Preaching the importance of *dāna* by citing various illustrations and legends, Śiva recounts the tale of Paraśurāma: after donating the entire earth to the sage Kāśyapa, Paraśurāma departed to the Sahyādri mountains. As Paraśurāma had no land left to himself, the sage Nārada advised him to push the ocean back by shooting arrows upon it in order to create land. Paraśurāma did so and happily resided on his new land, named Rāmakṣetra (II.6.43-44). Beautiful villages, holy places, and temples soon dotted the land (II.6. 35-48). Paraśurāma invited Brahmans from various places and gave them *varṣāsana*s (yearly privileges) and *agrahāram*s (villages donated as gifts). The Brahmans – experts of the Veda and its auxiliaries – included groups such as the Koṇkaṇas, Karahāṭas, Mahārāṣṭras, Tailaṅgas, Gurjaras, Kānyakubjas, Cittapūtas (Chitpavans), and several others. The sage gave several bounties – especially to the Chitpavans – and asked them to remember him in the face of crisis.[17]

One day the arrogant Chitpavan Brahmans wondered whether the sage's promise was true: they decided to test it by remembering him. Instantly, Parasurāma materialized in front of them and asked why they had summoned him. Upon learning that they did so in order to test his promise, he was furious and cursed them: "you will become arrogant

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[17] *pradadau ca viśeṣeṇa vedavidbhyo vicakṣaṇaḥ| varṣāsanāni sarveṣām agrahārāṇi bhārgavaḥ||* (II.6.57*)*
āryāvartodbhavānām ca vedavedāṇgapāriṇām| karahāṭamahārāṣṭratailaṇgānām dvijanmanām|| (II.6.58*)*
gurjarāṇām kānyakubja cittaputātmanām tadā| payoṣṇīṭīrasaṃsthānām eteṣām āryasaṃjñinām|| (II.6.59)
kāñci kauśala saurāṣṭra devarāṣṭrendu kacchinām| kāveritīrasaṃsthānām madhyagānām dvijanmanām||
udīcy ābhirasaṃsthānām drāviḍānām tathānagha| dakṣiṇāpathasaṃsthānām avantyānām tathaiva ca||
māgadhānām dvijātīnām yathādeṣam yathāvidhi| ahikṣetrodbhavānām ca daivajñānām dvijanmanām||
pradadau saviśeṣeṇa chitpāvanasaṃjñinām| dideśa bhārgavas teṣām upadeśam yadāpādaḥ||
bhaviṣyanti tadāsmākam kartavyam smaraṇam dvijāḥ| (II.6. 60-63a)

due to your learning, jealous of one another, possess meager knowledge, become unpleasant supplicants, become inclined towards a fruitless worship, become servants of the *Kṣatriyas*, be either poor with many children or wealthy and yet childless, seize your daughters' wealth, and sell your merit to others. Your subsistence will be difficult to come by, and your land will not yield good grain."[18] The repentant Brahmans begged the sage for forgiveness and a remedy to his curse. The sage replied that his curse would come true later, in the Kali age: yet it would come true. He departed to the Mahendra Mountains and lived happily there. The Brahmans returned to their villages and continued with their livelihood (II.6. 77-81).

A third version of the story occurs in the seventh chapter – the *Paraśurāmakṣetra-utpattiḥ* (the account of the origin of Konkan) – and reiterates several elements. After donating the entire earth to Kāśyapa upon the culmination of the Aśvamedha sacrifice, Paraśurāma departed to the Sahyadri Mountains and create a new region by pushing back the ocean. Paraśurāma noticed some fishermen therein, tied a sacred thread around their neck, and made them Brahmans. Although the sage asked them to remember him in distressful times, the Brahmans summoned him just to test his promise. Furious, he cursed them: they would "partake of bad or little food, wear meager clothing, and become

[18] *śaśāpātha dvijavarān ekamatadvijanmanaḥ| bhaved vidyāsu garviṣṭhā īrṣānyonyam bhaviṣyati|| kaṣṭaiva vṛttir bhavatu bharjite sadvijair api| bhūmir na dadyāt satsasyam yācakā bhavatāpriyāḥ|| yācamānāś ca vo dānam śūdrā dadatu sevakāḥ| bhavata kṣatriyāṇām ca parapreṣyās tathā dvijāḥ|| bhaviṣyāthālpavijñāna hatapūjāparāyaṇāḥ| daridrā bahuputrāś ca sampannāḥ putravarjitāḥ|| kanyāvittagṛhitāraḥ puṇyavikrayakāriṇaḥ|| iti datvā sa vai śāpam mahendram gantum udyatah|* (II.6. 72-76)

well-known only in a little-known place" (II.7. 28–48). This version does not mention the term Chitpavan, but it is clearly similar.

Not all the depictions of the Chitpavans are as negative as the above: a few verses describe the community as well-established in the region where Paraśurāma's arrow fell, inclined to acquire knowledge and perform duties, satisfied with meager gifts, and pure-minded. They are said to possess a fulfilled mind (*cittapūrṇa*), as they are proud of Paraśurāma's gift; they practice the three-fold lore, are truthful (*satyasaṅkalpa*), and give themselves to the duties enjoined in the Veda and the Smṛti. (II.20. 20, 21). The word Chitpāvana is derived from the name of a village: Cittapolana (present-day Chiplun in North Konkan) at the bottom of the Sahyadri Mountains. [19] However, such descriptions are few and far between: certain passages in the text appear to be amended by Chitpavans in order to negate the previous embarrassing descriptions.

It is obvious from the above that the overarching goal of the three main accounts is to defame the Chitpavans; this is realized in three ways. First, their history is inextricably linked to the creation of Konkan; this – in turn – is inscribed in the well-known legend of Paraśurāma. By inscribing the accounts obliquely, the text projects the community into an antiquity coeval with Paraśurāma's time. Such a projection seeks to legitimize their embarrassing antecedents – their origins as lowly fishermen and their eventual fall in status and moral character – and give them a semblance of authenticity.

[19] *citpāvanasya ca utpattir idam caiva tu kāraṇam| sahyādreś ca tale gramaś cittapolana nāmataḥ||* (II.1. 46)
tatraiva sthāpitā viprāḥ yāvat candradivākarau|| (II.1.47a)

The second motif is the figure of Paraśurāma himself: the prediction of the Chitpavans' ill fate is infallible and irreversible, doomed unto them by this revered figure. The third motif is the etymology of the group's name itself, used to denigrate either their origins, ancestry, or disposition. As "purified by the pyre" (*citā* = pyre + *pāvana* = pure), the narrative identifies the Chitpavans with their lowly fishermen ancestors who had to be sanctified by Paraśurāma. As "pure of heart" (*citta* = mind + *pūta* = purified), a variant narrative seeks to underscore their pious disposition. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* revisits these three motifs – region, name and the presence of an authoritative patron – in distinct ways when defining the identity of other Brahman castes.

OF DONKEYS AND POISON: THE DEPICTION OF THE KARHADAS

The chapter describing the Karhada Brahmans – *Kārāṣtrabrāhmaṇotpattiḥ* (Origin of Kārāṣṭra Brahmans) – appears immediately after the first chapter on the Chitpavans. Like that chapter, it too begins with Skanda requesting Śiva to elaborate on the origin of Kārāṣṭra Brahmans; Śiva obliges, proclaiming that he will narrate ancient history.[20] He begins by recounting their birthplace: "the region named Kārāṣtra is ten *yojana*s wide, located to the north of the Vedavati River and to the south of the confluence of Koyana. This country is evil and populated by harsh, evil, and sinful people. The Brahmans hailing from that region are called Kārāṣṭras.[21] These Brahmans

[20] *mahādeva uvāca: śruṇu putra pravakṣyāmi cetihāsam purātanam|kārāṣṭro nāma deśo'sti daśayojanavistṛtah*|| (II.2. 2)

[21] *vedavatyāś ca uttare tu koyanāsaṅga dakṣiṇe|kārāṣṭro nāma deśaś ca duṣṭadeśaḥ prakīrtitaḥ*|| (II.2. 3) *sarve lokāś ca kaṭhinā durjanāḥ pāpakarmiṇaḥ| tad deśajaś ca vipras tu kārāṣṭra iti nāmatāḥ*|| (II.2. 4)

are extremely corrupt due to sinful actions and are born out of adultery. When the semen of a donkey was mixed with bones, these sinful ones were born."[22]

Śiva continues: "the presiding deity of that region is goddess Mātṛkā, who is extremely cruel and ugly. A Brahman is sacrificed annually in her worship. Born of fathers of the same *gotra,* the wretched ones commit the great sin of killing Brahmans. They say that in the days of yore the goddess cursed them: one that fails to sacrifice a Brahman, will witness the doom of his lineage.[23] One must stay away from them; even upon the slightest contact with them, one must bathe with one's clothes still on. Even in a different region, one must not smell their air in the circumference of three *yojana*s. Otherwise, one incurs only sin, poisonous and difficult to overcome."[24]

When Skanda expresses his desire to know the details of the *gotra* and origin of the Karhadas and why even uttering their name is forbidden, Śiva describes their *gotra*s: Atri, Kauśika, Vatsa, Hārita, Śāṇḍilya, and Māṇḍavya. He then recounts their past: they performed a sacrifice for a goddess who would eternally bestow success on them. She promised the Brahmans that if they offered her a virtuous Brahman – especially a son-in-law or a nephew – she would grant them powers and success. Śiva admonishes their practice of human-sacrifice: "the abominable one, who slays a Brahman every year,

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[22] *kharasya asthiyogena retaḥ kṣiptam vibhāvakam||* (II. 2.5)
tena teṣām samuttpattir jātā vai pāpakarmiṇām|| (II.2. 6a)

[23] *tasyāḥ pūjā yadābde ca brāhmaṇo dīyate baliḥ| te paṅktigotrajā naṣṭā brahmahatyām karoti ca||*
na kṛtā yena sā hatyā kulam tasya kṣayam vrajet| evam purā tayā devyā varo datto dvijām kila|| (II.2. 7-8)

[24] *teṣām saṃsarga mātreṇa sacailam snānam ācaret| teṣām deśāntare vāyur na grāhyo yojanatrayam||*
kevalam viṣam āpnoti pātakaṃ hy atidustaram|| (II.2. 9)

transgresses all rituals and is banished by every *dharma*. Such Brahmans are to be driven out, never to be touched."[25]

A similar image of the Karhadas appears in the twentieth chapter, which recounts the creation of Konkan and the establishment of Brahmans by Paraśurāma. It recalls their origin from donkey-bones and alleges them to be united with the lowly Brahmans from the Vindhya mountains who administer poison; finally, it condemns them as non-Aryans, poison-givers, and Brahman-killers.[26] Śiva continues his tirade against a sub-caste of the Karhadas known as Padyes: he condemns their region as filled with mean people and *cāṇḍālas*. He explains the origin of their name: they have mastered only a *pada* (quarter) of the Gāyatrī mantra. If they visit an auspicious occasion, that event is ruined: hence, they must be avoided in all rituals (II.20. 29-31).

While the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*'s treatment of the Chitpavans is unkind, it is mild in comparison to the insults heaped upon the Karhadas. The origin of both communities is embedded within a particular region. However, the Chitpavans are disgraced in the auspicious region of Konkan, while the Karhadas inherit much of their evil character from their homeland – the Kārāṣṭra (the evil-land). Here too we see etymology being

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[25] *saṃvatsare mahānīco brahmahatyām karoti yaḥ| sarvakarmabahiś caiva sarvadharmabahiṣkṛtaḥ||* (II.2.13)
sarve te nagarād vāhyās teṣām sparśam na kārayet| tasyā devyāḥ kṛto yajñaḥ sarvatra vijayapradaḥ| (II.2.14)
sā devi cābravīd viprān sarvasiddhim dadāmi vaḥ| abde ced ḍiyate mahyam brāhmaṇaś ca sulakṣṇaḥ|| (II.2.15)
viśeṣataś ca jāmātā hy athavā bhāginisutaḥ| (II.2.16a)

[26] *anye' pi karahāṭas te karhapṛṣṭhāsthisambhavāḥ|* (II.20. 29a)
aparair vindhyadeśiyair garadair brāhmaṇādhamaiḥ|| (II.20. 30b)
ajñānād yonisaṃbandhāt kincin nindyatvam āgatāḥ| atas tv anāryās te jñeyā viṣadā brahmaghātinaḥ|| (II.20. 31)

used to provide a derogatory explanation of a caste-title: note that the prefix *kā-* denotes deprecation and diminution. Alternately, *kā* is an onomatopoeic representation of the donkey's cry: this is significant in light of the allegation that the community sprang from donkey-bones. The narrative literalizes this connection with bone in the word Karhāḍa: it splits the word into *kara/kar* and *hāḍa*: the first part derives from *khara* (donkey, in Sanskrit), while the second portion stems from *hāḍa* (bone, in Marathi).

Just as the Chitpavans' ancestors are said to come from lowly fishermen, the Karhadas' ancestry is traced to the defiled substance of donkey-bones and semen and to the practice of incestuous marital unions within the same *gotra* (strictly prohibited in the Dharmaśāstras). The account calls for their absolute banishment from all religious and social interaction, denying their Brahmanical status. While the patron deity of the Chitpavans – Paraśurāma – curses them to a despicable future, the Karhadas' patron – the evil goddess Mātṛkā – forces them to commit one of the most heinous sins for her sake: murdering a Brahman. Killing a Brahman was considered the most heinous of the five *mahāpātakas* (greatest sins).[27] Clearly, the author of this account did not find a single merit, or remotely positive trait, among the Karhadas. Gaitonde found this account so offensive that he did not even translate a single word.

In addition to the human sacrifice, the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* condemns the Karhadas by calling them poison-givers. Popular imagination has often attributed these

[27] The five *mahāpātakas* are as follows: *brahmahatyā* (killing a Brahman), *surāpāna* (consuming alcoholic beverages), *steya* (stealing) *gurvaṅganāgama* (relationship with preceptor's wife) and *mahāpātakasaṃsarga* (association with a great sinner). *brahmahatyā* was considered the most serious offence, unforgivable and expiated by death alone.

controversial practices to the Karhadas, and this has been a source of great embarrassment to the community. While these linkages circulated in the eighteenth century, we still find frequent references in the colonial sources of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The 1881 gazetteer of Ahmadnagar district describes Karhadas as Śāktas (worshippers of Śakti), formerly believed to propitiate the goddess by offering human sacrifice during the Dassehra festival. It further mentions that they invited a Brahman to their house for dinner, poisoned him, and killed him for the goddess. The district gazetteer of Ratnagiri and Savantwadi mentions this practice in its description of the Karhadas. A 1920 survey of castes and tribes in the Nizam's dominion refers to a narrative communicated to Sir John Malcolm in 1799 which describes – in gruesome detail – how the Karhadas reveled in goddess-worship and killed a human victim for her: they first won the trust of an unsuspecting victim, even marrying one of their own daughters to the intended victim to earn his trust; they then secretly gave him poison (or an intoxicating drink) and took him to a temple of the goddess; finally, they slit his throat as he prostrated before the goddess, and offered her his blood (Hassan 1920: 114-115). While we must be suspicious of the motives of those who provided such information to the colonial scholars, these examples nonetheless indicate the wide prevalence of this belief. The Karhadas, of course, defended themselves vehemently. In 1890, a Karhada wrote a letter to a newspaper refuting the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* allegation and arguing that this chapter was a later accretion (Athalye 1947: 28-31).

THE NOBLEST BRAHMANS: THE SARASVATS

The most flattering accounts in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* concern the Sarasvats. Unlike the name Chitpavan, the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* makes no mention of the name Gauda Sarasvat, the preferred self-designation of the Sarasvats in the south. The text mentions Sarasvats and Gaudas as within the *pañcagauḍas*, but the title Gauda Sarasvat is conspicuous in its absence. Thus, at the time of this portion's composition, the designation had either not come into existence or had not gained currency. The community most closely associated with the Sarasvats is that of the Brahmans from Trihotra (present-day Tirhoot near Bengal, as some scholars conjecture). The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* lists the Trihotra Brahmans within the *pañcagauḍas* and describes their migration into Goa along with certain deities. The Sarasvats assume the Trihotra Brahmans as their ancestors for two reasons: they claim to have resided in Goa for centuries and demonstrate that their deities are the same as those of the Trihotra Brahmans. Narratives from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries explicitly identify the Trihotra Brahmans as the Gauda Sarasvats; a number of scholars have asserted the same ancestry based on ethnographic evidence (Gunjikar 1884: 46, Kanvinde 1870: 66-67, Sheladekar 1938: 5-9, Punalekar 1939: 6-7, Kudva 1972, and Dhume 1986: 3).

Three accounts in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* celebrate the Trihotra Brahmans in connection with their sacred land. The first appears in the first chapter of a section entitled *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* in the *uttararahasya*; it picks up right where the narrative of the Chitpavans ends. After Paraśurāma established the Chitpavans, he brought ten sages into

Gomāñcala: Bhāradvāja, Kauśika, Vatsa, Kauṇḍinya, Kaśyapa, Vasiṣṭha, Jamadagni, Viśvāmitra, Gautama, and Atri. They were residents of Trihotra and belonged to the *pañcagauḍa* Brahmans.[28] Paraśurāma settled them in Kuśasthalī (present-day Kutthali) to feed them in *śrāddha* and sacrifice; he also brought the most superior and auspicious deities from the Trihotra region – Śāntādurgā, Nāgeśa, Saptakotiśvara, Māṅgirīśa, and Mhālasa – and established them at various places in Gomāñcala: Maṭhagrāma (present day Madgaon), Kuśasthalī, and Kardalīpura (present-day Quortalim).[29] Even now, the Sarasvats and other Goan communities worship these well-known gods: the Sarasvats claim to have worshipped these gods since at least the sixteenth century. In the third chapter, we discuss the Sarasvats' connection with these temples.

The second story in the third chapter – entitled *Gomāñcalamāhātmya* (the glory of Gomāñcala) – extols Trihotra Brahmans in connection with the god Māṅgīśa, the regional incarnation of Śiva. Śiva recounts how the god – alternately known as Māṅgirīśa – came to Gomāñcala: Lord Māṅgīśa was originally located at the mythical Māṅgirīśa mountain in Trihotra. Brahma created the universe and it soon perished: it destroyed itself. Brahma re-created it yet it perished again. Finally, he sought t he god Māṅgirīśa's blessing by

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[28] *trihotravasināś caiva pañcagauḍāntarās tathā| gomāñcale sthāpitās te pañcakrośyām kuśasthale||* (II.1.48)
bhāradvājaḥ kauśikaś ca vatsa kauṇḍinya kaśyapaḥ| vasiṣṭho jamadagniś ca viśvāmitraś ca gautamaḥ|| atriś ca
daśarṣayaḥ sthāpitās tatra eva hi|| śrāddhārtham caiva yajñārtham bhojanārtham ca kāraṇāt|| (II.1. 49-50)

[29] *ānītā bhārgaveṇa gomantākhye ca parvate| māṅgirīṣo mahadevo mahālakṣmīś ca mhālasā||*
śāntadurgā ca nāgeśaḥ saptakotīśvaraḥ śubhaḥ| tathā ca bahulā devā ānītā bhārgaveṇa ca|| (II.1. 52- 53)

practicing penance in Trihotra; with the grace of this deity, he was able to create a universe that operated according to karmic laws: it continued to exist eternally.[30] As a token of his gratitude, Brahma established a beautiful *liṅgam* of Māṅgirīśa in Trihotra: all the local Brahmans devoutly worshipped this deity as their patron. Later, Paraśurāma brought the Brahmans of the ten *gotra*s from Trihotra into the Kuśasthalī region, along with the goddesses Mahālakṣmī, Mhālasā, Śāntādurgā, and the god Nāgeśa for their worship. These Brahmans from Trihotra resided in Candratīrtha, Bhāskararatīrtha, Padmatīrtha, Vareṇya (present-day Verney) and Vāyutīrtha (II.3. 1-21).

The third story from the fourth chapter – *Brāhmaṇotpattī* (the origin of Brahmans) – extends the narrative in the first two accounts by elaborating on the Trihotra Brahmans' settlement in Gomāñcala. Responding to Skanda's questions regarding the Trihotra Brahmans of the ten *gotras*, Śiva explains that the Smṛtis mention the Trihotra Brahmans as having ten *gotras* and sixty-six families; of those, ten Brahman families (from the Kauśika, Vatsa, and Kauṇḍinya *gotras*) were established in Kuśasthalī and Kardalī. These Brahmans were most excellent, pleasant to look at, wise in all actions, and honored by kings.[31] Sets of six families each were settled in the villages of Loṭalī, Kuśasthalī, Vareṇya, and Maṭhagrāma; ten families were established in Cūḍāmaṇī; eight

[30] This account illustrates a common strategy of māhātmya literature to envisage a homology between local gods and pan-Indian gods like Śiva and Viṣṇu. The local deity is said to be either equal or superior to these gods. For similar comparisons between a local *tīrtha* and pan-Indian *tīrthas* such as Kashi, see Feldhaus 2003.

[31] *kuśasthalyām ca kardalyām trigotram sthāpitam khalu| kauśikam vatsa kauḍinyam gotram daśakulānvitam||* (II.4.5)
ete trigotrajā viprā uttamā rājapūjitāḥ| sudarśanāḥ sadācārāś caturāḥ sarvakarmasu|| (II.4. 6)

in Dīpavatī; and twelve in the middle of Gomāñcala. In this manner, the sixty-six families of Brahmans were established within Gomāñcala (II.4. 4-9). Hereafter Śiva explains the origins of various other communities from the union of these Brahmans with either Brahman or non-Brahman women (II.4.12-31).

The depiction of the Trihotras/Sarasvats contrasts sharply with that of the Chitpavans, though both communities are associated with the legend of Paraśurāma and his creation of the coastal region. While Paraśurāma is instrumental in the Chitpavans' downfall, he figures centrally in the Trihotras' glorious past. These accounts perfectly illustrate Das' argument: contrary to the dominant understanding – that myths function simply as charters to validate beliefs and practices – the same myth can be a charter for some and a point of contention for others (Das 1968: 158).

The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*'s appreciation of the Sarasvats is also evident in its detailed description of their *gotras* and their settlement in various regions of Goa. Similarly, as it describes the joint migration of the Trihotra Brahmans and their prominent deities, it validates the Trihotras' history by linking it inextricably to that of these deities. Furthermore, while it presents the name Chitpavan as a synonym for an ignoble past, it derives the name Trihotra from a sacred region. The greatest endorsement of the Trihotras lies in their inclusion among the *pañcagauḍas*: this contrasts once again with the Chitpavans who are included in neither category. Later, this ascription came to form the mainstay of the Sarasvat claim to authentic Brahmanhood: their identification as

Trihotras was the stepping-stone upon which they claimed to be part of the *pañcagauḍa* group.

Despite the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* glorification of the Sarasvats, it mentions a controversial practice that repeatedly threatened their Brahmanical status: the consumption of fish. Maharashtrian Brahmans, underscoring this as *the* central Sarasvat characteristic, claimed it as a violation of vegetarianism – a defining criterion for Brahmanhood. Subsequent chapters will delineate how this criterion became the main theme of an anti-Sarasvat tirade. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* takes note of this practice by identifying the consumption of meat as a *deśadoṣa* in the Trihotra and Kanoja regions (cited earlier). It discusses the *deśadoṣas* again in the fifth chapter and mentions the Sarasvats as Brahmans from Konkan who are benevolent, expert in the Vedas, and who consume fish (II.5.13). As if to justify this custom, the text further maintains that if an action is performed for the people's benefit – although scripturally unauthorized – it is not sinful: the Sarasvats consumed fish during a twelve-year drought in order to protect the Vedas (II. 5. 27-28). Later accounts develop this cryptic thread into an elaborately-spun tale.

The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* also narrates a story concerning an anonymous Brahman who consumes elephant-flesh: when others emulate his action by eating meat, he defends himself and explains that eating meat is a common practice – the supreme *dharma* of many. The narrative then elaborates a moral discourse: it encourages people not to censure those who follow their respective *dharmas* in accordance with their own time and

place. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* indicates its sympathetic attitude towards this practice and indirectly maintains its high regard for the Sarasvats: by contrast, later narratives are explicit about their views against both this practice and the Sarasvats. Narratives in support of the Sarasvats resorted to the concept of the *deśadoṣa* to justify this practice; those against concocted stories portraying it as a grave sin.

GODS ON THE EARTH: THE DESHASTHAS

It is intriguing that while the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* mentions lesser-known communities like the Padyas, it does not clearly allude to the Deshasthas – a prominent Brahman community which had occupied important positions in both religious and political spheres. We lack solid evidence indicating when the name Deshastha came into being. However, this is not altogether unusual: the names of several castes are not attested until the sixteenth or seventeenth century, even if the communities bearing those names might have been present since earlier times. Inscriptions and other historical sources contain few references to caste-names.

It is improbable that the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* would completely ignore the Deshasthas: it does praise a group of Brahmans whom we can tentatively identify as the Deshasthas. In describing the Karhada Brahmans, the text demarcates Madhyadeśa's boundaries: south of the Narmadā River and north of the Kṛṣṇā.[32] Although by this definition Madhyadeśa would cover a large part of central India, it really comprises the hinterland of Maharashtra (Desh); this is traditionally considered to be the Deshasthas'

[32] *narmadā dakṣiṇe tīre kṛṣṇā caiva tathottare|* (II. 2. 23a)

locale. The very term *deśa* in Deshastha denotes the hinterland, as opposed to the coastal Konkan region. The narrative underscores the excellence of this region's Brahmans and contrasts them with those from Konkan. It castigates the Konkan Brahmans for originating in an evil land, being badly clothed, and lacking proper conduct: hence, they should be avoided on all good occasions.[33] Those from Madhyadeśa, on the other hand, are the best among Brahmans.[34] Compare this with the aforementioned description wherein Madhyadeśa's Brahmans are likened to the gods, while those from Konkan and Karnataka are censured as merciless and evil (II.6. 40a, 45b). Furthermore, the narrative eulogizes a famous *tīrtha* in the Desh region: Karavīra (Kolhapur) is superior to Kāśī as it is the goddess Lakṣmī's creation and is capable of washing away even the gravest sin – the murder of a Brahman. The Brahmans in this *tīrtha* are said to be expert in the Vedas; they ward off all sin just by their sight (II. 2.25-27). Nevertheless, such references are few and far between. Despite this ambiguity, there seems to be a close relationship between the Deshasthas and the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*; to investigate this further, we will consider instances of Brahmanical rivalry in early-modern Maharashtra.

RIVALRIES IN EARLY-MODERN MAHARASHTRA

Historiography is never free from perspective, bias, and the (sometimes unconscious) agenda of its authors: as such, historiography often tends to denigrate and delegitimize the Other with much more vigor and fervor than it expends in extolling and

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[33] *iti koṅkaṇajā viprā duṣṭadeśasamudbhavāḥ*| (II.2. 21b) *kucailācārahīnāṃs tān sarvakāryeṣu varjayet*|| (II.2. 22a)

[34] *uttamam caiva brāhmaṇyam madhyadeśādayās tathā*|| (II.2. 22b)

eulogizing the Self. Accordingly, when attempting to investigate the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* context, asking why this narrative castigates the Chitpavans and Karhadas will be more productive than wondering why it praises the Sarasvats and Deshasthas. Let us therefore consider the dynamics of the dispute betweens the Chitpavans and Karhadas. The late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century witnessed the prolific rise of a line of Chitpavan Brahmans: the Peshvas. Shivaji's grandson Shahu appointed Balaji Vishvanath Bhat, a relatively unknown Chitpavan Brahman from Konkan, to the post of the Peshva in 1713. In 1719 he appointed Balaji's son Bajirao I, setting the precedent for the hereditary succession of the Peshva's position to the Bhats. The rise of the Chitpavans as Peshvas had important consequences for the Marathas: gradually (particularly from the 1730s onward) the Peshvas started seizing control of the state, reducing Shivaji's lineage to being merely titular Rajas (kings). They made Poona the Maratha administration's headquarters and reported to the Raja at Satara.

The reign of the Chitpavan Peshvas was the most significant epoch for Brahmans in Maharashtra. As relatively-new entrants into the Maratha power-center, the Peshvas were acutely concerned with validating their Brahmanical status and establishing the credentials of kingship (Bayly 1999: 67). To do so, they presented themselves as patrons of Brahmanical social models and reinforced Brahmanical supremacy in the religious, social, and political spheres (Bayly 1999: 68). The Peshvas' reign thus came to be what Bayly calls the *Brahman-raj*. Yet, under this veil of generalized Brahmanism lay the Peshvas' preference for their own caste: with the Peshvas' patronage, the Chitpavans

prospered more than any other community. Gunjikar notes that prior to the rise of the Peshvas, the Chitpavans seldom traveled to the Desh region; during the Peshva period, the rate of their migration from Konkan to the hinterland multiplied (Gunjikar 1884: 112-113). The community dominated most administrative jobs at all levels. As the Peshvas' leading moneylenders, the Chitpavans controlled the Maratha state's finances and attained prominence (Divekar 1982: 436-437). While most military commanders in the earlier periods had been Marathas, the Chitpavan commanders successfully created a powerful niche for themselves in the eighteenth century (Gavali 1988: 10). A number of Chitpavans also held important positions as scholars, priests, judicial officers, and royal cooks. The *Brahman-raj* was, in reality, more of a *Chitpavan-raj*.

Prior to the Peshvas' rise, the Chitpavans functioned as small-scale regional revenue officers, traders, and priests; by contrast, the Deshasthas dominated the social, religious, and political spheres. The Vedic *paṇḍits*, *śāstris*, and priests at the majority of inland Maharashtra's temples were Deshasthas (Gunjikar 1884: 98). They were also the largest Brahman community (Kumar 1968a: 37). As the original priestly elite, they deemed their own ritual status to be superior to that of other Brahmans, including the Chitpavans (Balyly 1999: 67). The other Brahman groups reciprocally validated the Deshasthas' claims by holding them in great esteem (Johnson 1970: 98). In politics, the Deshasthas had served in the Deccan Sultanates as administrators at the state's middle and top levels: this experience and expertise in administration made them natural candidates for Shivaji's top-level administrative circle (Roy Burman 2001: 228). They

continued to serve his lineage in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries as chief administrators; they continued to enjoy a dominant position in Maharashtra's socio-political sphere until their hegemony was broken by the Chitpavan Peshvas (Divekar 1982: 438).

Signs of the Deshasthas' discomfiture with the Chitpavans were palpable from the beginning: when Shahu appointed Baji Rao I as the Peshva in 1719, a top Deshastha counselor in his court discouraged him from doing so; other Deshasthas also felt that giving this post to a Chitpavan would harm their own community's interests (Gavali 1988: 106). Later, when the Bhat family entrenched itself, the rivalry between these groups peaked and the two camps worked against each another. Sakharam Bapu, a reputed commander, feared that the Peshva would erase the Deshasthas' presence: "His intention is to brush aside the Deshasthas and create an empire of the Konkanasthas" (Gavali 1988: 124). [35] In terms of ritual purity, the Deshasthas looked down upon the Chitpavans as *parvenus* (new entrants) into the socio-religious sphere, barely eligible to share ranks with the noble Brahmans (Kumar 1968a: 37). As the Chitpavans occupied the inner circle of the Peshva's court, the Deshasthas moved away to administer the peripheries – Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka (Gordon 1993: 144).

This long-standing enmity between the Deshasthas and Chitpavans suggests that the Deshasthas might have authored the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, or at least the passages therein which concern the Chitpavans. Recall that one of the stories depicts the Chitpavans as

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[35] The Marathi sentence from the official correspondence of Sakharam Bapu reads: "*desesta sāre dūra karon avaghe kokeśāi karave yesā manodaya āhe"* (Gavali 1988: 124).

serving under the *Kṣatriyas* and as perennially engaged in serving others: we can read this as a reference to their political career. As a community endowed with a preponderance of priests and scholars, the Deshasthas (who, incidentally, had one of the longest histories in the region) would have had easy access to the text and the requisite skills to compose Purāṇic accounts. Gunjikar, a Sarasvat scholar who wrote a history of the Maharashtrian Brahman castes, supported this claim: he argued that several manuscripts of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* were in Deshastha hands and speculated that it was they who composed most of the text (Gunjikar 1884: 145). The Deshasthas may not only have authored the derogatory passages regarding the Chitpavans, but also controlled the text's circulation.

Similar to the acute rivalry between the Chitpavans and the Deshasthas, that between the Sarasvats and Karhadas was also intense. Before considering conflicts involving these two communities, let us briefly review their history. The Karhadas derived their name from Karhad – their homeland (near Satara). Karhad or Karahāṭaka (as it appears in inscriptions) was a sacred city located in the hinterland at the confluence of the Koyana and Krishna rivers. While a Māhātmya entitled the *Karahāṭakamāhātmya* glorifies this sacred place (Athalye 1947: 2-3), the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* denounces it as an "evil land," contrasting it with sacred regions in Goa. Epigraphic evidence indicates that the Karhadas were present in Konkan and Goa since the twelfth century under the patronage of the Kadamba kings Śivacitta and Viṣṇucitta; later, the Vijayanagar minister Mādhava was their patron. The community was identified by its present name either after

its migration into these regions or before the thirteenth century in order to distinguish them from other Brahmans (Athalye 1947: 18-19). Various Karhada family histories confirm that they migrated to Konkan beginning in the twelfth century (Athalye 1947: 4); after their arrival, they were involved in disputes with the Chitpavans and Deshasthas over priestly privileges and grants. Their rivalry with the Sarasvats in Goa was particularly intense: Karhada priests repeatedly clashed with the region's Sarasvats. There was a legal dispute between the Karhadas and Sarasvats over the post of *sarajyotiṣī* (the head-priest and the chief astrologer) at the Śāntādurgā temple in Goa's Phonda district: it ran on for nearly two hundred years – from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries – until appeals were made to the prevailing rulers of Goa. The Sarasvats, who finally won the case, declared the Karhadas to be intruders in Goa (Parasnis 1913: 1-66). In 1798, there was another major conflict between the two communities in Savantvadi: the Karhadas refused to dine with the Sarasvats and the Sarasvats ostracized them (Valavalikar 1945: 246-251). Similarly, in the late eighteenth century, the Sarasvat Mahajans of the temple of Vijayadurga in Goa engaged in a legal battle with the Karhada Mahajans of the same temple; this ended with a lawsuit filed under the Portuguese regime in 1849.[36] Although not conclusive proof of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* authorship, these instances imply that the Sarasvats would have benefited by denigrating the Karhadas.

[36] An unpublished copy of the Portuguese judiciary's verdict 1890 contains the details of this lawsuit. (Similar disputes had occurred between Karhadas and Sarasvats over property and priesthood rights in the nineteenth century. See Valavalikar 1934: 223, 251.)

THE PESHVA'S RESPONSE

How did the Peshva – a Chitpavan – react to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*? Enormously embarrassed by the text, he reacted with vehement revulsion: if we are to believe James Grant Duff (the colonial administrator-historian of the Marathas), he "suppressed and destroyed all copies of the Sahyadri Kind" and scolded a Brahman from the town of Wai for possessing a copy (Duff 1826:11). The etymology of the name Chitpavan had become so controversial by the time of the first Bajirao Peshva (c. 1730) that the Chitpavans started referring to themselves as Konkanasthas (residents of Konkan). Valavalikar, a later Sarasvat scholar, claimed that by the reign of the second Bajirao (1775-1851) this new designation had nearly replaced the old one; he also alleged that the name Konkane originally belonged to the Sarasvats before the Chitpavans usurped it (Valavalikar 1945: 113-116). There may be some truth to this: Konkanastha is the more common and well-known designation today. In 1884, Gunjikar remarked that Chitpavan youngsters did not even know the name Chitpavan – they referred to themselves as Konkanasthas alone (Gunjikar 1884: 143).

THE *SAHYĀDRIKHAṆḌA* AND THE BRAHMASABHĀ OF SATARA

Let me now describe an important episode indicating the significance of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* in lived realities of Maratha polity.We learn of this episode from an official *nivāḍapatra* (a letter of decision) issued by the office of Shivaji's grandson – Shahu, the Raja of Satara, whose reign lasted from 1708-1749 (Sohani: 1937: 175-181). This letter records an important verdict given during the Raja's reign. In *śake* 1671 (1749

CE), an assembly convened at Shahu's court. An audience of ten thousand witnessed this meeting (this should be enough to indicate its significance and grandeur): there were eminent authorities and learned Brahmans from all over – *śāstrīs* from Satara, five *paṇḍits* from a *maṭha* (monastery) in Shringeri, five *paṇḍits* from Banaras, and *paṇḍits* from the cities of Karhad and Vai.

Before I describe the details of this episode, let me highlight why we must consider this episode as significant. First, this demonstrates that in the eighteenth century, the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* functioned as an important scripture in the Maratha judicial setting: like the role played by the aforementioned Jātipurāṇas, it was deployed to adjudicate the ritual status of certain communities – particularly that of the Sarasvats. Second, this episode reveals both the model of adjudication and the identity of the judicial authorities who were involved in the process of determining matters of caste and status. As such, it points to the politically significant audience of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, explaining why there was a proliferation of similar narratives in this period. Third, it indicates that the narratives in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* were being reinterpreted and reinvented. Finally, it demonstrates a very different response to the text from Shahu and his assembly of *paṇḍits* than that of the Peshvas.

The *śāstrīs* and *paṇḍits* of the assembly hailed from important centers of religious authority, some more prestigious than others. The most prestigious among these was the northern city of Banaras: a veritable *tīrtha* with a pan-Indic appeal, it was *the* locus of learned *śāstrīs* and *paṇḍits.* The scholarly community of Banaras was an important

authority in matters of ritual status and rank: it was frequently invoked in Maharashtra when disputes related to these matters arose. We will learn more about *paṇḍits* from Banaras in subsequent chapters. The *maṭha* in Shringeri (near Mangalore in coastal Karnataka) was significant in the religious world as well, for it was the seat of the Śaṅkarācārya, the highest preceptor of the Hindus. The celebrated eighth-century Advaita philosopher Śaṅkara established four such seats across India to promulgate the Advaita Vedānta. In time, the Śaṅkarācārya's authority came to be considered supreme in social and religious matters. Another seat of the Śaṅkarācārya was located at Karavīra (Kolhapur) in Maharashtra's hinterland. The Śaṅkarācāryas at both places were gurus of Śaiva Brahman communities; these included the Deshasthas and Chitpavans. The Śaṅkarācāryas often adjudicated disputes related to status and rank. Compared to Banaras and Shringeri, places such as Karhad and Vai were smaller in stature, famous mainly as regional centers of Brahmanical learning. In short: in this *sabhā* authorities of both pan-Indian and regional stature came together.

Why were all these experts summoned? Members of a community of writers and clerks – known as Prabhus – requested Shahu to bestow upon them the right to be initiated by chanting the Gāyatri mantra; they also asked for the right to perform the six actions of *yajana* (performing the sacrifices), *yājana* (officiating sacrifices for others), *adhyayana* (learning the Veda), *adhyāpana* (teaching the Veda to others), *dāna* (giving alms), and *pratigraha* (accepting alms). Of these, *yājana, adhyāpana,* and *pratigraha* were the exclusive rights of Brahmans; *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas* alongwith Brahmans were

entitled to the remaining rights. Previously, the Prabhus had considered themselves to be *Kṣatriyas*: now, they wanted to become Brahmans. The Prabhus who demanded these privileges had a strong influence in the Satara court, forcing Shahu to take their demand seriously. To determine whether the Prabhus were eligible for these rights, the Raja sought the counsel of the aforementioned learned authorities and held their assembly in his court. The Prabhus raised a question to the assembly: why were the Śeṇavīs allowed to perform the six actions while the Prabhus weren't? The term Śeṇavī was an honorific title referencing the skilled literati of the Sarasvats – the scribes, clerks, and administrators for various governments. However, other communities (particularly those in Maharashtra) often used the name Śeṇavī to refer to the entire Sarasvat community. (I will elaborate on this name in subsequent chapters.) If the Śeṇavīs/Sarasvats – like the Prabhus – were engaged in scribal duties, why were they able to perform the six Brahmanical actions, when the Prabhus were forbidden to do so?

In order to investigate this, the assembly ordered a copy of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* from the Shringeri *maṭha*; the results were as follows. The authorities first underscored the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*'s description of the *pañcagauḍa/pañcadraviḍa* Brahmans and decided that among the five Gauḍas were the Gauḍas, the Kānyakubjas, Maithilas, Sārasvats, and Utkilas; the five Draviḍas included the Draviḍas, Mahārāṣṭras, Tailaṅgas, Karnāṭakas, and Gurjaras. (This description nearly matches the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* version – cited earlier – with one exception: the term Madhyadeśa in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* is replaced here with the term Mahārāṣṭra.) The assembly asserted that these two groups of

Brahmans had existed since antiquity. They also discussed the Paraśurāma saga and affirmed the events of the Tretā age: Paraśurāma went on a killing spree and obliterated the Earth's *Kṣatriyas* in twenty-one bloody rounds. He repented his violence and decided to wash away the sin of murder through penance: first, he donated the entire earth to the Brahmans. He then made the ocean give him a piece of land fourteen *krośas* long and seventy-four villages wide so that he could have a home. In that land, he established Brahmans: from the river near Kalyana (a town near Thane in North Konkan) to the river in Rajapur (a town near Ratnagiri in South Konkan) he established Brahmans from the Maharashtra country and named them the Chitpavans; they were Brahmans attached to the Āśvalāyana branch of the Ṛgveda. He gave the Karhada Brahmans the land between the river near Rajapur and the river near Acara (roughly, this covers parts of Ratnagiri and the adjacent district – Sindhudurg). He brought these Brahmans from the Haihaya country: they were fated to be known as *viśamāraka* (those who kill by administering poison).

The assembly also noted the history of the Sarasvats in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*: in the month of Āśvin, Paraśurāma commenced a sacrifice in Pedane (a village in Goa) to wash away the sin of his violence. He needed Gauḍa Brahmans to perform the sacrifice: so he brought Sarasvat Brahmans from Trihotrapura, a sacred region in the Gauḍa lands. These Brahmans belonged to ten *gotras* and were affiliated to the Āśvalāyana branch of the Ṛgveda. Paraśurāma decreed that these Brahmans would enjoy *śāśvata* (eternal) Brahmanhood; he gave unto them various *agrahārams* (villages given as gifts) in the

region encompassed between the river near Masura and the river near Ankaleshvar.[37] There were two groups within the Sarasvats: one group included Brahmans of the Vatsa, Kauṇḍinya, and Kauśika gotras; the other was made up of Bhāradvāja-gotra Brahmans. Unto the former he gave the Sashti province (the villages Keloshi and Kushasthali); upon the latter he bestowed the Bardesh province. The assembly also determined why the Sarasvats were called the Śeṇavī: the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* had mentioned that if these Brahmans pursued the clerical vocation they were to be known as Pants or Śeṇavīs. Everyone was convinced by the *paṇḍits'* explanation. Lastly, the assembly considered the history of the Prabhus: unconvinced of their claim to Brahmanhood, it declined their request.

The above episode is important: it indicates that the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* had a politically significant audience. The assembly described in the episode was a *brahmasabhā*, that is, a bench of learned Brahmans well-versed in various traditional disciplines and the matters of *dharma* contained in Sanskrit scriptures. An important judicial institution existing prior to the Maratha state's emergence (from 1400 to 1818), *brahmasabhās* typically functioned in holy places such as Nasik, Kolhapur, Karhad, and Wai (Gune 1953: 65-66). The state's involvement was not necessary in a *brahmasabhā*: they were often independent. This particular *brahmasabhā*, however, was special: the Satara Raja himself convened it and scholars from Banaras and Shringeri – in addition to

[37] The region demarcated here is unclear. Masure is a village in South Konkan in district Sindhudurg, whereas Ankaleshvar is a city near the Gujarat coast, which would make this region very extensive. The Sarasvats' connection with Gujarat is unknown.

those from Maharashtra – attended. *Brahmasabhās* usually consulted Dharmaśāstra scriptures to adjudicate issues relating to *ācāra* (appropriate conduct), *vyavahāra* (litigation), and *prāyaścitta* (expiation) (Gune 1953: 66). The above episode indicates that *brahmasabhās* also used the Purāṇas as scriptures to ascertain the caste status and ritual privileges of a community; this is similar to the use of Jātipurāṇas in early-modern Gujarati royal courts to settle disputes of status and rank (see p. 10). The king, the experts of *dharma*, and the scriptures: these were the three elements constituting the judicial model with reference to which narratives like the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* reasserted their practical – and political – relevance. As we shall see, the authors of other narratives were also well aware of this audience.

How did the assembly describe the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* accounts of the Sarasvats, Chitpavans, and Karhadas? They glorified the Sarasvats by identifying them with the noble Brahmans described in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* as the Trihotra Brahmans (The extant *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* does not mention the name Sarasvat, but the name Trihotra, although later Sarasvats asserted that the Trihotra Brahmans were the Sarasvats' ancestors.) The assembly identified Trihotrapura as the Sarasvat homeland, thereby establishing a clear homology between the Trihotras and the Sarasvats. The assembly also identified the Sarasvats as part of the *pañcagauḍas*, eulogized as an ancient group of Brahmans. In a further attempt to bolster the Sarasvats' status, they ascribed specific aspects of the Sarasvats' story to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. These included: the two groups of Sarasvats honored by Paraśurāma, the geographical boundaries of the region he gave to them, and

the directive to use the name Śeṇavī according to the Sarasvats' occupation as administrators; these details are not found in the existing *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. These differences imply two possibilities: either the assembly consulted a variant manuscript of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, which contained the above details, or they added these details while explaining and interpreting the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* account of the Sarasvats. Both these possibilities are open to conjecture. Irrespective of the plausibility of either of these possibilities, it is clear that the assembly was certainly in favor of the Sarasvats and directly affirmed their Brahmanhood. Most importantly: this is the first (and perhaps the only) instance where the Maratha royal court *officially* endorsed the Sarasvats' Brahmanhood; aside from this instance, Sarasvats in the Maratha region received a startlingly different reaction to their claims to Brahmanhood as I will discuss later.

The depiction of Chitpavans in the verdict raises some important points. The assembly defined the Chitpavans as Ṛgveda-affiliated Brahmans established by Paraśurāma in a specific region. Why did they leave out the tale of their origin from lowly fishermen and the story of Paraśurāma's curse? Was this a conscious attempt to avoid the Peshva's wrath? Of course, we do not know if they consulted a hitherto-unknown manuscript of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa.* If, however, they used a version familiar to us, it seems very likely that the assembly deliberately obliterated the narrative's controversial portions in order to avoid the Peshva's wrath. Though the assembly acknowledged that Paraśurāma settled the Karhadas after bringing them from the Haihaya country, the assembly had no sympathy for the Karhadas: their remark – that the

Karhadas kill by poisoning – is enough to indicate their lack of favor toward the Karhadas. Imagine the magnitude of such a ghastly accusation in a prestigious courtly meeting witnessed by more than ten thousand. The Karahadas had no friends – either in the Raja's court or in the *brahmasabhā.*

The above episode suggests an even more pressing question: what was the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* doing at Shahu's court when the Peshvas sought its suppression? Mainly consulted to shed light on the Sarasvats' history, the assembly refrained from mentioning the controversial Chitpavan narratives. Would the Peshvas allow a *brahmasabhā* to use the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* in their court at Poona? Likely not. But then why did Shahu sanction its use? As I mentioned earlier, the Peshvas became the *de facto* rulers of the Marathas and reduced the Satara Raja to a titular position. This process of usurpation was underway from the 1730s on: 1749 – the year of the assembly – coincides with the crescendo of the Peshva's power. Was Shahu subtly challenging the Peshva's growing power by using the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* at his court? Was it his final, yet feeble, attempt to assert himself as the real king before his death in the following year? The answer to this question – just like those to this episode's other mysteries – remains open to conjecture.

CONCLUSION

The depictions of the Chitpavans, Karhadas, Sarasvats, and Deshasthas in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* revolve along different permutations of three main motifs. The text identifies and associates these groups with the history and inherent moral character of their respective regions, highlights the role of a central figure who either validates or

undermines their identity, and encapsulates the moral character of these groups in the etymology of their respective caste-designations. Paraśurāma's creation of Konkan and Gomāñcala is fundamental to the past of both Chitpavans and Sarasvats. While his curse dooms the Chitpavans, his grace confers material well-being and esteem upon the Trihotras/Sarasvats. The Trihotras/Sarasvats are as auspicious and noble as the sacred *tīrthas* wherein they dwell. Similarly, the Deshasthas acquire their godliness from their sacred homeland – Madhyadeśa, a land superior to its neighboring regions. In an acute contrast from the above, the badlands of Kārāṣtra imply an evil that inheres in its residents, the Karhada Brahmans. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*'s utter contempt for the Karhadas shows in its explanation of their caste-designation's etymology: the Karhadas are born from the bones (*hāḍa*) of donkeys (*khara*). It states its disdain for the Chitpavans by deriving their name from the combination of *citā* (funeral pyre) and *pavana* (purified): a constant reminder of their lowly ancestors – fishermen purified in an unholy funeral fire. Unlike the benevolent and just Paraśurama, the patron goddess of the Karhadas – the evil Mātṛkā – demands abhorrent human sacrifices. Despite their different biases toward these communities, later narratives adhered to these very same motifs, a sign of how powerfully normative the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* depiction had become. Additionally, the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* was the main source of two theoretical notions that were to become immensely consequential: the *pañcagauḍa/pañcadraviḍa* classification and the theory of the *deśadoṣas*.

One cause of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* importance lies in its genre: by establishing itself as a Purāṇa, it latches on to the immense scriptural value which tradition accords to this genre. To legitimize its claim, it situates itself within the *Skandapurāṇā* and emulates the characteristic generic features – the *pañcalakṣaṇas*, the temporality of the *yugas*, and the narrative-framework of a dialogue between divine figures. Utilizing this Purāṇic framework, it relates accounts of Konkan, Gomañcala, and the Brahman groups therein.

We can contextualize the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* depictions of Brahman groups in early-modern Western Maharashtra's competitions and conflicts: the power-dynamics between the Chitpavans and Deshasthas, as well as those between the Sarasvats and Karhadas, are particularly pertinent. As an emergent, upwardly mobile social group, the Chitpavans threatened the status of the Deshasthas, who considered themselves to be the region's authentic, primordial Brahmans. The Deshasthas' nightmare – their loss of power – came true as the Chitpavans ascended to the position of the Peshva. Likewise, frequent disputes over priestly privileges strained the relationship between the Karhadas and Sarasvats in Goa. Thus, while the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* delegitimizes the Chitpavans and Karhadas, it eulogizes the Sarasvats and Deshasthas.

The use of historical narratives in ascertaining the status of social groups was a common practice in the early-modern period, as the Jātipurāṇas demonstrate. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* functioned comparably, validating the Sarasvats' status in the judicial assembly of religious authorities convened at Shahu's court. In what might be the only instance of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* official use in the Maratha royal court, the accounts

therein were retold to legitimize the Sarasvats as authentic Brahmans within the *pañcagauḍa* fold and to denigrate the Karhadas as evil poison-givers. The text's invocation was ambivalent with regard to the Chitpavans. The Peshva, offended by the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* insulting account of his caste, had censored the narrative. While the use of this text constituted an indirect challenge to his authority, the assembly nonetheless remained silent over the controversial portions and only briefly mentioned the Chitpavans' history. In what follows, we examine the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* reinterpretations and re-invocations in both the discursive and political spheres.

Chapter 2: The *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*: Status Lost and Status Regained

By the seventeenth century, the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* became an authoritative account of the origin of the Brahman castes in Maharashtra. Its influence is nowhere as pervasively evident as it is in a narrative titled *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*. In this chapter I will discuss ways in which this narrative shows its dependence to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, both implicitly and explicitly, while simultaneously departing from it on various accounts. Before delving into the details of the comparison, I first contextualize the discussion in a foundational inquiry concerning intertextuality. What is the process binding two texts in a dialectical relationship? What are the relations between texts, authority, and identity?

What constitutes a reliable indication of the authority of a text? If we momentarily set aside the reader (whose act of reading itself plays an active role in canonization) and focus solely on the literary and discursive tradition within which the text resides, two phases seem to occur in canonization. First a text successfully deploys strategies such as claiming divine authorship, timeless antiquity, or allegiance to a pre-existing discursive and literary tradition. Second, such a text is disseminated in the later tradition wherein it is often cited and/or interpreted. While the text extends its domain and legitimizes itself by being invoked in later narratives, the later narratives themselves draw their own authority and legitimacy from the prototype narrative they invoke. Thus, narratives are bound in a dialectical relationship in which the "original" narrative

becomes a prototype and newer narratives imitate the prototype narrative to validate themselves; simultaneously, the prototype narrative further enhances its authority by means of the newer narratives. The later narratives may offer different elements and versions but so long as their point of departure emanates from the prototype text and so long as their differences stand *in relation to* the prototype text, both the prototype and its variants form an organic whole that we identify as a textual tradition or textual canon. Within the world of Sanskrit texts we are familiar with this aspect of textual interdependence through various cases: the Vedic textual tradition, the multiple renditions of popular epics such as the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahabhārata*, and the metaphysical tradition of the Vedānta and other schools of Indian philosophy.

In historiography the question of the interrelationship between texts and the comparative authority of one text over another becomes especially crucial in the wake of theories regarding historiography *in* the narrative versus historiography *as* the narrative. With regard to the latter, an influential model offered by White (1978) argues that historical writings have much in common with fictional literary narratives: the historian imaginatively invents (rather than discovers) a coherent historical account by selectively focusing on certain elements in raw data that she has at her disposal. Furthermore, the selection, configuration, and systemic arrangement of fact – a process called *emplotment* – derives from the intent of the historian to highlight a particular point of view and a pregeneric plot-structure that the historian has in her mind. Moreover, the content of any historical account is determined by the cultural and epistemological preferences of the

historian and her audience (White 1978: 84-85). White's theory implies that all historical narratives – whether modern or pre-modern – strive to place themselves in the discursive tradition that appeals most to their authors and readers by incorporating themes and features acceptable to that tradition.

White's theoretical model of historical writing as a literary narrative is an indication of the shifting focus on the study of narratives and the integration of narrative theory into a variety of disciplines (including history) during the 1970s and 1980s (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997: xiii). Continuing this trend in recent decades, historians of South Asia have been paying close attention to historiographical modes in pre-modern indigenous narratives that are distinct from the Western modes of historiography. Thus, an increasing number of studies are discussing ways in which the pre-modern historical narratives deployed themes, motifs, and narrative strategies suited to the discursive requirements and literary tastes of the indigenous historian and his audience (Thapar 1974, Guha 2004, Rao et al 2003). Questions regarding how a narrative legitimizes and authorizes itself according to the acceptable norms in the tradition would also be quite pertinent to this line of enquiry: these questions would seek to explain why a narrative becomes more popular and dominant over others within the same traditions.

With regard to the Indian historical tradition various studies have highlighted ways in which pre-modern historical narratives served various elite groups who wrote, commissioned, or simply appropriated these narratives to eulogize their glorious past and legitimize a shared identity. For instance, Chakrabarti (2001) has demonstrated the ways

in which the myths in the Bengal Purāṇas served to integrate local cults into the Brahmanic fold, thereby creating and sustaining a common regional religious identity. Guha (2004) and Deshpande (2002) have illustrated how the prose *bakhar* chronicles that emerged during the Maratha period in the later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Maharashtra engendered a shared sense of Maratha identity, espousing values of valor and loyalty. In Gujarat, Jātipurāṇas composed in the early modern period were composed to justify the social rank of various Brahman castes (Das 1968).

Similarly, a recent study by Figueira (2002) demonstrates how the constant reiteration of the textual authority of the Vedas constructed the myth of a common Aryan racial identity, and how such an identity was appropriated by both Hindu orthodox groups and British scholars in the nineteenth century to validate their own assertions of faith. Figueira claims that "a canonical literature arises through the consensus of a group elite and normally serves to stabilize that group" (2002: 2); this is applicable not just to scriptural texts such as the Veda or the Dharmaśāstra, but also to *any* corpus of narratives. The *bakhar* literature serves as an example: it achieved for the Maratha martial elite what the Vedic texts achieved for the priests in the Vedic period and the Brahman intellectuals in the nineteenth century.

However, the extent to which any of these narratives could succeed in propagating their ideology and influencing the identity of their audience was contingent upon how effectively these narratives presented themselves as authoritative and appealing to the respective epistemological and literary sensitivities of their audience. The more the

narrative tradition succeeded in sustaining claims to authority and legitimacy, the higher the utility of that tradition for a group that sought its own validation by propagating the narratives.

We will find ample instances of narratives and texts which deployed certain textual devices to convince the intended audience of their authenticity and their cultural relevance. I am concerned with the Sanskritic tradition; given the distinct tendency in this tradition to posit texts as divine and timeless works with human importance, texts such as Purāṇas and Śāstras proclaim themselves to be divine revelations transcending time and space. These texts also strive to present themselves as part of a particular scriptural tradition by invoking authoritative scriptures in that tradition. Some other common strategies used by Sanskritic texts to propagate themselves are: indicating their allegiance to a single normative text, associating themselves to a royal court, and claiming to be commissioned by royal authorities.

However, narratives do not invariably celebrate a shared identity and a common past of a group by integrating relevant mythical or historical elements, nor do they always function to legitimize a community. They may also function to highlight differences between two groups, or to delegitimize either of the groups by twisting mythical and historical elements; this is even more the case when the two groups are involved in a common quest for ascendancy in a given society. Narratologists have not yet fully explored the kinds of narratives that – far from constructing identities of communities such as the Marathas – instead seek to challenge the identities of castes and communities

engaged in conflicts. Thus, unlike narratives extolling the past glories of a person/group (such as the various panegyrics, epics, hagiographies, and chronicles), narratives such as the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* aim at castigating a group by insinuating a vile past. Such narratives play a dual role in that they aim to undermine the identity of a group while simultaneously serving the interests of their authors whose identity is validated through a negative depiction of the other group.

Similarly, the very same features that lend authority and authenticity to a narrative that ennoble the common past and ideology of a group can be also deployed to depict the inferior past of a community and thereby subvert the identity of that group. For instance, in the previous chapter I highlighted various ways in which the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* established its credentials in the line of the Purāṇa tradition. That the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* could sustain its self-proclamation as an authoritative text is also evident when it came to be the most-cited text in the later narratives and debates that sought to underscore the embarrassing history of the Chitpavans and the Karhadas and the prestigious past of the Sarasvats. If the scriptural authority of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* was reinforced in the later narratives that shared with the text their predilection for the Brahman communities, the authority of these later narratives was also consolidated by the invoking of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. They emulated the themes and strategies deployed in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* to voice their agreements or disagreements over the "history" of the Brahman communities and thus staked their claim to being received as authoritative texts in posterity.

The above observations are especially true with regard to a narrative entitled *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā* which drew heavily from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and went on to become the second most cited text (after the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*) in the nineteenth-century debates between the Sarasvats and the Maharashtrian Brahmans. This chapter will discuss historiography in the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*: how the text evinces the influence of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, and yet seeks to create its own niche by inventing new themes. Before doing so I first lay out some important details regarding the publication of the text, its manuscript tradition, genre and content.

INTRODUCTION TO THE *ŚATAPRAŚNAKALPALATIKĀ*

Publication and Manuscripts: Unlike the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, which attracted much attention and discussion in the eighteenth century itself, *"The Divine Creeper of One Hundred Questions"* became controversial long *after* its composition, that is, in the nineteenth-century debates. The debate that first brought out the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā* (*Latikā* hereafter) into the public arena occurred in 1870. This debate, the first well-publicized one in Brahman circles of nineteenth-century Maharashtra, revolved around the issue of whether or not the Sarasvat Brahmans could perform the *ṣaṭkarma* that define Brahmanhood. The Maharashtrian Brahmans asserted that the Sarasvats could perform only three actions: giving alms, having sacrifices performed for them, and learning the Veda; in this scheme, they were ineligible to also accept alms, officiate at sacrifices, and teach the Veda. The matter was discussed in a meeting between the Sarasvat Brahmans of

Bombay and the Chitpavan Brahmans of Poona. The Chitpavans of Poona brought forth a copy of the *Latikā* and quoted it as an authoritative text in support of their argument. Subsequently, the treatise attracted significant attention and discussion from both groups, who leveraged the text to suit their respective benefit. Sarasvat Brahmans defended themselves by pointing out passages in the *Latikā* that seemed to undermine the Chitpavans and Karhadas. A Sarasvat named Bhavanishankar Kanvinde published a few portions from the text regarding the descriptions of the Sarasvats as well as those of the Maharashtrian Brahmans (Kanvinde 1870). A few years later, prominent Sarasvat scholar Ramchandra Bhikaji Gunjikar again published the same portions in his book on the history of Maharashtrian Brahman communities of (Gunjikar 1884). Both Gunjikar and Kanvinde had access to a common manuscript which mentioned that the *Latikā* was composed in *śaka* 1612/CE 1690.

The remaining manuscript never saw the light of day: the two authors published only some portions of the manuscript. However, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that a second manuscript was extant. This second manuscript, collected from Satara, was penned by a scribe named Ravaji Bhatta Dhandarphalkar in 1856. A comparison between portions of the *Latikā* that were published and the Satara manuscript reveal slight differences in the contents, the chapter numbers in colophons, the order of verses, and certain lines and words. I will elaborate on these differences later. The most important difference, however, concerns the dating of the text: according to the Satara manuscript the *Latikā* was composed in *śaka* 1499/CE 1577.

Author and date: Both manuscripts unanimously mention the name of the author as Mādhava. In the Satara manuscript, after beginning the text with the customary salutation to the gods, the author says, "Mādhava salutes his guru and composes this auspicious text called *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*. I composed this treatise on 1499 *Śālivāhana śaka*." (In Gunjikar's book the date is *śālivāhana śaka* 1612/CE 1690). Brahman scholars in the nineteenth century pointed out that the author was certainly not the well-known scholar Sāyaṇa, the commentator of the *Ṛgveda* in the fourteenth century, also known by the name Vidyāraṇya Mādhavācārya (Kanvinde 1870: 161-162; Gunjikar 1884: 150).

Although the *Latikā* claims to have been composed in *śaka* 1499/CE 1577, there is no independent source to confirm this. The text is referred to neither in the *Sahyāḍrikhaṇḍa* nor in the *Konkaṇākhyāna*. That the author was familiar with the *Sahyāḍrikhaṇḍa* and its depiction of the Chitpavans, Karhadas, and Sarasvats as well as with the controversies regarding the status of the Sarasvat Brahmans is clear from its repeated allusions to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. In fact, some portions of the *Latikā* do seem to be written in response to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, as will become clear in the course of this chapter. This indicates that the text was certainly composed after the *Sahyāḍrikhaṇḍa*.

Genre and contents: As the whereabouts of the manuscript consulted by Kanvinde and Gunjikar are presently unknown, we must rely on the manuscript available from Satara in order to be familiar with the genre, narrative structure and textual

conventions used in the *Latikā*. The text is written in Sanskrit and consists of more than six hundred verses in the commonly-used *śloka* meter. Unlike the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, the text does not assign itself to any particular genre nor does it claim to be a divine revelation. The author declares it to be a *śubhā* (auspicious) compendium of *kathāśatam* (one hundred stories) whose authenticity lies in the claim of the author that it is written in accordance with "the authoritative statements from the past (*purvavākyānusāratah*)," after duly considering "what is said in the Smṛtis, etc.," as well as "what is written by the learned (*śiṣṭas*) in the tradition." Thus, the text posits itself to be not a secular literary storybook such as the *Kathasaritsāgara*, but a Śāstra treatise that aims to *explain* the origin of various phenomena: a compendium elaborating on *itihāsa* (the way it once was).

Each of the one hundred myths, stories and descriptions of a wide range of phenomena in the *Latikā* are dealt with in a chapter; these are termed *praśna* (question). These *praśna*s are arranged in three main divisions called *adhyāya*s. The first two *adhyāya*s are titled *Jātiviveka* or the discernment regarding castes. As the title indicates, most of the topics in these sections recount the origin of multifarious *jāti*s (castes), *miśra-jāti*s (mixed castes) or *saṅkara-jāti*s (hybrid castes born out of the mixture of *jātis*, as Mādhava defines them). The first *adhyāya* consists of thirty-five *praśnas*, and deals with the *jātis* among the first three *varṇa*s (Brahman, *Kṣatriya*, and *Vaiśya*). Thus, there are detailed accounts of Brahman *jāti*s from Maharashtra such as the Chitpavans, Karhadas, and Sarasvats, as well as those from Karnataka and Andhra; *Kṣatriya jāti*s such as Kāyita (a corrupt form of Kāyastha), the scribal community of Parabhus (Prabhu), the *Vaiśya*

caste called Vāṇasa, and so on. The remaining section describes minor communities born out of *varṇasaṅkara* (the intermixture among the four *varṇa*s.) Some of the other significant topics include castes outside the fold of Brahmanism such as the Lingāyatas, and Christians (called "Kiristāva"), the origin of the philosophies of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, *nāstikamata* (Atheism), the *ṣaṭ-darśana* (the six schools of thought), the notion of renunciation, metaphysical concepts such as *ātman* (the individual soul), and the distinction between sacred and profane objects.

The second section, spanning from chapters thirty-six through fifty-six, is more comprehensive than the first one. It expounds on the *samskāra*s (rites of passage), means of livelihood, and duties prescribed in scriptures to the first three *varṇa*s, as well as to the *saṅkara-jātis* or castes resulting from the *pratiloma* and anuloma marriages (A *pratiloma* marriage is the union of a woman of higher *varṇa* with a man of lower *varṇa*. An *anuloma* marriage is between a man of higher *varṇa* and a woman of lower *varṇa*).The *Latikā*'s second section also describes various mixed castes that are said to be born from the *saṅkara-jātis* such as the goldsmith, coppersmith, gardener, charioteer, carpenter, barber, lady hairdresser, dancer, shepherd, and so on. Interestingly, the text also describes the origin of various Muslim communities such as the Turks, the Pathans, the Saids, and the Moguls.[38] The untitled third section consists of chapters seventy through one hundred and covers various philosophers and metaphysical theories such as accounts of Madhva

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[38] For instance, the *Turuṣka*s or Turks are said to be born out of a secret union between a woman of the *Mamade* race and a man from Andhra. Only *Cāṇḍāla*s are said to be superior to them (Ch.2.20.86).

and his philosophy of Dualism, incarnation of the Advaita philosopher Śaṅkara, twenty-four principles of the universe according to the Sāṃkhya philosophy, the principle of *Brahman* (the transcendental ultimate reality), distinction between an individual soul and the Universal Soul, and the origin of various groups of deities. Overall, however, none of the three sections follow any strict thematic unity and overlapping topics are quite common.

GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS OF THE *ŚATAPRAŚNAKALPALATIKĀ*

The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* has an overt regional affiliation; does the *Latikā* also exhibit such ties? The text certainly evinces familiarity with the regions in Maharashtra as the stories identify certain castes with specific geographic regions such as the Sahyadri mountains, the Konkan coast, Varhad, Madhyadesh, and Bardesh. However, the most compelling indication of its regional focus comes from the inclusion of a number of Marathi caste-designations. Marathi words of Marathi origin such as *Kāsāra* (ironsmith), *Tāmbaṭa* (coppersmith), *Bhoira* (palanquin-bearer), *Cābukasvāra* (horse-trainer), *Mālī* (gardener), *Bhorapī* (*bahurūpi*) (actor) are generously used throughout the text. This indicates that the author was based in Maharashtra and was familiar with Marathi in addition to Sanskrit.

Given the focus of the text on Maharashtra, it is no surprise that the author was also familiar with the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. Although he acknowledges Smṛtis and the works of Manu and Yājñavalkya as his sources of authority, it is the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* which he

uses as the chief authoritative scripture to describe places and communities in Maharashtra. The *Latikā* and the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* have much in common. In particular, the first two chapters pertaining to the myth of Paraśurāma indicate the author's familiarity with the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. In the first chapter, entitled "Reason for the Curse given to Brahmans by Paraśurāma," Brahmans sought to acquire a kingdom during the Tretā age. They performed harsh penance to please Paraśurāma and he blessed them with a boon they desired. He also promised them that if they happened to remember him in any calamity by ringing a bell, he would immediately come to their rescue. Having obtained a kingdom, the Brahmans became arrogant and corrupt. With the intention of testing Paraśurāma's promise, they rang a bell and summoned him when there was no occasion to do so. When Paraśurāma appeared and asked them why he was summoned, they only looked at one another's faces. The angry sage cursed them so that these crooked Brahmans would never trust each other, would forever remain poor, and never be worthy of ruling the earth; they would always be fit only to beg (See, Ch. 1 Myths of Identity). With the exception of a few details, the story is strikingly similar to the account of Chitpavan Brahmans in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* described in the previous chapter of this dissertation.

The second chapter, entitled "The Cause for the Creation of Land of Paraśurāma," narrates the familiar story of Paraśurāma. Here, the sage requests the ocean to retreat to the point where his arrow would fall in order to create reclaimed land. The ocean begins to worry as it would have no place to go if the arrow fell too far; just then, a

termite approaches the ocean and asks the reason for its worry. When it comes to know the ocean's predicament, it promises to help: the ocean had protected the termite in the past. Along with its family, it approaches Paraśurāma's bow in the night and weakens the bowstring. The next morning, Paraśurāma returns to the ocean and releases the arrow; the bowstring falls apart and the arrow manages to go only twenty *krośa*s. The ocean retreats until that point and the region thus created comes to be known as Paraśurāmakṣetra, i.e., Konkan. Furthermore, Paraśurāma creates fourteen Brahmans out of corpses and establishes them in the region. The Brahmans created in this way are said to be "inclined towards the path of *yoga*, endowed with *brahmacarya* (celibacy) to obtain liberation" (2. 16, 17). The author adds that this account occurs at length in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*; having read it well, he has presented only a gist of the story here.[39]

The above story of Paraśurāma and the ocean appears with similar details at various places in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. The episode of the termite occurs in the sixth chapter of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* titled *Pṛthvidānam* (describing the creation of Rāmakṣetra and Paraśurāma's curse on the Chitpavans). The two accounts confirm that by the time of the composition of the *Latikā* the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* had established its status as an authentic source for the history of the Konkan region and the Brahmans therein.

If the author was well-acquainted with the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and revered it as his scriptural authority, were the histories of the Brahman communities' in the two texts

[39] *etat sarvam sahyakhaṇḍe savistāram pracoditam| tat sarvam ca samālokya tātparyam kiñcid ucyate||* (1.2.18)

compatible or otherwise similar? To answer this question let us review the description of the Karhada, Chitpavan, and Sarasvat Brahmans in the *Latikā*. After the fifth chapter, the colophon mentions that the text will describe various Brahman castes in the Western region of Maharashtra. The description begins with an account of the Karhada Brahmans.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE KARHADAS

> "In a region called Paraśurāmakṣetra, there was a place called Nandipura. Brahmans in that place were devoted to the performance of rituals enjoined in the Śruti and Smṛti. They were endowed with the knowledge of the Veda and its auxiliaries while simultaneously immersed in the Vedic rituals. They were gifted with servants, children and wives, as well as with wealth and food. In this region of the Brahmans, there was an evil officer who owned several camels. He hated Brahmans, he was sinful, arrogant, and a great deceiver. Heartless as he was, he spoiled several Brahman women by committing adultery and created many children. Those who had become defiled by coming in contact with him approached other Brahmans in the region. The wise Brahmans came to know that the degraded Brahmans were subjugated by the evil officer. The desecrated ones underwent a penance according to established injunctions. They were told that they would belong to a different caste by the name Karhāḍa, and those who remained fallen amongst them would be known as Padyas.[40] No inter-dining would take place between the Karhadas and the Padyas. However, they all would be always affiliated to one Veda: the Ṛgveda along with its auxiliaries, sub-auxiliaries, and sūtra. They were also told that the Padyas should also adhere to the Ṛgveda.
>
> "A cross-breed of donkey and camel is khara-uṣṭram; the one who maintains it is called uṣṭrapa. Those who are born from the bones of the animal are known as Karhāḍaka. They are spoken to be of two kinds: Padyas and Karhāḍakas. Those who were born from contact with the animal were called Karhāḍas, while those who were born from the union of the evil officer with the Brahman women are remembered as Padyas. All of them were sanctified after they performed a despicable penance by appeasing the Goddess Durgā, who bestowed a boon upon them that 'those in your caste who would kill Brahmans to please me would be

[40] The Padyas form a sub-caste within the Karhada Brahmans. They are found most commonly in the South Konkan and Goa.

> bestowed with wealth, progeny, and superiority among all Brahmans.' In śalivāhana śaka 915 Karhāḍakas became entitled to perform Ṣaṭkarma (the six actions). Thus ends the sixth question regarding the origin of Karhāḍas in Jātiviveka section of the Śatapraśnakalpalatā by Mādhava (1.6.1-15)."

If we compare the above account with that in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* we notice that certain elements are dissimilar in the two texts. Most noticeably the *Latikā* locates the region of Karhadas in Paraśurāmaksetra or Konkan; this is in opposition to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*'s placement of their origins in the inauspicious region *Kārāṣṭra* in the inland Desh area. Perhaps when the *Latikā* was composed a large number of Karhadas had settled in Konkan; at the time of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* their home was identified with Karahāṭaka (Karhad) in the inland Desh region. Similarly, the episode of the evil officer, his defilement of Karhada women, and the Karhadas approaching the sages and undergoing a penance are all absent in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa.* Moreover, the text emphasizes the distinction between Karhadas and Padyas and prohibits the two communities from inter-dining. In the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* the Padyas are said to be a sub-caste of the Karhadas; yet they are said to be worthy of banishment from all rituals just like the Karhadas.

Both texts, however, also agree with each other with regard to a few key motifs. Firstly, both texts associate the ancestry of Karhada Brahmans with donkey-bones and thereby attempt to explain the caste-designation Karhada. Let us recall here that the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* traces the origin of this community to a mixture of semen and donkey-bones. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, this etymology is concocted by splitting

the word Karhāḍa into *kara* (or *khara*) and *hāḍa* (bone in Marathi). Secondly, the motif of the goddess's boon (which promises prosperity and success to the Karhadas if they sacrifice a Brahman to her) is also common to the two texts. Clearly, authors of both texts seem to be unfavorably disposed towards Karhadas and therefore depict the community with varying degrees of abhorrence. While the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* describes the community as absolutely ignoble and sinful, the *Latikā* depicts them as originally prototypical Brahmans: once-engaged in the prescribed rituals and endowed with the knowledge of the Vedas, they later became a separate caste due to impurity. Such differences notwithstanding, the *Latikā* clearly emulates the themes in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* -- region, designation, and patron-deity -- that the latter considers to constitute the core of community identity.

If the depiction of the Karhadas in the Satara manuscript implies the negative attitude of the author towards them through his borrowing from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, the manuscript used by Kanvinde and Gunjikar tells a different story. The account of the Karhadas in that manuscript reveals that a different version of the story was also in circulation. Although this alternative version follows the first version almost verbatim, it significantly alters certain verses, lines, and – most significantly – key words in order to convey a positive image of the community. Thus, the noble Brahmans are said to "innocently" come in contact with a Brahman (not the evil officer), who is sinful, shameless, and cunning like the officer in the first version. When the sinful Brahman dies, these Brahmans approach sages who confer upon them a distinct caste name

Karahāṭa as these Brahmans went to a holy region named Karahāṭaka, on the banks of the river Kṛṣṇā, to be purified. Those among the Karahāṭakas who remained defiled came to be known as Padyas; although both communities adhered to the *Ṛgveda*, they were not to inter-dine with each other. The second version completely omits the usage of the words Karahāḍa or Karhāḍe as well as their etymology from donkey or camel bones. Instead, it replaces these lines by those that associate the origin and history of the community with the holy region of Karahāṭaka situated in inland Desh.

The most radical point of departure, however, appears in the motif of the goddess's boon. In order to purify themselves the Karahāṭakas are said to have performed a "great" penance by pleasing the goddess through worship (as opposed to the "despicable" penance in the first version). The pleased goddess grants the Brahmans a boon that "those who *worship* Brahmans in order to please me will attain prosperity and success" (according to the first version, the goddess bestows this boon on whomever *kills* a Brahman for her).[41] Such contrasts between the two versions indicate an inherent tension in the manuscript tradition of the *Latikā*: the author of one version was aware of the existence of the other and attempted to respond to it according to his attitude towards the Karhadas. The author of the Gunjikar edition was clearly biased in favor of the Karhada Brahmans. In fact, on the basis of the description of Karhadas in the manuscript

[41] Satara edition:*yuṣmad jñātiṣu mattuṣṭyai brāhmaṇān ghnanti sarvadā|sampatsantatisaṃyuktā vipreṣv ekatvam āpnuyuḥ||* (1.6.14).
Gunjikar edition: *yuṣmad jñātiṣu mattuṣṭyai brāhmaṇān pūjayanti ye| santatsampattisaṃyuktā śreṣṭhatvam prāpnuvanti te||* (Gunjikar 1884: 155).

that he consulted, Gunjikar believed that the author, Mādhava, was certainly a Karhada Brahman (Gunjikar 1884: 156).

What does the second version of the Karhadas' story signify for the authority of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*? Does it reinforce the authority of the Purāṇa or challenge it? The answer is not a simple one. On one level the text seems to challenge the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* by: a) identifying the region of the community as the holy Karahāṭaka, over the inauspicious Kārāṣtra region in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*; b) by omitting the reference to the murder of Brahmans and replacing it with the worship of Brahmans; and c) by presenting the patron-goddess Durgā as an auspicious deity, as opposed to evil Matṛikā of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa.* On another level, however, *because* it resorts to the same strategies and motifs as those in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* – such as explaining the caste designation through etymology, highlighting the regional affiliation, asserting a connection with a regional deity influencing the moral conduct, it obliquely confirms that the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* had already made these criteria normative in ascertaining the credentials of Brahmans. On the basis of the same criteria, the history of the Karhadas could be explained as either noble or ignoble. Thus, at one level of its discourse the narrative attempts to challenge the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*; but by ultimately deriving its discourse from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* it achieves exactly the opposite. The author of the first version, however, shares his view of the Karhadas with the author of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and thus draws heavily from it, thereby acknowledging its authority in the matter. In either case, both versions imply that

the "history" of the Karhadas in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* had become normative for those who wished to undermine the community, as well as those who were keen to bolster it.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE CHITPAVANS

The account of Chitpavans (1. 7. 1-20) in the *Latikā* follows immediately after that of the Karhadas. Unlike the differing versions of the Karhadas' history, the account on Chitpavans in both *Latikā* manuscripts is almost identical. It starts by narrating a tale of fourteen families of Brahmans who lived to the west of the Sahyadris along with their children and grandchildren. As ideal Brahmans they are said to be well-endowed with the knowledge of the Veda and its auxiliary, regularly performing the Agnihotra and other types of sacrifices, bestowing knowledge upon their disciples, and donating food. It further says that due to misfortune they were carried away by barbaric foreigners *(mleccha barbara*) staying in the ocean. After many years, children and grandchildren were born to them; they married amongst themselves without the proper rituals. They all became corrupt due to their contact with the island-dwelling *mleccha*s. After several years had passed, Paraśurāma was born; he was a Brahman, versed in *dharma*, wise, pious, and expert in all Śāstras and the Veda. Knowing him to be a benefactor of all people, the Brahmans sought refuge in him. He gave them a *prayaścitta* (penance) as well as sixty surnames and fourteen *gotra*s. Paraśurāma established two distinct groups among them, one devoted to the *śākala* branch of the Veda and the other devoted to the *taittirīya* branch of the Veda. As he purified the mind (*citta*) of the Brahmans they came to be known as Chitpavans. Despite their sanctification by Paraśurāma, the Chitpavans

practiced prohibited actions, were eagerly engaged in eating fish, and also indulged in selling their daughters, due to a lack of control over their organs.

At this point the story briefly refers to a legend regarding the Chitpavans in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* in which Paraśurāma created fourteen Brahmans from corpses; these Brahmans were said to be sages from the ancient past who adhered to celibacy for several years in order to attain the path to liberation. Later these same Brahmans reappeared in the Kali Age with fourteen *gotra*s and sixty surnames. (Recall that a similar account appears in a *Latikā* chapter regarding the creation of Konkan by Paraśurāma. The story, however, does not identify the Brahmans as Chitpavans.) The author of the *Latikā* dismisses this story as an apocryphal account "which was narrated only to deceive people in the world." (It seems that he agrees with the corpse-motif, but challenges the part where the Chitpavans are said to be celibate sages from the previous age.)

The author also explains how various divisions or sub-castes among the Chitpavans were formed: those who tended birds of a melodious voice (*kalabhāṣita*) were called Karkara. Similarly, there was another group called Kilavanta, who were "well-known to be extremely censurable." Yet another division called Sapravaras was born when members of the same *gotra* married one another. The account concludes with the statement that the Chitpavans became pure in *śaka* 410. After narrating the account of Chitpavans' origin, the next two chapters enumerate the family names (*upanāma*) of Chitpavans based on their *gotra*s and *miśragotra*s (combination of two or more *gotras*) believed to be given to the community by Paraśurāma (1.8.1-19 and 1.9. 1- 13). The

author says that the lists of surnames are for the wise to regulate the dining and marrying practices among the Chitpavans. Thus, for instance, the five family names Citale, Phadake, Maune, Vancole, and Bhalabhoka belong to the Atri *gotra*; Kunte, Bhagavata, and Pendase are affiliated with the Jāmadagni *gotra*, and so on.

Similar to the account of the Karhadas, the narrative of Chitpavans' origin reiterates various motifs in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa.* It subscribes to the etymology of the name Chitpavan as the one whose hearts are purified by Paraśurāma. The negative traits identified with the community are similar to those attributed to Paraśurāma's curse described in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. In particular, the adjective "those who sell their daughters" is clearly based on a similar description as "those who subsist on their daughters' price" in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa.* Furthermore, the reference to the fourteen *gotra*s and sixty families of the community is clearly borrowed from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa.*

Curiously, however, the narrative expressly denies the veracity of the account in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* that seeks to attribute a noble ancestry to the Chitpavans; according to this account celibate Brahmans were reborn as Chitpavans in the Kali Age. By describing such legends as false, baseless, and intended to deceive people, the *Latikā* not only denies the high origin of the Chitpavans, but also seeks to privilege its own authenticity and reliability with regard to the history of Chitpavans. In other words, only those motifs in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍ*a that comply with the viewpoint of the author are accepted, while those that do not are rejected. More interestingly, the motif of celibate-

sages is absent in the existing version of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. This implies that the author had access to another version of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* in which the motif of the celibate-sages was included, in order to attribute high ancestry to the Chitpavans. In other words, attempts to subvert the embarrassing "history" of the Chitpavans in one version of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* by inscribing an alternative account in other versions were already underway during this time. However, such attempts were met with a challenge from the author of the *Latikā* and others who sought to undermine the caste-status of the Chitpavans.

In addition to the familiar themes, the story also introduces certain new elements such as the carrying away of the Chitpavans by the ocean-faring *mleccha*s and their proliferation through union with the degraded foreigners. The association of the community with "foreign barbarians" seems to be inspired from the real-life physical characteristics of the Chitpavans, especially their fair color, light eyes, lean physique, and straight nose, which were observed to be strikingly distinct from the features of other indigenous communities.[42] Furthermore, while insinuating the lowly and impure ancestry of the community, the episode of the *mlecchas* also reiterates a pattern which is also noticeable in the description of the Karhada Brahmans: the originally pure Brahmans are desecrated through contact with a supposedly impure element such as the *mleccha*s; only

[42] Gunjikar noted that Chitpavans were extremely fair, and had light-eyes – features that were not seen among other Brahman communities (Gunjikar 1884: 157).

after they undergo a penance ordered by a sage or other pure Brahmans do they emerge with the status of a distinct community.

What was presented mythically in the text was proposed also as a theory by various Brahman historians in the nineteenth century who conjectured that the ancestors of the community were foreigners who came to India from Africa or, more specifically, from Egypt.[43] These scholars also argued that a region near Egypt was named Barbara and people in that region possessed physical attributes similar to the Chitpavans. They conjectured that the inhabitants of the Barbara region had traveled to the Western coast of India and mixed with the aborigines, leading to the emergence of the Chitpavan community (Gunjikar 1884: 147).[44]

THE SARASVAT STORY

The pattern noted in the history of Karhada and Chitpavan Brahmans recurs in the account of Sarasvat Brahmans as well. Both manuscripts offer an identical account as follows: the quintessential Brahmans living in the Gauḍa country are said to be devotees of Śrutis and Smṛtis, performers of sacrifice, and constantly busy in performing the *ṣaṭkarma* (performing sacrifice for oneself and for others, learning and teaching the Veda, and giving and accepting alms). Soon an occasion for their defilement arises during a terrible famine in the region: the lack of rain causes several people to die or migrate to

[43] This theory was proposed by the Chitpavan scholar Raosaheb Vishvanath Mandlik and supported by Gunjikar (Gunjikar 1884: 148).

[44] Similarly, a recent study of the Chitpavan gene-pool indicates the presence of various Central Asian and European traces in the maternal genes of the Chitpavans, among other indigenous traces (Kivisild et al. 2003 and Gaikwad et al. 2005).

other regions. Due to the scarcity of food the Brahmans resort to eating fish. After twelve years of drought it rains heavily in the thirteenth year and prosperity is restored with the availability of plentiful food and grain. However, people begin to cast aspersions on these Brahmans because they had consumed fish.

Like the Karhadas and the Chitpavans, the remorseful Brahmans are purified when they approach noble sages, who give them a penance for purification, and name them as a distinct caste called Śaṇavī (a variant of Śeṇavī). The sages bestow upon these Brahmans the right to perform three actions: performing sacrifices, learning the Veda, and giving ritual gifts. The sages further ask the Brahmans to perform rituals such as the daily ablutions and the five sacrifices, but to avoid three actions – teaching the Vedas, officiating at sacrifices, and accepting alms – "as they would avoid accepting a woman without proper marital rituals." At this point the text defines the caste-designation Śaṇavī as those who catch fish by drawing it up by *śaṇasūtra* (a net made of hemp). The chapter concludes by explaining why, unlike in the case of the Chitpavans and the Karhadas, it is unable to mention the exact time when this community became pure: the Purāṇa on which the present account was based is very old and the Smṛtis do not provide the exact time of the incident. But as the story is well known in the tradition, it is certainly true, asserts the *Latikā* author (1.17. 1-17).

In the narratives composed after the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa,* the consumption of meat seems to have become the most defining characteristic of the Sarasvats in the eyes of other Brahman groups. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* refers to the controversial practice as a

deśadoṣa of the Trihotra region (which is acceptable in that region); it also mentions the twelve-year drought which forces the Sarasvats to consume fish in order to protect the Veda and expresses a sympathetic view of the practice. The history of Saravats in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, however, also deals with the establishment of the community by Paraśurāma and the Sarasvats' connection with the regional deities and *tīrtha*s. The *Latikā*, however, focuses exclusively on the non-vegetarian diet of the Sarasvat; it weaves around the threadbare story of the drought in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* the familiar story of how pure Brahmans turn into a fallen caste through sin.

This selectivity is apparent in the choice of the caste-designation as well: repeatedly the narrative refers to the community as Śaṇavī*,* and contrives the etymology of the term as "those who draw fish from *śaṇasūtra*, a net of hemp." The caste designation thus encapsulates and symbolizes the "history" of the Sarasvats when they transgressed Brahmanical norms of vegetarianism and became a "fallen" caste. The caste name Sarasvat or Trihotra Brahman (from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*), which underscores the affiliation of Sarasvats with sacred *tirthas*, finds no mention in the *Latikā*. The text thus winnows from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* the story of the drought and uses etymology as a tool to construct a historical account of the Sarasvats' inferior status as *trikarmī* Brahmans. Similarly, the account replaces Paraśurāma, benevolent patron of the Sarasvats, with the anonymous sages, who penalize the Sarasvats by revoking their right to three important functions. Apart from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* the text seeks to base its account on authoritative sources such as the Smṛtis, the behavior of the *śiṣṭa*s (the learned), as well

as the popular oral tradition. These sources may not attribute a date to the origin of the Sarasvats; yet – for the author – they are reliable as they lend veracity to his account. It is important to note here that the two motifs of the consumption of meat by the Sarasvats during drought and their loss of three Brahmanical privileges are major motifs in other narratives, as we see in the next chapter. In section II we will also see the how the *Latikā* was called upon in the disputes between the Sarasvats and non-Sarasvats in the colonial period, and how these two motifs were repeatedly highlighted in those disputes.

Before I conclude, let me discuss the designation Śeṇavī or Śaṇavī, the variant that the *Latikā* uses to refer to the Sarasvats. As I mentioned above, the *Latikā* avoids the name Sarasvat, focusing instead on the name Śaṇavī and offers a derogatory etymology of that name. The *Latikā* is not the only narrative that uses this name to the detriment of the Sarasvats. As we see later, the name Śeṇavī and its variants appear as common motifs in other anti-Sarasvat narratives as well. A rather unusual name, Śeṇavī was subjected to multiple, often denigrating, interpretations in the discourse aimed against the Sarasvats. Valavalikar, a prominent Sarasvat scholar from the first half of the twentieth century, offers a detailed exposition of the name Śeṇavī as a rebuttal. Valavalikar presents a broad range of historical documents to argue that the term (along with its variants such as Seṇāvai, Seṇavai, Seṇai, Śaṇai, Śaṇai, Śaṇavai, Śeṇavai, Seṇavāi) was an honorific title among the Sarasvats, not their caste-name as others erroneously believed (1945: 141). The range of historical documents he cites – inscriptions, land records, Portuguese official documents, travelogues, memoirs – makes his explanation quite compelling. For

instance, he cited various inscriptions from the eleventh through the fifteenth century from Goa that record gifts given to Brahmans in the region. These inscriptions mention variants of the term Śeṇavī as honorific suffixes to the names of Brahmans in the region, indicating that the term was in use in this sense at least since the eleventh century (Valavalikar 1945: 141-142). Various Portuguese records from the sixteenth century, land records in Goa, and travelogues of foreign visitors mentioned Śaṇai Brahmans as elite citizens, royal envoys, and diplomats. For instance, the famous Italian traveler Pietro Della mentioned a certain Vitula Sinai (Vitthala Śaṇai), who was an ambassador for the Nayaka kings of Ikkeri to the Portuguese. A Portuguese Jesuit priest living in Goa stated in his treatise titled *Oriente Conquistado a Jesu Christo* that Śaṇai was an honorific title applied to men of letters and eminent teachers, in particular those from the region of Kutthali in Goa (Valavalikar 1945: 149). Thomas Stephen, yet another priest from Goa, also defined the word Sennoi as teacher in his work on Konkani language grammar. The *Pustaka Mestaka*, a Marathi work from the late seventeenth century, defined Śaṇavaī as designated clerks or scribes (Valavalikar 1945: 151). Here we may also recall that the *brahmasabhā* of Satara ascribed the explanation of the name Seṇavāi to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*: Sarasvats who follow the occupation of clerks are to be known as Pant or Seṇavāi. In short, the term Śeṇavī and its variants were honorific appellations applied to the elite Sarasvat literati pursuing teaching, scribal, and diplomatic duties.

While the name Śeṇavī became a subject of ridicule in the anti-Sarasvat discourse that we will be seeing subsequently, it will be worthwhile to see how Sarasvat scholars

explained this term. Valavalikar notes the etymologies that various Sarasvat scholars offered: Gunjikar (1884) suggested that Śeṇavī derived from *śarman ārya* (*śarman* = honorific appellation of Brahmans) > *śaṇvāya* > *śeṇavaī* >*śeṇavī;* Alternatively, *śarman ārya* > *śarmārya* >*śanavaī* > *śeṇavaī* > *śeṇavī.* Other scholars derived the term from *śāṇṇavī*, itself a derivation from the Marathi word *śāhāṇṇava* denoting number ninety six. These scholars argued that the Śeṇavīs earned this title as they were the presiding officers of ninety-six villages in Goa. Some derived it from the Kannada term *śānabhoga* or *śānabhāva*, the hereditary office of the village accountant and record-keeper (Valavalikar 1945: 152). A prominent Sarasvat researcher Rao Bhahadur Shripad Talmaki derived it from the Konkani word *śāṇo* (wise), implying the intellectual profession of the Śeṇavīs. Sir R.G. Bhandarkar, a prominent Sanskrit scholar, surmised that Śeṇavī originated in the Prakrit word *śeṇāvaī* from the Sanskrit *senāpati* (commander) (Valavalikar 1945: 153).

CONCLUSION

What do the "histories" of the Karhada, Chitpavan, and Sarasvat Brahmans indicate regarding the attitude of the author of the *Latikā* towards these communities? Unlike the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* which seemed to be favorably inclined towards the Sarasvats and the Deshasthas, curiously, the Satara version of the *Latikā* is favorable to none and negative towards all Brahman castes. If we are to seek the caste of the author on the basis of this version alone, we can assume that he was not a Chitpavan, Karhada, or Sarasvat. On the contrary, on the basis of the positive depiction of the Karhadas in the other

manuscript tradition of the text (Gunjikar edition), one may argue for the authorship of a Karhada Brahman. Furthermore, we may even conjecture that the author could have been a Deshastha Brahman, as the history of Deshastha Brahmans is conspicuously and curiously absent in the *Latikā*. Similarly notable is the greater emphasis placed on the history of theologian Madhva whose spiritual lineage the Deshasthas followed. However, such scant evidence is insufficient to draw any definitive conclusion in this regard.

Whatever the caste of the *Latikā*'s author Mādhava, he consciously sets the historical accounts of the Brahman castes in a specific pattern, or what White terms as the "pre-generic plot structure;" this entails selection of specific motifs that are either invented anew or selectively culled from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. This pattern is suggestive of the way in which Brahman *castes* are conceptualized vis-à-vis the archetypal Brahman *varṇa*. Thus, the histories of all three Brahman communities begin by referring to the ancestors of these communities who were pure and archetypal Brahmans: they are said to be constantly engaged in the rituals and sacrifices enjoined by the Veda and the Smṛtis, endowed with the knowledge of the Veda and its auxiliaries, protecting *agnihotra* fire, imparting knowledge to their disciples, and (as mentioned in case of Sarasvats) engaged in the typical *ṣaṭkarma*. The ideal Brahmans are said to undergo a loss of purity due to contact with immoral and impure person/s, or from practicing a forbidden action. Thus, the Karhadas are defiled by coming in contact with an immoral officer, the Chitpavans by uniting with the barbarian *mlecchas*, and the Sarasvats by consuming meat and breaching the code for vegetarianism. They then approach noble sages who allow the corrupt

Brahmans to undergo a penance to wash away their sins and become pure. After performing the penance, the previously corrupt Brahmans assume a new caste status and a new caste-name, Karhada, Chitpāvan, or Śaṇavī. Thus, the text insinuates that these Brahman *jātis* are degraded off-shoots of the ideal Brahman *varṇa* that came into being after the Brahmans committed a sin and performed a penance to wash it away.

As mentioned in the introduction, any "historical" narrative seeks to attune itself to the epistemological and literary conventions that are acceptable to its audience. In the case of the *Latikā*, the intended audience constituted the authorities in royal courts and the orthodox authorities in monasteries and elsewhere; they were arbiters in caste disputes among Brahmans, and consulted scriptures to ascertain the history of the contending communities. (Let us here recall the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* was brought into the court of Shahu from the monastery in Shringeri to decide whether Sarasvats were *ṣaṭkarmī* Brahmans.) Thus, unlike the Marathi *povāḍa*s (heroic songs) and *bakhar*s (historical narratives of wars and kings) that vividly describe heroic episodes meant to inspire the martial Maratha elite and commoner alike, the *Latikā* presents itself in a way that – besides articulating the identity of the Brahmans – also appeals to its orthodox audience: it chooses to express itself in Sanskrit, the esteemed language of erudition, scriptural authority, and authentic knowledge. It comes very close to presenting itself as a Śāstra, and claims to be based on the traditionally acknowledged sources of authority such as the Smṛtis and the *śiṣta*s.

However, the text seems to share an ambivalent relationship to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*: although it reiterates themes and topoi from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, or even expressly acknowledges the latter as its source, it also rejects themes that would undermine the purpose of the text. Yet, both in its acceptance and defiance of it, the text underscores the normative discourse of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* regarding the "history" of the Brahman communities. However, while it adheres to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, it successfully retains its own character as an authoritative compendium of the history of the Brahman castes; this would explain why the Brahman scholars repeatedly invoked the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā* later in the colonial setting.

Chapter 3: Brahmans in Theory and Brahmans in Practice: The *Śyenavijātidharmanirṇaya* and the Identity of Karhadas and Sarasvats

To begin, let us review in detail the social setting in which the origin myths of castes such as those in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā* were presented. Earlier I noted that erudite *paṇḍits* of repute from local religious centers in Maharashtra as well as those from centers of traditional learning such as Banaras consulted the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* as an authoritative text to determine the caste status of the Sarasvats in the royal court of King Shahu. Similarly, caste-narratives were utilized to settle disputes regarding rank and privilege among various castes in the courts of local political heads not just in Maharashtra but also elsewhere in pre-British Indian society (Das 1968: 155).

Although the local overlord was the final arbiter in a number of caste disputes, meting out justice was certainly not his prerogative alone. As Sumit Guha points out, besides the Chatrapatis and the Peshvas, the dominion of justice in pre-British Maharashtra was shared by various other bodies such as families, guilds, village communities, caste headmen, and experts on the matters of dharma (Guha 1995: 101-126). With regard to the Brahman communities in Maharashtra, it was – in addition to the Peshvas – the *maṭha*s of the Śaṅkarācārya at Sankeshvar, Karvir (Kolhapur), and Shringeri that adjudicated the conflicts arising due to the transgression of caste-restrictions and rank among native Brahman castes. They also provided authoritative letters of order or certificates (*ājñāpatras*) regarding matters such as the eligibility of one

caste to inter-dine with other Brahman castes.[45] The Sarasvats were under the jurisdiction of their own *maṭha*s at Gokarna, Kavalem, and Partagali in Goa (Gunjikar: 1884: 23; Tucker 1976: 331). Additionally, the learned Brahmans at Banaras were also called upon to support the caste credentials of the Brahman communities in question.[46]

The accounts of caste-origin in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Śatapraṣnakalpalatikā* were written with the orthodox religious authorities (the Śaṅkarācārya, the *paṇḍits* of Banaras) and political authorities (such as the Chattrapatis and Peshvas) in mind; these groups often worked in conjunction with one another. The extent to which such accounts succeeded in appearing authentic to their orthodox audiences was contingent upon how well they conformed to the Brahmanical textual tradition – both discursively and formally. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* had demonstrated that an "authentic" text such as itself had a life beyond the page in royal courts and in the assembly of the learned, where it would be invoked to adjudicate the status of Brahmans in practice. It had thus become a model for later authors who sought to establish the

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[45] The intervention of the Śaṅkarācārya continued till the early twentieth century. A dispute between Chitpavans and a lesser known Brahman named Palashe was taken to the Śaṅkarācārya at Shringeri in 1904. In 1910 he presided over a debate regarding the eligibility of Rāṇāvat Brahmans to interdine with Brahmans of other castes (Divekar 1985: 47- 51).

[46] A letter in Sanskrit claiming to be written in 1700 and signed by as many as thirty Brahmans of Banaras declares its verdict regarding a request of a Sarasvat Brahman named Vitthal seeking permission to undertake *sannyāsa*. After ascertaining that the Brahman belongs to the *pañcagauḍa* category of Brahmans, the letter declares him to be eligible for all the *saṃskāra*s (rites of passage), including *sannyāsa*. The letter also addresses those who criticize the Sarasvats on account of their custom of eating fish and deny that the Sarasvats are Brahmans. According to it, the custom agrees with the country of residence of the community and is therefore not against their caste-status (Gunjikar 1884: 22-24). The *paṇḍit*s at Banaras often shared with the *maṭha*s a relationship based on mutual validation of spiritual and religious competence. A letter addressed to the Sarasvat *maṭha* at Gokarna by fifteen *śāstrīs* of Banaras extols the *maṭha* chiefs for being well-versed in Śāstras and for sharing their knowledge with the *śāstrīs* at Banaras (Gunjikar 1884: 15).

validity of their own versions of myths regarding the origin of Brahman communities through a highly conventionalized Sanskritic form and idiom.

In addition to the use of accounts of the past as a means to define the status of various Brahmans, the later narratives had recourse to yet another powerful resource that could endow them with a seal of canonical authority and also appeal to their orthodox audience to a great degree: the Dharmaśāstras This expansive body of texts containing codifications of the moral and religious obligations and ideal conduct for all *varṇa*s and *āśrama*s had long been considered the chief authority on matters of *dharma* by Hindus in history and practice. Far from being a set of monolithic doctrines that were seldom used in reality, "the science of *dharma* was a highly complex and ingenious science in which the standards of the righteousness and orthodoxy of a given local individual or group could continually be adapted to the needs and desires of its subjects, and at the same time continue to be strictly enforced" (Lariviere 1989: 760). The exegetical tradition in the form of the digests (*nibandha*s) and commentaries on major and minor Dharmaśāstra texts ensured the adaptation and expansion of the Dharmaśāstras' discursive domain according to contemporary society's needs throughout medieval times. In the early modern period the Dharmaśāstras were also brought into the realm of judicial practice through regional systems of adjudication such as those of families, caste-guilds, village communities, and – naturally – kings to resolve social and ritual issues such as inheritance and caste-boundaries (Lariviere 1989: 760). Orthodox *paṇḍits* continued to invoke these scriptures in British India to decide upon various matters: the relative

strength of theoretical knowledge (*śāstra*) against conventional conduct (*ruḍhi*), the practice of *satī*, widow remarriage, conversion and purification, and so on (Telang 1886; Tucker 1976; Mani 1987).

Throughout the Maratha period, the use of the Dharmaśāstras was fairly extensive in legal proceedings (*vyavahāra*) held in villages, as well as in royal courts, to settle disputes regarding diverse matters such as inheritance, penance (*prāyaścitta*), distribution of property, purification or excommunication from a community, etc.[47] However, the flexible adaptation of the Dharmaśāstras was particularly relevant to the erudite *paṇḍit*-authors of the various narratives of caste origins in early modern Maharashtra. As scriptures whose authority was considered next only to the Vedas, the law-books of *dharma* were a rich repository of formulations to determine the credentials of the contesting Brahman groups in question. The archetypal Brahman and his supreme position in the society of four *varṇas* lay at the very heart of the Brahmanical worldview in these scriptures; an exhaustive range of prescriptions regarding the Brahman's social and ritual privileges, his distinguishing markers, conduct and duties under varying circumstances, and appropriate diet and modes of occupation could be applied to

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[47] From the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries of the Maratha regime, the *Mitākṣarā*, Vijñāneśvara's commentary on the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, was often consulted in judicial proceedings of *dharmasabhā*s and *brahmasabhās* or meetings of learned Brahmans, to decide upon matters of inheritance, property disputes, and conversion. In 1658, there was a dispute among brothers from a Brahman family of Vai on the ownership of all brothers over inherited land developed individually by one of the brothers. A *dharmasabhā* was convened to settle the matter, and after consulting the *Mitākṣarā*, the verdict was given that the land developed individually by a brother could not be shared by all the brothers. Similarly, in 1686 during Sambhaji's reign, a Brahman named Gangadhar Kulkarni was said to have been forcibly converted to Islam. Later, there was a dispute on whether he could be readmitted into his caste as a Hindu. After consulting the *Mitākṣarā*, the Brahman community decided to give him a *prāyaścitta* and accept him back into his caste (Bhat 1959: 144-145).

determine who was – or was not – a true Brahman, and who succeeded or failed to adhere to the normative Brahman-*dharma*. It was not just the actual observance of Brahman castes' conduct in everyday life, but also accounts of their past that could be tested and judged against the hermeneutical framework of the notion of Brahmanhood in the Dharmaśāstras. If myths of origin – such as those in the *Latikā* –presented an *"historical"* snapshot of the Brahmans' moral conduct in a specific time and place, the doctrines in the Dharmaśāstras offered a discourse *beyond* the limitations of time and place that could evaluate a Brahman's situation in any time and place. In other words: Dharmaśāstras could function complementarily in interpreting the narratives of history, or independently to rearticulate and reinforce the interdependence of the theory and practice of Brahmanhood.

THE *ŚYENAVIJĀTIDHARMANIRṆAYA*

The narrative entitled *Śyenavijātidharmanirṇaya* illustrates how the Dharmaśāstras were deployed in conjunction with an "historical" account to construct a narrative of identity and hierarchy between the Sarasvats and the Karhadas in pre-colonial coastal Maharashtra. The narrative claims to summarize a verdict issued by a council of king Shivaji's court-*paṇḍits* led by Gāgābhaṭṭa of Banaras, the celebrated priest, who officiated at Shivaji's coronation ceremony. As the title indicates, the verdict concerns the *dharma* (duties) of the Śyenavi (i.e., Śeṇavī or Sarasvat) *jāti* (caste). The manuscript found at a local Sanskrit school in Rajapur was published in 1913 by P.N.

Patvardhan in the annual report of Bharatiya Samshodhaka Mandala at Pune. The manuscript mentions the names of two scribes: Gopala Gurjara (said to be the son of Yajñesvara and a resident of Bilvapura) and Vinayaka (who made a copy in 1895, after a previous copy of the text was donated to the Sanskrit school in 1812). Thus, the available text is only a copy and not the original.

The narrative unfolds in the form of a letter addressed by a group of Brahmans from various places in Ratnagiri (such as Rajapur,[48] Sangameshvar, Lanje, and localities around the Krishna river) to a community of "Karahāṭaka" (Karhada) Brahmans. At the very outset these Brahmans from Ratnagiri pay a tribute to the Karhada Brahmans in highly ornate language replete with long compounds and various figures of speech such as *rupaka* (metaphor) and *atiśayokti* (hyperbole); this tribute describes them as ideal in conduct and great scholars of various Sāstras (such as the sage Jaimini's Mimāṃsā, Kapila's Sāṃkhya, Vyāsa's Vedānta, and various Smṛtis). They are also said to be experts in the Dharmaśāstras and the very embodiment of the conduct prescribed therein. The authors announce that they write this letter to the Karhadas as a response to a query from the latter: in the *krodhi saṃvatsara* (the thirty-eighth year of the sixty-year Bṛhaspati/Jupiter cycle) some Karhada Brahmans had asked the authors questions regarding the *dharma* and *acāra* (conduct) of a group of people named Koṅkaṇa and Śeṇavī who were residents of Rajapur town. (The narrative uses "Śyenavi" and "Śeṇavī"

[48] Rajapur was a well-known port in North Konkan for the export of goods from the Desh region to other countries. In the early seventeenth century, it was under the control of the Dutch, the French, and the British who had established various factories and inventories there (Athalye 1947: 14).

alternately.) Although the Karhadas were aware that Śyeṇavis had migrated to Rajapur "due to a calamity that had occurred in a certain place and time" (*deśakālaviplavena*), they were keen to know the precise nature of the *dharma* and *ācāra* of this obscure community. The authors assure the Karhada Brahmans that their response to the query is written with due consideration of the traditional (*purvaparamparāgata*) *ācāra* of the Śyenavis and therefore may serve as a guide on how to treat the Śyeṇavis residing in the Karhadas' region.

The authors' response begins by narrating an incident at Shivaji's court. Prior to this, seven lyrical stanzas offer a highly ornate *praśasti* (royal encomium) to Shivaji and his father Shahji. The *praśasti* uses familiar imagery to celebrate the ideal royal virtues of the two kings. Shahji is praised as an illustrious king born in the race of pure and noble kings: "a bright light in the form of fame, always in the heart of people, endowed with virtues." His son Shivaji is lauded as Yama in giving gifts to the benevolent and as king Pṛthu in tormenting his enemy's army. Shivaji's unparalleled valor, courage, and beauty are said to put even a lion, Bhima, and Kāma (the god of love) to shame. Moreover, just as his wealth is only for donating to others, his vow of heroism is only to protect his people, his speech only to utter truth, and his mind only to contemplate God. As the sovereign king (*cakravartin*) who caused the fall of the king of Delhi, Shivaji is described as being capable of causing the enemy to run to the dense forest merely by casting an angry look. While the salutation serves to cast Shivaji as an ideal Hindu king, its main

purpose is to highlight the superiority of the narrative itself: the text inscribes itself into the history of the great Maratha king in order to appeal to its audience.

Following the lyrical *praśasti*, the authors begin an account of a remarkable episode in Shivaji's court: when king Shivaji was ruling the kingdom, a group of people from the Sahyadri region came to visit him. These people are said to be dressed like Brahmans, well-known as Śyenavi," and described as following the regional agricultural practices.[49] As the king was unaware of their community, he asked his well-versed courtly scholars questions regarding their *dharma* and conduct. The assembly of these scholars comprised prominent *dharmādhikārin*s and *upādhyāya*s who were experts in the Veda and the Dharmaśāstras, followers of the path laid down in the Smṛtis, and capable of seeing the truth.[50] Thus – apart from Gāgābhaṭṭa – those who were present included: Raghunātha Dīkṣita, Kavindra Paramānanda,[51] Mahādeva Paṇdita, Prabhākar Upādhyāya, Śriraṅga Śāstri, Nṛsimha Śāstri, Viśvaṃbhara Bhaṭṭa, and several others. Some of these *paṇḍits* are said to be from the banks of the Krishna and the Godavari rivers, while others are termed *etaddeśīya*s or natives of the Maratha country. The text particularly mentions

[49] As noted earlier, although others described the Sarasvats as Śeṇavīs, among the Sarasvats themselves, the Śeṇavis were the elite Sarasvats who pursued professions such as teaching, writing, and accounting. Sarasvats such as Valavalikar argued that Śeṇavi was an honorific title. Cf. Conlon 1977: 22-23.

[50] The authors give definitions of the designations *dharmādhikārin* and *upādhyāya* by Manu and Yājñavalkya: a *dharmādhikārin* is the one who is expert in the Arthaśāstra and the Dharmaśāstra; he is an authority appointed by the king over seven matters, namely, sacrifices, vows, penance, astrology, Purāṇas, judging, and observing *dharma* in a given region. Similarly, an *upādhyāya* is defined as the one who masters the entire Veda or a section of it along with the auxiliary sciences and teaches the Veda to earn a livelihood (Patvardhan 1914: 295).

[51] Paramananda was Shivaji's court-poet who composed the famed biography of the king titled *Śivabhārata*.

*dharmādhikārin*s named Gurjara[52] (most likely the ancestor of Gopala Gurjara, the scribe of the manuscript) and Paṇḍuraṅga Upādhyāya: both are "of noble origins, truthful, expert in the Vedas and Vedāṅgas, and pleased the gods with their speech." Other members of the council are enumerated as follows: learned men from Rajapur named Raghunātha Upādhyāya, Keśava Upādhaya, Viśvanātha Upādhyaya, Viṭṭhala Upādhyāya, and a reputed *upadhyāya* and *dharmādhikārin* named Ananta Galavallikar from the Sangameshvar town of Ratnagiri. In order to answer the king's questions regarding the Śyeṇavis, all these *paṇḍits* consulted the Dharmaśāstra scriptures such as the Smṛtis of Manu and Yājñavalkya along with their commentaries, multifarious Upasmṛtis (smaller Smṛtis based on the main Smṛtis) by eighteen commentators, the eighteen great Purāṇas, various Saṃhitas, and Kathās. [53] Upon knowing the gist of all these texts, the *paṇḍits*' council reached a decision regarding the *dharma* of the Śyenavis and reported it to the king. Having narrated this incident, the authors from Ratnagiri describe the *paṇdits*' decision to the Karhada Brahmans from this point onward. Thus, there are two layers in the narrative. The outer layer is the letter by the authors from Ratnagiri to the Karhada Brahmans. Within this outer layer unfolds the inner layer of the elaborate verdict given

[52] As several traders from Gujarat migrated to Rajapur in the fourteenth century, their priests mixed with the native priests of the same *gotra* and thus new Brahman families came into existence. The Gurjara family, whose family name clearly indicates their connection with Gujarat, was a prominent Karhada family in Rajapur. The erudite men from this family had obtained the title Pādhye (short for *Upādhyāya* or erudite scholar). Interestingly, Athalye mentions the genealogy of the Gurjara family composed by Gopala Gurjara (1947: 14-15). This Gopala Gurjara seems to be the same person who scribed the *Nirṇaya* (Athalye 1947: 14-15).

[53] The texts consulted by the court-*paṇḍits* were as follows – commentaries of Hemādri, Mādhava, and Vijñāneśvara on Yājñavalkya; the *Ratnāvali*, the *Madanapārijāta*, the *Candrikā*, the *Kṛtyakalpataru*, the *Smṛtikaustubha*; Smṛtis by Bṛhaspati, Gautama, Yama, Aṅgirā, Pracetas, Śātātapa, Parāśara, Śaṅkha, and Atri, besides the *Manusmṛti*; the Dharmasūtras of Āpastamba and Baudhāyana; the eighteen Upasmṛtis include the works of Jābāli, Naciketas, Skanda, Laugākṣika, Asita, Vyāsa, Sanatkumāra, and Gobhila.

by the *paṇḍits* from Shivaji's court. In the following passages (from p. 10 to p. 16), I describe this inner layer of the *paṇḍits'* verdict.

The *paṇḍits'* verdict starts by citing a passage from the Dharmaśāstra that provides the grounds for determining the Śyenavis' *dharma* and elaborates on various topics related to the duties of a Brahman. The passage begins by describing the routine duties of Brahmans as follows: performing the *sandhyā* worship, studying, contemplating, and teaching the Veda; fostering his parents, teachers, wife, and the needy; performing *śrāddha* ceremonies, officiating sacrifices for the king, and thus earning his livelihood.[54] However, when a Brahman suffers from adversity (*āpad*), he is prescribed a different set of rules for his duties (*āpaddharma*). (The significance of this discussion on *āpaddharma* becomes apparent only later in light of a tale from the *Padmapurāṇa*.) On the basis of citations from the *Manusmṛti*, the text concludes that during times of calamity when a Brahman has no other means of subsistence, or when he is not able to carry out his own *dharma*, he is allowed to undertake the occupations of *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas*.[55] Thus, though he may sell goods or till the land, he must continue

[54] A Brahman's duties are said to be divided between three parts of the day. The text quotes the *Narasiṃhapurāṇa*, according to which in the morning after ablutions the Brahman must bathe, perform the *sandhya* worship, tend the household fire, and fetch flowers and sacred grass for worship; in the afternoon he must study, contemplate, and teach the Vedas; and in the remaining third part of the day he must attend to the *poṣyavarga* (people to be looked after). These include a Brahman's parents, teacher, wife, son, the needy, those who are dependent on him, guests, and unmarried sister. These are the people that must be maintained even at the cost of a hundred other deeds, according to Manu (Patvardhan 1914: 297).

[55]Manu 10.81 (Patvardhan 1914: 297). Even while following the profession of a Vaiśya, "He falls immediately if he sells meat, lac, and salt. If he sells milk, he becomes a Śudra after three days" (Manu 10.92).

The text cites the *Kālikapurāṅa* which authorizes the Brahman in calamity to practice agriculture, but lays out various regulations regarding the use of oxen, the time of tilling, offering a part to the king and the needy, etc. Similar regulations by Parāśara and Hārita are also quoted (Patvardhan 1914: 297).

to observe some prohibitions against selling certain goods, tilling the land at a time other than the first half of the day, using old oxen, and so on.

In addition to permissible modes of livelihood in times of calamity, the *paṇḍits*' decision contains Dharmaśāstra injunctions regarding the diet of a Brahman in calamitous situations: it cites various Smṛtis according to which the consumption of various kinds of meat by a Brahman under life-threatening circumstances is permissible. For instance: according to Śaṅkha's *Madanapārijāta*, a Brahman may eat five five-nailed animals, alligators, turtles, rabbits, and only specific kinds of fish such as Siṃhatuṇḍaka and Rohita.[56] *Madanapārijāta* also allows the consumption of meat when one's life is in danger, as well as in *śrāddha* when the meat is offered to the gods and the forefathers.[57] On the basis of various scriptures, the verdict asserts that eating meat in the absence of a calamity is tantamount to a grave sin for which the Brahman must undergo *prāyaścitta* (penance).[58] Then follows a long discourse regarding the types of food – including foods cooked by certain classes of people – to be avoided.[59]

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[56]*bhakṣyāḥ pañcanakhā medhyā godhā kacchapā śalyakāḥ| śaśasya matsyeṣu api hi siṃhatuṇḍakarohitāḥ||* (Patvardhan 1914: 298)

[57]*prāṇātyaye tathā śrāddhe mokṣitam dvijakāmyayā| devān pitṛn samabhyarca khādan māṃsam na duṣyati||* (Patvardhan 1914: 298).

[58] Thus, according to Yājñavalkya, after the Brahman survives by following the *āpaddharma,* he must subsequently purify himself and bring himself onto the correct path. Similarly, the *Madanapārijāta* also enjoins that the Brahman should purify himself by undergoing a penance, and then practice his own duties as a Brahman. However, if he continues to practice *āpaddharma* when there is no adversity, his family meets doom, according to Yama, Śātātapa, and Vyāsa. Similarly, the *Madanapārijāta* enjoins one to avoid cheating, consuming forbidden food (*abhakṣya*), taking another's wife, and practicing actions that go against the Śrutis and friendship. Manu, too, declares that those who consume forbidden foods when not suffering from a calamity become *abhojyannā* (those whose foods it is forbidden to consume) and thereby commit sin (Patvardhan, 1914: 298).

[59]The citations are drawn mainly from the *Manusmṛti* (4.205-209, 214), which forbids the Brahman from consuming food not offered in sacrifice, food offered by women and impotent people, food cooked by the

Following the discussion on diet, the gist of the *paṇḍits*' verdict presents a story from the last canto of the *Padmapuraṇa*. This *itihāsa purātana* (ancient history), as the verdict terms it, is narrated by Sage Nārada to king Ketumālin in order to prevent him from retiring to the forest to begin *vānaprasthya* (the third stage of life in which a householder abandons his worldly possessions and retires to the forest with his wife). Nārada says that there was a king named Sudhumna, a descendent of Vaivasvata Manu, who ruled the entire earth. He retired to the forest after entrusting his kingdom to his own sons. When the king died, his sons quarreled amongst themselves to win control over the kingdom. As a result of this strife, anarchy followed and the strong exploited and robbed the weak. As people of different *varṇa* mixed with one another (*varṇasaṃkara*), gods forsook the earth, withheld the rains, and a famine ensued.

The famine lasted for sixty years during which all beings perished and humans – especially Brahmans – became corrupt. Several Brahmans died of hunger and thirst; some relocated to the banks of the river Ganga and survived by eating vegetables; others took shelter around various lakes and rivers, surviving by drinking water or by eating fruits, lotus-stalks, wild rice, and grass to protect their *dharma*. Some Brahmans took shelter near the Godavari, Reva, Kalindi, Kaveri, and Sharayu rivers and protected their *dharma* by surviving on *brāhmī*, a well-known medicinal herb. Those who went to banks of the Krishna river sustained themselves on the juice of *durvā* (a type of sacred grass) and cow-milk; some Brahmans ate lotus seeds and *karahāṭa* (a particular herb or the

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drunken, angry, dancing girls, food abhorred by the wise, and so on. Similarly, it also prohibits food offered by those who consume meat or kill birds, animals, and fish and sell meat (Patvardhan 1924: 298).

fibrous root of lotus).[60] These Brahmans preserved their own lives; yet much more importantly, they persevered in their *brahmakarman* (the prescribed duties of a Brahman).

There were, however, other Brahmans who were unable to sustain themselves in this manner and resorted to eating animals. They consumed various kinds of animals: in particular, they lived off *śyena*s (hawks), chickens, and other forest-creatures. These Brahmans saved their lives but relinquished their *dharma*. Eventually, as the gods failed to obtain their sacrificial share, they approached Viṣṇu; he promised to make it rain if just and pious kings ruled the Earth. Accordingly, the gods came onto the Earth and crowned a good king to rule. Soon it rained: Earth was bountiful again.

The surviving Brahmans returned to their respective regions and expanded their families. However, the Brahmans who had become impure by consuming hawk-flesh (that is, the Śyenavi Brahmans) surrendered themselves to the pure Brahmans from the banks of the river Krishna who had protected their dharma by eating *karahāṭa* (that is, the Karahāṭaka/Karhada Brahmans). These Brahmans gathered together; out of sympathy, they granted the fallen Brahmans a right to perform three actions: *yajana* (performing sacrifice), *adhyayana* (learning the Veda), and *dāna* (giving donations).[61] They also allowed the Śyenavis to practice professions such as trading, writing, agriculture, and

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[60] The scientific name of *karahāṭa* is Vangueria Spinoza.

[61] A Brahman in entitled to six actions or *ṣaṭkarma*, namely, *yajana* (hosting a sacrifice), *yājana* (officiating at a sacrifice for others), *adhyayana* (learning the Veda), *adhyāpana* (teaching the Veda), *dāna* (giving donations), and *pratigraha* (accepting donations). Of these six, *yajana*, *adhyayana*, and *dāna* can be practiced by *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas* as well, whereas the remaining three are prerogatives of Brahmans alone.

royal service. The pure Brahmans also declared that they themselves would act as priests in the matters of sacrifice, teaching the Veda, etc., to the impure Śyenavis. Subsequently, the Śyenavis came to be named after the respective regions in which they earned their livelihood.[62] Those who stayed in Konkan during the time of famine continued to live there along with their priests. According to Nārada, the moral of the story is that a kingdom without its king meets its doom; he therefore requests the king not to abandon his kingdom.

On the basis of the story, the *paṇḍits*' verdict concludes that the Śyenavis had lost their Brahman status. Now in order to determine the Śyenavis' new caste status and *dharma*, it cites and interprets select formulations of the Dharmaśāstras. It refers to Manu's formulation that *dharma* is ultimately dependent on *ācāra* or conduct; this, in turn, is to be gleaned from the conduct of Brahmans from the Madhyadeśa, or alternatively, the Brahmāvarta or the Āryāvarta.[63] Citing texts by Yājñavalkya, Yama, and the *Madanapārijāta* mentioned earlier,[64] and noting that the Śyenavis had been engaged in *pūrvaparaṃparāgata ācāra* or traditional customary practices suitable for

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[62] This is a reference to the various sub-castes among the Saravats that were named after the regions of their origin. For instance, Kudaldeshkars are from Kudal, Rajapurkars from Rajapur, Bhalavalikars from Bhalavali, Bardeshkars from Bardesh, Sasashtikars from Sasashti, and so on.

[63] *dharmaś ca ācārāyattaḥ| tathā ca Manuḥ- ācāraḥ paramo dharmo vidvadbhiḥ parikīrtita iti||*
sa ca ācāraḥ madhyamadeśādiprasūtebhyo brāhmaṇebhyo vijñeyaḥ||
"As said by Manu, the divine region that lies between the rivers Sarasvatī and Drṣadvatī is known as the Brahmāvarta. The conduct that is traditionally prevalent in that region is good conduct. (Manu V.18) ; Similarly, the Madhyadeśa is also identified as the region that lies between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas (Manu 2.20); The region between the eastern and the western ocean where river Sarasvati disappeared is known by the wise to be the Āryāvarta, according to Manu 2.22 (Patvardhan 1914: 300-301)."

[64] "According to Yājñavalkya, a Brahman who traditionally practices the profession of a *Vaiśya* for five generations even when he is not in calamity is to be considered a *Vaiśya* from his sixth generation onwards. Similarly, Yama enjoins that those Brahman families, who practice agriculture or serve the king like *Vaiśyas* when not in adversity (*apād*), suffer disrepute (*akulatā*) (Patvardhan 1914: 300-301).

Vaiśyas, the verdict declares that the Śyenavis, in fact, belong to the class of *Vaiśyas* and are therefore eligible for the *dharma* and *saṃskāra*s prescribed for *Vaiśyas* and ineligible for those prescribed to Brahmans. Similarly, it also asserts that the Śyenavis should hire a priest from a Brahman caste to perform the *śrāddha* ritual. Furthermore, in accordance with the *Manusmṛti* and the regulation that eating meat is sinful for those South of the Vindhyas, the verdict denigrates the Śyenavis as *abhojyānnā* (people whose food it is forbidden to eat).[65]

After determining the *varṇa* status of the Śyenavis, the verdict further explains which *āśramas* (stages of life) are permissible to them. It accepts that Brahmans, *Kṣatriyas*, and *Vaiśyas* are allowed to be *brahmacārins* and *gṛhasthas* (celibate students and householders); being a *vānaprasthin* (hermit) was altogether forbidden for all *varṇa*s in the Kali Age. However, the question regarding whether the Śyenavis may take up the final stage of life – *sannyāsa* (renunciation) – elicits a complex argument from the *paṇḍits*. Their verdict presents two mutually opposite views in this regard. First, the *purvapakṣa* (view of the opponents): in addition to Brahmans, *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas* are also allowed to practice *sannyāsa*. The other view is the *siddhānta* (accepted tenet) of the *paṇḍit*s themselves: *sannyāsa* is permissible only to Brahmans. Both positions are argued by interpreting various Dharmaśāstra texts through *nyāyas* (maxims) from the Mīmāṃsā tradition. Thus, the opponents' view states that the Smṛtis of Aparārka, Jābāla, and others permit *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas* to accept *sannyāsa*; they prescribe the use of

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[65] "*ete abhojyānnā iti manunā abhojyānnaprakaraṇe niveśitatvāt ca| vindhyasya dakṣiṇe bhāge māṃsabhug iti pātityāt ca||* (Patvardhan 1914: 301)."

external markers of a *sannyāsin* (such as the griddle, staff, and deer-hide) exclusively to Brahmans.

The *siddhānta*, on the other hand, relies on the Vedic injunction that "Brahmans may become *sannyāsin*s (*brāhmaṇāḥ pravajanti*)" and argues that the word Brahman in this injunction applies only to the Brahman caste and not to *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas*. In order to answer the question of "how to interpret the injunction (cited earlier by the *pūrvapakṣa*) explicitly enjoining that even *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas* may undertake *sannyāsa*," the *siddhānta* argues that this reference is to Brahmans who resort to the occupations of *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas* during a calamity and continue to do so even after it has passed. (The implication here is that those who are *born* as *Kṣatriyas* or *Vaiśyas* are not allowed to take *sannyāsa*.) In order to prove this position, the *siddhānta* deploys various syllogisms from the Nyāya and the Mīmāṃsā tradition to explain the apparent contradiction among various scriptural rules and finally proves that members of the Brahman caste *alone* are eligible for *sannyāsa*. At this point the Brahman authors from Ratnagiri conclude their summary of the *paṇḍits*' decision; curiously, however, they do so without stating whether the Śyenavis are allowed to practice *sannyāsa*. The authors appeal to the Karhada Brahmans that the prescribed *dharma* of the Śyenavis is to be gleaned from the verdict summarized above, and the Śyenavis in their region must be treated accordingly.

Date and Authenticity of the *Nirṇaya*

Does the *Nirṇaya* indeed faithfully record a verdict issued by Shivaji's court *paṇḍits*? The editor-publisher of the text, P.N. Patwardhan, perhaps did not deem the authenticity and date of the text an issue worth investigating. He simply assumed it to be a copy of a verdict (*nirṇaya*) issued in the times of Shivaji. In 1945, a prominent Sarasvat scholar V.R. Valavalikar raised doubts over the authenticity of the text on various grounds. He argued that the references to the *krodhi saṃvatsara*, Shivaji, and Gāgābhaṭṭa were misleading, because this *saṃvatsara* appeared in 1664, which could not be reconciled with the reference to Gāgābhaṭṭa in the narrative. Gāgābhaṭṭa was not present in Maharashtra until 1673, one year prior to Shivaji's coronation. He cited prominent historian Rajvade's observation that Gāgābhaṭṭa came to Maharashtra in 1673 and returned to Banaras in the winter of 1674, after Shivaji's coronation. Based on this information he argued that the text's assertion of Gāgābhaṭṭa's presence in Shivaji's court in 1664 was grossly erroneous, giving away the fact that the story was fabricated. Similarly, he also rejected the narratives' claim that Shivaji was unaware of the Śeṇavī community, as, he asserted, Shivaji's incursions into South Konkan occurred frequently after 1659, and it was impossible that this great king was completely ignorant of the community that had a predominant presence in this region. He alleged that the authors of the text inscribed the figure of Shivaji into their false story only in order to make it appear credible (Valavalikar 1945: 159-160). Furthermore, he drew attention to the narrative *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*, which, composed in 1721, describes a very similar encounter

between Shivaji, Maharashtrian *paṇḍits*, and the Sarasvats. Based on a mention by the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*'s author that the Karhada Brahmans of Rajapur were his informants, he argued that the *Nirṇaya* was the work of these Karhadas who were contemporaries of the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* author. Thus, he concluded, the narrative was not composed in 1664 (Valavalikar 1945: 233-235).

Valavalikar's argument regarding the chronological incompatibility between references to the *krodhi saṃvasara* and Gāgābhaṭṭa's presence in Maharashtra needs further investigation. If Gāgābhaṭṭa was indeed absent from Maharashtra until 1673, then Valavalikar's contention regarding the *Nirṇaya'*s inauthentic date will be proven. However, his observation of the similarity between the *Koṅkaṇakhyāna* account and the *Nirṇaya* account is more significant. In the next chapter we will see that the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* indeed describes an astonishingly similar incident, but its conclusion of this incident is rather different than that in the *Nirṇaya*. This indicates that either of these two narratives might have been a source for the other, and that the *Nirṇaya* may have been composed either before or after the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna.* Again, without sufficient evidence, it is difficult to ascertain the exact date of the *Nirṇaya*.

Aside from the contention with its date, we cannot be sure whether it is indeed a summary of an official verdict given in Shivaji's court. Although the editor claims that it is a copy of a verdict given during Shivaji's times, such verdicts are in the form of *nirṇayapatras* issued by a royal court or by *brahmasabhas.* The text itself does not claim to be a *nirṇayapatra* or a copy of a *nirṇayapatra*; it simply claims to recount an actual

verdict given by Shivaji's court-*paṇḍits*. It is difficult to ascertain the veracity of this claim without confirmation from an independent source. The lack of precision in the details of the said account only adds to the ambiguity regarding the nature of the text. Furthermore, the text lacks formal aspects such as any official seal or signatures, which would have indicated that it is a true *nirṇayapatra* or a copy thereof. As a large portion of the *Nirṇaya* is devoted to the interpretation of various Dharmaśāstra passages and arguments presented in the *pūrvapakṣa-siddhānta* format, it appears more like a Dharmaśāstra Nibandha. [66]

INTERPRETING THE VERDICT IN THE *NIRṆAYA*

Clearly, the purpose of the verdict as presented by the authors from Ratnagiri is to project a hierarchy between the Karhadas and the Sarasvats on the basis of purity; this, in turn, is considered to be contingent on the criterion of their diet. The story of a famine (a motif that recurs in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*) serves to indicate the moral superiority of the Karhadas inasmuch as they are said to have protected their *dharma* even in a calamity by refusing to consume meat and subsisting on *karahāṭaka* alone. The word *karahāṭaka* also indicates this by deriving the caste-designation Karhada from *karahāṭaka*; the reported verdict of the *paṇḍits* subverts the previous derogatory etymologies of the term Karhada in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*

[66] Incidentally, several Nibandhas end with the word *nirṇaya*, as Patrick Olivelle pointed out in a personal communication.

(wherein it was derived from "donkey-bones"). Thus, unlike these two narratives, the present narrative attempts to construct a *positive* account of the noble past of the Karhadas. It is very likely that the authors of the narrative were themselves Karhada Brahmans who constructed this entire narrative about Shivaji's encounter with the Śeṇavis and the verdict of his court *paṇḍits*. These (presumably) Karhada authors were acutely aware of the embarrassing etymology of the term propagated in the prior narratives. In order to elevate the status of their caste and restore the prestige associated with their caste-designation, they changed the story of famine and introduced a new etymology of the name Karhada.

The same story and the same etymological means are used contrastingly to construct a *disparaging* account of the past of the Sarasvats on the basis of their diet. While the noble Brahmans from the bank of the river Krishna were able to protect their Brahmanical *dharma*, those who consumed *śyena* (hawk-flesh) deviated from the *dharma* and were therefore named Śyenavi. The verdict not only implies the degradation of the Sarasvats, but also makes the name Śyenavi synonymous with the inferior status of the Saravats in the past. The designation serves as a reminder of the fact that the "immoral" and "impure" action of the Sarasvats regarding their diet came at a cost: they lost the right to perform the three privileged Brahmanical actions, especially the right to perform priestly duties for their communities and others, were thereby relegated to the practice of non-priestly, non-religious mundane careers in agriculture, scribal duties, and royal services. The name is thus presented as inseparable from the inferior status of the

community and vice-versa. The *Padmapurāṇa* account cited earlier is similar to that in the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*: the name Śeṇavī is derived from *śaṇasūtra* (a net made of hemp that is used as a fishing implement). While the verdict reinforces the branding of the Sarasvats as the *trikarmī* Brahmans (Brahmans who are not allowed to perform three of the total six actions: officiating a sacrifice, teaching the Vedas, and accepting ritual gift), as found in the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*, it also replaces the anonymous sages in the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā* with the Karhada Brahmans from the *Padmapurāṇa* story as the authoritative body withholding the Śyeṇavi's right to perform the three actions and ordaining them to pursue non-priestly vocations. Moreover, the implicit logic in the narrative and the verdict it narrates is that just as the Karhada Brahmans from the story decide the fate of fallen Śyeṇavis in hoary antiquity, so too are the court-*paṇḍits* of Shivaji and the (presumably) Karhada authors of Ratnagiri entitled to adjudicate over the Śyenavis' status. The entire narrative containing the verdict is thus a replay of the story it narrates: the account of the famine that occurred in the past is used in the narrative to justify the decision of the *paṇḍits* and the (presumably) Karhada authors in the present. In other words, the story of famine and the two larger narratives in which it is embedded – the letter of (presumably) Karhada authors to their fellow caste-men and their account of the episode in Shivaji's court – both reveal a thematic similarity regarding the balance of power between the Karhadas and the Sarasvats.

Where the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā* define Brahman communities by means of "historical" accounts alone, the *Nirṇaya* takes a further step

and seeks to interpret the historical account in the *Padmapurāṇa* by contextualizing it within the hermeneutical framework of the Dharmaśāstras. The narrative deems as most significant two elements in the Sarasvats' history: their diet and their occupation. Regarding their diet, the narrative presents the Dharmaśāstra rules that allow for the consumption of only certain kinds of meat under specific circumstances (such as when a Brahman's life is in danger) and also presents the rules that denounce those who continue to consume meat when not faced with such conditions. Without stating it explicitly, the *Nirṇaya* does suggest that the Śyenavis consumed meat because their lives were at stake; yet they consumed the flesh of hawks, chickens, and other animals which were clearly proscribed in the scriptures. Alternately, it seems to suggest that they failed to restrain themselves whereas their Karhada counterparts succeeded in surviving without committing violence. In both cases, the Śyenavis are said to have failed to adhere to the ideal of vegetarianism prescribed in the Dharmaśātras and are thus designated *abhojyānnāḥ*.

With regard to the occupation of the Sarasvats, however, the Dharmaśāstras play a greater role than merely providing an interpretive framework to the *Padmapurāṇa* account. The *Padmapurāṇa* story mentions that the Sarasvats/Śyeṇavis engaged in non-religious, non-priestly activities such as farming, trading, writing, and royal service. The authors of the *Nirṇaya*, however, would not have been able to declare them to be *Vaiśyas* on the basis of this story alone. Doing this would have given rise to the objection that if the Sarasvats practiced these professions in the past, they should not be regarded as

Vaiśyas in the present. Therefore, as a rejoinder, they take recourse to the concept of *ācāra* in order to declare that if a Brahman's *ācāra* is akin to that of a *Vaiśya* for several generations in the absence of a calamity, he must be treated as a *Vaiśya*. The authors claim that even after the events described in the *Padmapurāṇa*, the Sarasvats continued to live like *Vaiśyas;* therefore, in accordance with their traditional *ācāra*, they must be treated as *Vaiśyas*. Thus, the notion of *ācāra* seems to succeed in providing substantial grounds for proving the *Vaiśya* status of the Sarasvats, whereas the story alone would have failed.

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF BRAHMANHOOD IN PRE-COLONIAL MAHARASHTRA

When the *Nirṇaya* resorts to the *Padmapurāṇa* and the Dharmaśāstras to define the identities of Karhadas and Sarasvats, it simultaneously tells us what the projected hallmarks of Brahmanhood were and how these were deployed to test the authenticity of Brahman castes in pre-colonial Maharashtra. The *Nirṇaya* implicitly highlights the centrality of the pursuit of non-secular, *vaidika* (sacred, priestly) *vṛtti* (mode of livelihood) which are prescribed *exclusively* for the priestly class: *yājana* (officiating at others' sacrifices), *adhyāpana* (teaching the Vedas), and *pratigraha* (accepting ritual gift), in addition to two other criteria – a vegetarian diet and the ability to undertake *sannyāsa* (renunciation). The *Nirṇaya* implies that in pre-colonial Maharashtra these three normative codes were used to define a true Brahman; adhering to practices contrary to these three factors signified a lack of Brahmanhood in the "errant" Brahmans. The authors of the narrative accordingly appropriated scriptures such as the Purāṇas and the

Dharmaśāstras to project these values as a theoretical touchstone to authenticate the credentials of Karhadas and Sarasvats in the past and present. Once these criteria were established, the Sarasvats' consumption of fish and practice of *laukika* (secular) vocations such as farming, trading, and rendering scribal services (as against the *vaidika vṛtti* noted above) were interpreted as a breach of the Brahmanical code.

Is it possible to discover why the authors of the *Nirṇaya* focused *only* on these norms to highlight the distinction between the Sarasvats and Karhadas? Were there any actual practices that formed the basis for this discourse of difference in the *Nirṇaya*? Similarly, is it possible to see a hierarchical order in which these three ideals were deemed important? Undoubtedly, as the *Nirṇaya* clearly indicates, diet was the most radical point of departure between the Sarasvats and other Brahmans; therefore it was also a more important criterion than the other two (priestly means of livelihood and *sannyāsa*). To understand the full significance of this criterion, we must revisit the *pañcagauḍa* – *pañcadraviḍa* categories described earlier in the chapter on the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. Let us recall that *pañcagauḍa* and *pañcadraviḍa* were well established categories that had found their way into the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. Based on ten broad regions -- five in the North and five in the South – this classification became a normative concept that validated the Brahmanical status of Brahman groups based in various regions. The normative status of this classification is nowhere more explicitly evident than it is in the case of the Sarasvats and the Maharashtrian Brahman groups. The Sarasvats claimed to be one among the five Gauḍas who hailed from the north of the Vindhyas, whereas the

Maharashtrian Brahman groups claimed to be among the Draviḍa Brahmans who were based south of the Vindhyas. Thus, the Karhadas – along with the Chitpavans and the Deshasthas – considered themselves among the *pañcadraviḍas.*

This regional distinction signified an important (and perhaps a more fundamental) distinction between the *pañcagauḍas* and the *pañcadraviḍas*, or more specifically, between the Sarasvats and the Maharashtrian Brahman groups. This distinction concerned the diet of these two groups. The Sarasvats consumed meat (especially fish), for the consumption of meat was acceptable among the *pañcagauḍa* Brahmans, such as the Kanyakubja Brahmans (Khare 1972). To the *pañcadraviḍa* Brahmans groups in Maharashtra, however, meat-eating and Brahmanhood were mutually exclusive concepts: the co-existence of these two – as embodied by the Sarasvats – was absolutely unacceptable and anomalous. Therefore, diet became the most obvious criterion for the Maharashtrian Brahmans with which they differentiated their own "superior" status from the "inferior" status of the Sarasvats. The staunch adherence of the Maharashtrian Brahman groups to the ideal of vegetarianism must be understood as a reassertion of the identification of Brahmanical purity with the principles of non-violence and vegetarianism. This identification – which emerged most prominently in the post-Vedic period – had provided the *raison d'être* for the higher purity of the Brahman class over the non-Brahman classes during the subsequent centuries (Smith 1990: 196-197). We do not possess clear evidence on whether vegetarianism was the main criterion to distinguish between various Brahman castes in medieval and late-medieval India. Nonetheless, in the

early modern period it was certainly invoked to indicate the superiority of one Brahman community over another as we see here.

The discomfort of the non-Sarasvat Brahmans with the Sarasvats' "transgression" of the quintessential values of Brahmanhood found expression in narratives such as the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā* which construed "historic" accounts regarding the loss of the Sarasvats' Brahmanhood as a consequence of the consumption of meat. Even the *Sahyādrikhaṅḍa*, which extolled the noble origin and past of the Trihotra (Sarasvat) Brahmans, noted meat-eating as a *deśadoṣa* among the Trihotras. It was unable to avoid dealing with their "anomalous" practice and was thus forced to provide an awkward explanation for the custom (See Chapter 1, Myths of Identity). However, it was a text such as the *Nirṇaya* that explicitly denigrated the status of the Sarasvats in comparison to the Karhadas who already had a history of clashes with the Sarasvats in Goa (see Ch. 1 Myths of identity). The Karhadas enjoyed an upper hand in Konkan – particularly in and around Ratnagiri – due to their presence in the region much before the Sarasvats (Athalye 1947: 19, 21-22). The Sarasvats started migrating towards upper Konkan from Goa in the sixteenth century, and more significantly in the seventeenth century due to certain circumstances in Goa (to be explained shortly). Places such as the thriving trading port at Rajapur were a meeting ground of the established Karhada community and the Sarasvat members, who, as new aspirants in the region, sought employment and business opportunities. The latter had started doing well for themselves, rapidly climbing the social ladder, and successfully competing against the Karhadas. The progress of the

Sarasvats resulted in inviting the Karhadas' attention to their dietary practice that, due to its radical difference from that of the Karhadas, was the immediate practice to be termed "aberrant." This "aberrant" practice now served as an effective resource that the Karhadas were able to exploit in order to indicate the Sarasvats' "inferior" purity. Narratives such as the *Nirṇaya* were composed during this time to bring into focus the "deviation" of the Sarasvats from this "ideal" of superior Brahmanhood to which the Karhadas claimed to have adhered. Thus, the portrayal of vegetarianism as a criterion for superior Brahmanhood was rooted in the Karhada-Sarasvat rivalry for material advantages. By the virtue of their pre-established dominance in upper Konkan, it was the Karhadas who were able to indicate what constituted the "norm" for ideal Brahmanhood through the means of this narrative.

What of the criterion of practicing *vaidika* or religious *vṛtti* (mode of livelihood)? Like the criterion of vegetarian diet, was this also based on real differences between the occupations of the Karhadas and the Sarasvats, leading the former to question the credentials of the latter? Unfortunately, the answer to this question is not as straightforward as the one regarding diet. It is true that a large population of the Sarasvats engaged in non-*vaidika*, secular occupations, most notably in agriculture, writing, and serving as diplomats and accountants for their masters – the Portuguese, the Marathas, and smaller overlords in the region of Goa and Konkan. A section among the Sarasvats did serve as priests in the temples of Goa. The majority, however, had taken to secular jobs as scribes, accountants, or traders (Conlon 1977: 19). Indeed, the community was

better known for their expertise in these professions than as priests and teachers. However, these professions were not a prerogative of the Sarasvats alone: most Brahman communities in early-modern Maharashtra earned their livelihood through similar pursuits. In particular, the Deshasthas, Chitpavans, and Karhadas had thrived as the landed elite and village heads, whose income came not from teaching the Veda and accepting alms but from cultivating fertile lands that they either owned or received as donations from local patrons for maintenance. Of course this is not to suggest that *all* members of these communities had forsaken their traditional privileges of officiating sacrifices, teaching the Vedas, and accepting alms, but only to highlight that the pursuit of secular occupations was commonly accepted among various Brahman communities. A sizable group of Brahmans in these communities continued to receive donations for priestly services, and instruction of scriptures, and accepted ritual donations. If that was the case, following *vaidika* occupation would certainly not be as rigorous a hallmark as vegetarianism; the *Padmapurāṇa* story in the *Nirṇaya* certainly seems to indicate this by projecting a non-vegetarian diet as the primary reason for the Sarasvats' fall from Brahmanhod and loss of the three privileged actions (*yājana, adhyāpana*, and *pratigraha*). Similarly, while the story compares the Sarasvats and Karhadas on the basis of their diet, it avoids comparing them on the basis of their respective occupations: instead, it only states how the superior Karhada Brahmans allowed the "impure" Sarasvats to pursue means of livelihood fit for the *Vaiśya* class.

The question still remains: why does the *Nirṇaya* prohibit religious occupations for the Sarasvats? Perhaps in this case the question of what constitutes a true Brahman was related less to the actual practice among Brahmans and more to the theoretical notion of Brahmanhood prescribed in scriptures; who wielded the power to invoke the issue with regard to whom was undoubtedly of importance. Before I discuss at length the power struggles between the Maharashtrian Brahmans and the Sarasvats in the larger socio-political setting of the Maratha country, let us recall the contentious relationship between the Karhadas and the Sarasvats: the Karhada Brahmans, who were well-settled in coastal cities in the Konkan belt such as Rajapur for generations and who were well-known in Maratha courtly-circles, were able to practice secular professions without being challenged. The Sarasvats, however, were relatively new entrants in the competition for opportunities in Upper Konkan, and they had just began to claim their own niche in the region by threatening the predominance of the Karhadas. The Karhadas resorted to the Dharmaśāstric discourse dealing with the conduct of Brahmans in order to portray the Sarasvats' practices as non-Brahmanical, as a means to counter their growing influence in the region. Any practice of the Sarasvats that seemed to be a violation of Brahmanical code laid down in scriptures could not escape without being challenged and questioned by the Karhadas. As the well-established landed elite and scholars present in Upper Konkan long before the immigration of the Sarasvats, the Karhadas were in the position to put the Sarasvats under a theoretical scanner and accuse them of violating the injunction to practice *vaidika* or religious occupation prescribed to Brahmans. The fact

that the Sarasvats were reputed scribes, accountants, traders, and agriculturists, but not priests performing rituals and teaching the Vedas in the Maratha country further served to weaken their case and strengthen that of their opponents who were known to engage in both priestly and non-priestly occupation. This may explain why the authors of the *Nirṇaya*, who were clearly in favor of the Karhadas, selectively interpreted Dharmaśāstra injunctions regarding the means of a Brahman's livelihood to demean the Sarasvats' status, but avoided applying the same criterion to judge the status of the Karhadas. Similarly, accounts from the Purāṇas – believed to contain truthful accounts from the past – were invoked to prove that the Sarasvats were guilty of practicing secular occupations and thereby guilty of breaching the Brahmanical code of conduct.

While we attempt to find correlations between the discursive domain of the *Nirṇaya* and the practical domain of the Maharashtrian Brahman communities, we must simultaneously bear in mind that the former did not necessarily correspond with the latter. Ultimately, the *Nirṇaya* was the work of authors whose main intention was to underscore the perceived superiority of the "Self" of the Karhada Brahmans against the "Other" of the Sarasvats; therefore, awkward mismatches between the theory and practice of Brahmanhood in case of the Karhadas had to be ignored. Similarly, if we restrict ourselves only to the scope and purpose of the narrative, the ultimate purpose of the authors was to declare the Sarasvats to be *Vaiśyas*. Achieving this goal would have been impossible without attributing to the Sarasvats the *pūrva-paraṃparāgata-ācāra* (customary practice) of following a secular vocation.

My analysis so far regarding the diet and occupation of the Sarasvats suggests a hierarchy between the criterion of diet and occupation: while the *Nirṇaya's* polemic on diet is strong (for it is rooted in the actual difference between the Sarasvats and Karhadas, as members of the *pañcagauḍas* and the *pañcadraviḍas*), its invocation of the criterion of occupation seems relatively weak (for not only the Sarasvats, but other Brahman communities as well, would have been guilty of violating that criterion).

This argument runs contrary to O'Hanlon and Minkowski's arguments in their recent article focusing on how the question of who is a Brahman became a site of intense contention and negotiation among Brahmans in early-modern Maharashtra, as they competed against one another for administrative and scribal jobs available abundantly in polities of the Konkan littoral in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Maharashtra (O'Hanlon and Minkowski 2008: 381-416). O'Hanlon and Minkowski point out that *paṇḍit*-networks in Maharashtra and Banaras were critical to the process of adjudicating the relative standing of the contending Brahmans; they add that the *paṇḍits*' conceptualization of a ritual and social hierarchy among various Brahman groups centered around whether the Brahmans' pursuit of somewhat "unclean" occupations (agricultural work and trade) was appropriate in relation to the supposedly "clean" occupations (administrative and scribal duties). Contemporary narratives such as the *Nirṇaya*, according to them, were key indicators of the prevalent notion that menial labor was inconsistent with being a Brahman. In support of their argument they highlight Dharmaśāstra texts cited in the *Nirṇaya* (in particular those of Manu and Parāśara) which

warn Brahmans of the degeneration of their status due to selling certain goods or cultivating land after the emergency period and prescribe rituals to wash away the sin of harming agricultural animals and worms in the soil. Similarly, on the basis of the decision by the assembly of Shivaji's *paṇḍits* that the Śeṇavīs had practiced agriculture for several generations even after the famine and were, therefore, fit for the rank of Vaiśyas, the scholars argue that the issue was not only that the Śeṇavis engaged in agriculture for several generations. The issue was also that the menial labor and the killing involved in agriculture itself were tantamount to undermining the virtues and qualities of a Brahman. They further argue that the real issue in the assembly was *not* Śeṇavīs' diet but their "crude" agricultural practices which attracted criticism and the evaluation of their Brahmanical status.

The scholars' observation that the assembly considered agricultural activities extending beyond the emergency period to affect the status of Brahmans in general and that of Sarasvats in particular certainly seems plausible. However, two issues related to their arguments need to be examined. First: does diet come across as a less critical issue than occupation? Second: is there a hierarchy among various non-priestly occupations wherein agriculture is a *particularly* inferior and, therefore, a more problematic means of livelihood than others? In other words: does the *Nirṇaya single out* farming from other mundane jobs as a *particularly* crude kind of operation? Is the erosion of Brahmanical virtue believed to be caused by agriculture along with other professions or by agriculture alone?

Let us consider the first issue: in light of my analysis regarding diet so far, it is clear that Sarasvats' diet is central to the chief purpose of the *Nirṇaya* –to establish a hierarchy between the Sarasvats and the Karhadas. The *Padmapurāṇa* story clearly indicates that it is only due to eating meat that the Sarasvats become impure and begin practicing agriculture, trading, etc., with the permission of the pure Karhada Brahmans to do so. Diet, in other words, is the primary reason which explains why the Sarasvats lost their Brahmanical status and right to priesthood. Similarly, one of the Dharmaśāstra injunctions by Manu defines the Sarasvats as *abhojyānnāḥ* (people whose food is forbidden to be consumed), indicating the centrality of diet in identifying the community. Another citation in the same passage reiterates the same: "owing to the sinfulness of the meat-eater in the south of the Vindhyas (*vindhyasya dakṣiṇe bhāge māṃsabhug iti pātityāt ca*)." Certainly, the *ācāra* (customary practice) of farming and trading among Sarasvats plays a decisive role in determining their status as Vaiśyas; yet it is their transgression of vegetarianism that leads them to take up these professions in the first place. In other words, for the authors of the *Nirṇaya*, diet *is* a far more significant criterion than occupation.

Let us now consider the proposition that killing in agriculture is particularly responsible for the erosion of Brahmanical virtues. Dharmaśāstra rules in the *Nirṇaya* do indicate the unfitness of farming and tilling the land with ploughshare for a Brahmin; they prescribe various dos and don'ts with regard to the number of animals to be used and kinds of land to be tilled; similarly, they also mention a particular sacrifice called *khala-*

yajña to rid a Brahman of the sinful effects of agricultural activity. Yet, the text also mentions regulations with regard to trading and tending cattle; failure to observe these is said to cause a Brahman's downfall. For instance: Manu states that selling meat, lac, salt, and – in particular – milk causes Brahmans to become *Śūdras* (Patwardhan 1914: 297). Similarly, Yama forbids Brahmans to serve the king , perform sacrifices with the wrong substance, *and* use bulls and donkeys for tilling the land when not under calamity. Thus, the text does not suggest the relative inferiority and crudeness of farming to other non-*vaidika* modes of livelihood such as trading, accounting, writing, and serving the king. The *Nirṇaya* criticizes Brahmans practicing *Vaiśya* occupations in general without creating any hierarchy among these occupations themselves. Even the *Padmapurāṇa*-story clearly mentions that the Sarasvats, under the directive of the Karhada Brahmans, began practicing *lekhana* (writing) and *rājasevā* (royal services) in addition to agriculture. Furthermore, in reality, the Śeṇavīs were most closely associated with scribal duties and diplomatic services in the local governments of Maharashtra and Goa. The Sarasvat caste chronicle *Konkaṇākhyāna* (composed in 1721) also associates the word Śeṇavī with the profession of writing and accounting. Considering these factors, the only conclusion that we can draw from the *Nirṇaya* is that the Śeṇavīs' pursuit of secular modes of livelihood had become a bone of contention between them and the Maharashtrian Brahmans who were keen to exploit any disjuncture between prescribed rules for the livelihood of Brahmans and the actual practice of the Sarasvats. Not just the

crude function of tilling the land, but also trading, rendering service to the king and writing account-books could theoretically undermine the status of Brahman groups.

Let us turn back to the third criterion of Brahmanhood: *sannyāsa*. The rationale of the *Nirṇaya* for choosing the criterion of *sannayāsa* seems to be even more complex than that for diet and occupation. If Śeṇavīs are *Vaiśyas*, are they eligible for *sannyāsa* – the ultimate prerogative of a Brahman? The authors of the *Nirṇaya* are themselves somewhat elusive in this regard and give no definite answer. The discomfort of the authors seems to stem from the fact that the Sarasvats did in fact fulfill this criterion. Notwithstanding their secular jobs and "anomalous" diet, the Sarasvats had been affiliated to the religious institution of *maṭha*s as a mark of their Brahmanical status in Goa since as early as the sixteenth century. These *maṭhas* – primarily situated in and around Goa – were led by the *svāmi*s (spiritual heads) chosen from the community and were staunch *sannyāsins* devoted to either the Śaiva (Smārta) or the Vaiṣṇava sectarian stream; they claimed to be descendants of a long lineage of spiritual preceptors (*guruparaṃparā*).[67] Two of the chief *smārta maṭhas* were situated at Kavalem and Khanapur; the two Vaiṣṇava ones resided at Kochi and Gokarna (Gunjikar 1884: 21-22). Collectively these four *maṭha*s signified the religious and theological foundation of the entire Sarasvat community. The allegiance to the *guruparamparā* of a *maṭha*-chief in one of the four *maṭha*s provided the caste and its sub-groups not only a religious identity, but

[67]One of the earliest Smārta lineages traced their origin from the medieval Advaita philosopher Śaṅkara's preceptor Gauḍapāda. A later lineage forsook their Smārta allegiance and allied with the lineage of the Vaiṣṇava preceptor Madhva around the beginning of the sixteenth century (Conlon 1977: 21).

also a status identity and a sense of purity as Brahmans (Conlon 1977: 10). Furthermore, it was priests from the Sarasvat community – and not those from the other Brahman communities – who carried out priestly functions for Sarasvat householders in the Sarasvat-dominated belt around Goa and Malabar (Gunjikar 1884: 24). For members of the Sarasvat community to support the Brahmanical prerogative of *sannyāsa*, the pursuit of a secular means of livelihood involving farming/trading and adhering to the custom of eating meat could happily co-exist without being mutually incompatible. The last two factors – a secular occupation and the consumption of meat – were construed to be incompatible with Brahmanical status according to the beliefs of *non-Sarasvat* Brahmans in Maharashtra. In Sarasvat-dominated regions in and around Goa, however, that was far from the case. As a wealthy class of landed elite which led most village communities in Goa as well as commonly owned and supported local temples (as I will explain in greater detail shortly), Sarasvats enjoyed a supreme position in Goa. In Goa any objections to the Sarasvats' Brahmanical status were least likely to occur. In other words: response to the Brahmanical status of the Sarasvats varied according to their relative standing in Goa and Maharashtra.

However, even in Maharashtra – where eating fish and farming could exclude the Sarasvats from being Brahmans – the undeniable tradition of celibate-renouncers among the Sarasvats and the significance of the ascetic tradition as a marker of the Sarasvats' Brahmanhood were sufficient to justify their status as Brahmans. From the non-Sarasvats' viewpoint the Sarasvats could not have their cake and eat it too. The real

challenge for the non-Sarasvats, then, was to reconcile Sarasvats' asceticism with the *lack* of Brahmanical status. Hence the question: is a non-Brahman eligible for *sannyāsa*?

The unease of the non-Sarasvats about answering this question directly is reflected in the complex argument they presented in the *Nirṇaya* for and against the proposition and in the fact that they ultimately ended the text without even stating explicitly whether the Sarasvats/Śyeṇavis were eligible for *sannyāsa*. They had to invoke the Dharmaśāstras' injunction: besides the normal Brahman caste, the *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas* who were *former* Brahmans were also eligible for *sannyāsa*. After establishing the Sarasvats' status as *Vaiśyas* on the basis of their traditional *ācāra*, the authors implied that the Sarasvats qualified for *sannyāsa* not as Brahmans but as *Vaiśyas* who were formerly Brahmans. Thus, the authors could retain *sannyāsa* as a chief marker of Brahmans and were simultaneously able to prove two propositions: first, the Sarasvats were no longer Brahmans; second, their *sannyāsa* was not a result of their status as Brahmans but as *Vaiśyas* who had once been Brahmans. Thus, although the criterion of *sannyāsa* was based on a common practice shared by both the Sarasvats and non-Sarasvats, in the case of the Sarasvats it was understood and explained in a way that indicated their inferior status and lack of eligibility. Narratives such as the *Nirṇaya* stemmed from such complex negotiations between the theory and practice of Brahmanhood; the questions emerging from these negotiations did not always elicit straightforward answers.

Brahmans in the Socio-political Environment of Early-Modern Maharashtra

The authors of the *Nirṇaya* were learned *paṇḍit*-Brahmans well-versed in the Purāṇas and the Smṛtis. They did not function in a socio-political vacuum as they were quite aware of the significance of the political environment in which they were operating. As mentioned earlier, using Shivaji and his court-*paṇḍits* in the beginning of the narrative seems to be an attempt to use the symbolism associated with the king – who was revered by the Brahmans and non-Brahmans alike – in order to lend authenticity and infallibility to the *Nirṇaya*. More significantly, however, the motif also points to a larger socio-political reality that had brought the Maharashtrian Brahmans and the Sarasvats together in the shared space of the Maratha state and created opportunities for both groups. Thus, while the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Latikā* do reflect tensions among Brahman communities, it is the *Nirṇaya* which clearly points to the interrelationship between state patronage and recognition of higher status on the one hand and contestation among local Brahman communities who vied with one another to obtain that recognition on the other. In what follows, I will elaborate on the larger socio-political backdrop of early modern Maharashtra and Goa against which the conflict between the Sarasvats and the Maharashtrian Brahman groups came to the fore. I have described certain facts related to the political scenario in Maharashtra in my discussion of the rise of the Peshva and its implications for the Chitpavans and the Deshasthas. Here I revisit some of those

descriptions in a much larger context dealing with the pre-Peshva days and the socio-political scenario in Goa.

MAHARASHTRIAN BRAHMANS UNDER THE PESHVAS AND BEFORE

The rise of the Maratha rule had the deepest impact on the Brahman communities in the Maratha country. Before I turn to this significant epoch, let me briefly describe the position of Brahmans in the pre-Maratha period. Prior to the rise of the Marathas Brahman communities in Maharashtra had enjoyed patronage as priests of local temples from local kings such as the Silaharas in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[68] In the Bahmani Sultanate and the succeeding Deccan Sultanates of Bijapur (ruled by the Adil Shah) and Ahmadnagar (ruled by the Nizam Shah), regional Brahman-priests were able to retain inherited sources of maintenance in the form of special grants and privileges. More importantly, literate Brahman communities – most prominently the Deshasthas – were absorbed into the lower and middle levels of the administration of the sultanates (Roy Burman 2001: 228). As a result of the social ascendancy offered by these regimes, Brahman priests and bureaucrats flourished as a class of landed elite in the Upper Konkan as well as in the inland Desh region. After the foundation of the Maratha state, the Brahmans who had earlier assisted the sultanates in the lower and middle levels of administration were quick to occupy top positions in the core Council of Ministers in

[68] Twelfth- and thirteenth-century inscriptions describe the donations of Silahara kings to local temples and Brahman priests at various places along the Upper Konkan region of Maharashtra (Tulpule, 1963: 41-47, 83-84). A prominent Karhada family received village Sangameshvar in Konkan as an *agrahāram* from the Silahara king Vijayarka (Athalye 1947: 7). Various other Karhada families were also supported by Silahara kings in the twelfth century (Athalye 1947: 8).

Shivaji's court; these included both the Deshasthas and Karhadas.[69] Even as priests, both Deshasthas and Karhadas – such as Keshav Pandit, who was appointed as Shivaji's royal priest (*rājapurohita*) – were employed in the royal court and in a number of regional temples and religious establishments.[70] Keen to advocate Hindu religious symbols and institutions and to justify his title as the *gobrāhmaṇapratipālaka* (Upholder of Cows and Brahmans), Shivaji lent generous patronage to local temples and priests through donations of *vṛtti*s (incomes from grants of lands) and *varṣāsanas* (yearly grants) on special occasions.

During the reign of Shahu, Shivaji's grandson and the fourth Chatrapati, the seat of Peshva or Prime Minister was handed over to a Chitpavan Brahman named Balaji Vishvanath Bhat in 1713. From 1749 until the decline of the Maratha Empire in 1818, the descendents of the Bhat family controlled the Maratha state from Pune, while the line of Shivaji's descendents was reduced to the mere title of Rajas. As Chitpavan Brahmans themselves, the Peshvas were keen to propagate Brahmanical dominance over both social and political spheres by lending special favors to the Brahman class in general, and to the Chitpavans in particular. Scores of Chitpavans, as well as Karhada priests, literates, and poets migrated to prominent centers of the state including Pune, Satara, and Konkan in

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[69] Shivaji's Aṣṭapradhāna (the core council of eight ministers) was occupied to a large extent by the Deshasthas. The following Deshastha Brahmans were members of the council: Moropant Pingale was the chief minister (Peshva), Annaji Datto was the secretary (Sachiv), Raghu Ballal Korde, the commander –in-chief, Ramachandrapant Amatya looked after finance, Moreshvar Panditrao was responsible for religious matters, Niraji Raoji was the minister of justice and legal matters, and Pralhad Bavadekar looked after intelligence.

[70] A Karhada priest with the title of Inamdar was appointed to carry out daily worship of the Goddess on Pratapgarh in Satara during the late seventeenth century (Athalye 1947: 24).

search of employment and recognition. Karhadas and Chitpavans came to populate and dominate specific regions: for instance, the prosperous port of Rajapur emerged as a distinct hub of the Karhadas, while Ratnagiri in Upper Konkan and Pune in the Desh region were known as Chitpavan pockets.[71] While the Peshvas were particularly keen to employ members of their own caste in commercial, priestly, and administrative jobs, they encouraged other local and immigrant Brahman communities as well (Bayly 1999: 67). Thus, besides the Chitpavans, a number of Karhadas also served the Peshva as successful army commanders (Gordon 1993: 194). In addition to the Brahmans employed in state jobs, Brahman priests also benefited: rich grants, villages, and lands were given to temples, religious sites and priests (Gordon 1991: 186). Later, the dominance of the Chitpavans in the Peshva court led to an outward migration of the Deshasthas to serve Maratha commanders in the peripheral areas such as Ujjain, Gwalior, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. Those who remained at the Peshva court could not help but feel disgruntled over their shrinking importance in state affairs. However, in spite of the internal politics among Brahmans, the class of Maharashtrian Brahmans in general had taken over much dynastic and bureaucratic power in the Maratha domain; this led to what Susan Bayly (1999: 64) has described as the Brahman-Raj.

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[71] Gordon 1993: 194. For instance, the celebrated Marathi poet Moropant was a Karhada Brahman whose grandfather migrated to Kolhapur from Konkan to serve king Shahu in the early eighteenth century (Pangarkar 1938: 22). Several families of Karhada Brahmans also migrated from Desh to Konkan from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries and became chief priests, village priests, astrologers, village heads (*khot*) and *dharmādhikārin*s (Athalye 1947: 10-14).

THE SARASVATS OF GOA

While the Maratha administration continued to be dominated by the local Brahman communities (in particular by the Chitpavans), a small group of Sarasvat Brahmans from Goa had started to appear on the scene to claim a share in opportunities offered by the thriving Maratha state. Their presence in Maharashtra was negligible until the sixteenth century but started becoming noticeable from the late seventeenth century onwards. The reasons for their migration to Maharashtra lay in the socio-political upheaval that the region of Goa was experiencing from the sixteenth century onwards due to Portuguese rule: this upheaval effected the community of Sarasvats as priests and elite local administrators. These were the circumstances that the *Nirṇaya* describes as *deśakālaviplava* (turbulence in the country at a certain time); it was due to these conditions that the Sarasvats were forced to migrate to places such as Rajapur.

By the sixteenth century the Sarasvats had established themselves as members of an affluent class that had prospered with the establishment of villages and temples in the fertile lands of Goa. In the fifteenth century, temples in Goa were under the patronage of both local village communities and the governors of Vijayanagar kingdom. A large number of temples in the region were collectively owned by village communities consisting of the local landed elite (called *gāonkars*); *gāonkar*s who enjoyed special ritual privileges in temples were known as *kulāvi*. The *gāonkars* and *kulāvīs* looked after the daily expenses and the maintenance of temples by donating a portion from the collective income of the farmlands and orchards; they also appointed priests and other servants to

the temple (Conlon 1977: 18).[72] To a large extent, these *gāonkar*s consisted of Sarasvat Brahmans in the region; in return for their patronage to the temples, they enjoyed various ritual privileges therein (Dhume 1986: 16). Besides the *gāonkars*, the temples received land donations and other endowments from local representatives of the Vijayanagar kingdom who were also Sarasvat Brahmans.[73] Thus, by the sixteenth century, regional Sarasvat Brahmans had emerged as a prominent class within the landed and administrative elite.

Towards the last few dacades of the Vijayanagar empire, the Adil Shah of Bijapur reigned over Goa for a few decades in the late fifteenth century until the Portuguese conquered Goa in 1510. The Portuguese reign brought about an unprecedented change in the fortunes of the native Sarasvats and their temples. In the beginning, the Portuguese government chose not to interfere with the local temples and religious institutions. Close to the middle of the sixteenth century, however, the ecclesiastical authorities and

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[72] The lands, known as *kulāgaras*, and the people who owned these lands, known as *kulāvi*, are recorded in the *Foral de Salcete*, the Land Survey of the Portuguese compiled in 1558. The book records the land belonging to the well-known temples of deities such as Śāntādurgā, Maṅgeśa, Ravalnātha, Ganeśa, Nāgeśa, and various village deities (Dhume, 1986: 15). Two inscriptions of 1558 and 1590 mention the donation of *dharmādāya*s (donation for carrying out religious duties) and a portion of agricultural land given by the Sarasvat *gāonkars* to priests of local temples (Ghantkar 1973: 66-73).

[73] An inscription of 1402 written in Old Marathi, found at the temple of Ravalnātha in the island of Goa, records various kinds of donation for the maintenance of the temple and the priests therein. The donor, Māi Seṇavī, was the officer of the Sattari region, and worked for a Governor of Vijayanagar named Anantaras Gosāvī (Tulpule 1963: 302-305). An inscription of 1414 similarly records Mai Seṇavī's donation to the temple of Nāgeśa in village Bandivade (present day Bandode). According to the inscription, when Nanjan Gosāvi was the governor of the Vijayanagar kings in Goa, his officer Māi Seṇavi donated a portion of his income from land to the temples of Nāgeśa and Mahālakṣmī in the village. In return for this donation, Seṇavī's land was made tax-free by the local village community (Tulpule 1963: 306-311). Curiously, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* mentions a certain Bāndoḍekar who was an officer in the Vijayanagar administration; he was the son-in-law of the trustee of the Nāgeśa temple called Bāndoḍkar. The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* asserts that the name of the officer was Vāgale, who donated *vṛtti*s and *varṣāsana*s to the temple. His donation was recorded in a royal edict inscribed on stone. This reference in the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* must be regarding Māi Seṇavī and the stone inscription in the Nāgeśa temple.

Portuguese government altered this policy. Several existing temples were destroyed and the erection of new temples was prohibited.[74] Laws were made to prevent the renovation of temples without the special permission of Portuguese authorities; failure to do so would result in forfeiting of the temple property. Similarly, under the policy of the "Rigor of Mercy" (*Rigor de Misericordia*), temple owners and priests were made to agree that the income of lands belonging to the destroyed temples be given over to the development of churches and missions.[75] The temple authorities were forced to relocate images of their deities from Salcete and Bardesh to regions that were under the Adil Shah's control.[76] While scholars have largely viewed the actions of the Portuguese government and missionaries as motivated by religious grounds, the economic aspect of these campaigns must not be overlooked. The Portuguese must have noted that the fertile lands and orchards in possession of the temples and temple authorities were a crucial asset for state

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[74] By 1550, several temples in the island of Goa and three adjacent islands of Divar, Chorao, and Jua were destroyed. In 1543 Ibrahim Adil Shah lost two islands named Bardez and Salcete to the Portuguese. A Portuguese General Miguel Vaz proposed to the King of Portugal that the temples in these regions also be destroyed. Erection of new temples stopped as Viceroy Antao de Naronha ordered that no Hindu temple be erected in the territory of the Portuguese, and the already existent Hindu temples not be repaired without special permission. Furthermore, the order also maintained that violation of the order would result in the forfeiting of temple property. *Foral de Salcete*, a Portuguese record of land survey in the island of Goa, contains a list of the destroyed temples (Pissurlencar 1984: 53).

[75] The agreement took place on 28th June 1541 in the presence of a few Portuguese officers and prominent Brahmans from various villages of Goa Island and several native landlords. "They were informed by the Controller of the Finances that they should, with free will, be prepared to give and donate the income of lands belonging to the temples and those situated in this island, since these temples were entirely destroyed, and there was no chance of their ever being built again, and as previously they did not use this income fruitfully, but spent all of it towards the same temples and its *gurous*, dancing girls, Brahmins, blacksmiths, carpenters, washermen, barbers, shoemakers, painters, and other servants of the aforesaid temples" (Priyolkar 1961: 68-69).

[76] According to the Portuguese sources from the second half of the sixteenth century, the temple of Maṅgeśa was transferred from Kutthal in Salcete to village Priyol in Phonda Taluka in 1560 (Dhume 1986: 25; Priyolkar 1961: 85).

revenue. Therefore, with regard to these temples they implemented policies that were overtly religious, but political at heart.

With the establishment of the notorious Goa Inquisition in 1541, the different orders of the Church – the Dominicans, Franciscans, and Jesuits – propagated the mass conversion of the non-Christian residents of Goa by various means: restrictions were levied on the non-Christian population and the *xendi* (pronounced śenḍi) tax was levied on the regional Hindu population;[77] those who opposed Christianity were brought before the Inquisition and punished; king D. Sabastião passed a law in 1567 to the effect that the non-Christian priests – including Brahman priests, Muslim Kazis, or Hindu preachers, priests, and astrologers – were banned from the Portuguese dominion (Pissurlencar 1967: 60). In response to these laws, the natives of Goa islands migrated to other regions further south of Goa or north of it towards the Maratha country in search of a new livelihood and patronage (Kulkarni 1996: 4).

What was the response of Sarasvat Brahmans to Portuguese rule? Far from being unanimous, the response was mixed. On the one hand, the Sarasvat *gāonkars* and *kulāvi*s transferred idols to safer regions to ensure their unobstructed worship.[78] A large number of Sarasvats vehemently opposed the allegedly forced conversions and religious policies of the Portuguese; as the result of this, the Portuguese viewed them as staunch

[77] For a detailed account of the Inquisition and the religious policies of the Portuguese, see Priyolkar 1961 and Pissurlencar 1967 and 1984.

[78] Between 1541 and 1566 most Hindu images in the island of Salcete and Tisvadi were transferred to the neighboring regions under the Adil Shah's control. According to the Portuguese records, the property of the empty temples in these regions was used to build churches (Pissurlencar 1984: 101-103).

antagonists of the state.[79] On the other hand, however, a certain section of affluent Sarasvat traders and skilled literati assisted the Portuguese government by participating in the processes of Portuguese state-building. The Portuguese needed literate bureaucrats at middle and low levels of administration and some Sarasvats were happy to oblige. They mastered the Portuguese language, secured employment in the Portuguese administration as messengers to the non-Portuguese states, as interpreters for the Portuguese, or as envoys and accountants; they thereby enjoyed preferential treatment from their Portuguese patrons.[80] Some of them even worked in the employ of the Portuguese to spy against the Adil Shahi Sultanate.[81] With regard to religion, instances in which Sarasvats willingly converted to Christianity with the intention of securing economic gains and concessions from the Portuguese government are not rare. Overall, a class of Sarasvat

[79]In 1541, around thirty Sarasvat *gāonkars* and *kulāvis* from fifteen villages in the Tisvadi island of Goa organized a meeting to devise a plan to counter the Portuguese (Pissurlencar 1984: 95). Similarly, in a letter of 1541, written to the king of Portugal, a Portuguese noble maintained that local Brahmans Krishna, Luqu, Anu Sinai and others opposed conversion. The noble suggested that these leaders should first be converted to Christianity, and if they disagreed they should be invited to Portugal under the pretext of imparting useful information of the region. The noble hoped that conversion of the masses would have been easy if these Brahmans were away for two years (Priyolkar 1961: 71).

[80]Several Sarasvats were well-known officers and diplomats in the Portuguese government. For instance, Krishna Śeṇavī was a captain in the Portuguese army. Formerly a wealthy trader of horses, he assisted the Portuguese in capturing Goa and subsequently he was invited and honored by the king of Portugal in 1520. Krishna's son was Dadaji, who was appointed to his father's position, but later under the suspicion of treachery he was replaced by a convert Sarasvat Brahman called Lakuz Sanai. Ajju Nayak was an interpreter for the Portuguese in the court of Mughal emperor Jahangir from 1610 to 1622; Krishna Śeṇavī was an interpreter in the court of the Adil Shah at Bijapur; Narayana Śeṇavī was the Portuguese envoy to the British from 1654 to 1672. Similarly, Ramoji Śeṇavī Kothari was the Portuguese envoy to the Marathas, Bijapur Sultanate, and the Dutch in 1545. He enjoyed all kinds of concessions from the Portuguese government to follow his religious practices (Satoskar 1987: 560-577).

[81]A Sarasvat Brahman named Mhala Pai was an officer of the Vijayanagar kingdom. Dissatisfied with the sultanate of the Adil Shah that followed the Vijayanagar rule, he initially assisted the Portuguese against the Adil Shah. Due to the proselytizing policies of the Portuguese, however, he secretly began leaking information to the Adil Shah. When the Portuguese came to know this, they arrested him and confiscated his property. Eventually Mhala Pai migrated to Cochin and settled there (Satoskar 1987: 560).

literati benefited immensely from their Portuguese masters and rose rapidly on the social scale of mobility.

MIGRATION OF THE SARASVATS INTO MARATHA COUNTRY

A different kind of mobility in the Sarasvat community was also underfoot in the form of a large emigration – either by force or will. Many left their native region between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries. A large scale exodus took place when the law to evict non-Christians was passed by the Portuguese. A large number of Sarasvat families were forced to leave the region along with members of other Hindu castes.[82] Some of them migrated south toward Mangalore, Karnataka, and Malabar, while others fled north of Goa toward upper Konkan.[83] A small branch of the Sarasvats migrated and settled as traders in the town of Rajapur near Ratnagiri in Upper Konkan, a flourishing port and center of trade. They later became a sub-caste within the Sarasvats called Rajapur/Bhalavalikar Sarasvat Brahmans. The most defining change in the fortunes of the Sarasvats occurred when those skilled in Portuguese found their niche in the need for translators, interpreters, writers, and diplomats in the Maratha regime. In the latter half of the seventeenth century, Jivaji Śeṇavī and Pitambar Śeṇavī were working as Shivaji's foreign ministers to negotiate with the Portuguese (Pissurlencar 1967: 82). In the wake of Shivaji's growing diplomatic relations and warfare with the Portuguese, the importance

[82] A list of these Brahmans is given in a Portuguese document (Pissurlencar 1984: 115-116).

[83] Even before the Portuguese conquest, the Sarasvats may have migrated as traders towards the Kanara district. The community, however, attributes their migration along the Southern coast mainly to the Portuguese regime. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the Nayakas of Ikkeri recruited Śeṇavīs in state administration and revenue management (Conlon 1977: 27-30).

of these two ambassadors was immense. Similarly, some other Sarasvats accepted jobs as revenue officers both in the center and along the periphery of the Maratha state (Conlon 1977: 26).[84] We can safely claim that this laid the foundation for the social mobility of Sarasvats under the Peshvas, later in the eighteenth century.

Employment in Shivaji's administration was not the only incentive that made Maharashtra attractive to the Sarasvats. Shivaji's campaigns in Goa and his religious policies for his subjects also provided a strong motive for the Sarasvats' migration into Konkan and Desh. Initially, Shivaji considered the Portuguese to be his allies in his naval warfare against the Siddis or Abyssinians who controlled most of the Konkan coast. From 1659 to 1667, he campaigned to capture Portuguese regions in the Upper Konkan and Goa islands. During these campaigns, the religious freedom of the Hindu population of Goa became a bone of contention between Shivaji and the Portuguese. On various occasions he sought to oppose the conversion of the natives.[85] To counter the tide of conversion he created the post of Paṇḍitrao in his core council. One of the duties of the Paṇḍitrao was to assist the *maṭha*s of the Śaṅkarācārya at Sankeshvar and Kolhapur – the revered religious seats of the Brahman communities in Maharashtra – to accept the converted back into the fold of Hinduism. Between 1665 and 1670 Shivaji had asked

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[84] When a local commander named Khem Savant overthrew a Sarasvat subordinate of Bijapur and established the independent Savatvadi state north of Goa, most of the administrative jobs were entrusted to migrant Śeṇavīs (Conlon 1977: 26).

[85] When the Viceroy of Goa issued an order in 1667 to deport all except Roman-Catholics from Goa, Shivaji detained four missionaries from Bardez and threatened to kill them if the order was not revoked. The Portuguese Viceroy then withdrew his order of deportation. Similarly, Shivaji also raised the issue of forcible conversion and confiscation of the property of orphans to the Viceroy in 1675 (Kulkarni, 1996: 4-5).

various Brahman *sabhā*s (Brahman-assemblies) to purify the Christian converts in the island of Goa and accept them back as Brahmans (Kulkarni 1996: 8-9).

Besides these moves, patronizing local temples was yet another means for Shivaji to consolidate his rule – both politically and ideologically – in the conquered territory. For instance: Shivaji renovated the temple of Saptakotiśvara in the village called Narve in the Tisvadi island of Goa in 1670 (Prabhu-Bhembre 1979: 29).[86] Undoubtedly, this raised the status and popularity of the king among the regional Sarasvats, who sought support for their religious and Brahmanical status from the Hindu king. More importantly, however, the role of the Paṇḍitrao and the *maṭha*s of the Śaṅkarācārya in conjunction with state authority established a hierarchy of power and prestige among the Sarasvats and the Maharashtrian Brahmans. As a result of this hierarchy, the latter were perceived to be superior because of their task of reconverting the converted to Hinduism. The symbolic dimension in the motif of the king and his *paṇḍits* in the *Nirṇaya* must have been derived from this socio-political reality.

The association between the Sarasvats and the Maratha kingdom grew stronger during the Peshva reign in the eighteenth century. Naro Ram Rege and Ramachandra Malhar Sukhtankar (both Sarasvat Brahmans from Goa) were ministers in the court of the second Peshva and wielded considerable influence in the Maratha administration. Ramchandra Sukhtankar later became a Maratha commander and participated in various

[86] The temple of Saptakotiśvara was in the island of Divad before its destruction in 1540 by a Portuguese officer Miguel Vaz. In 1558 the idol of the deity was transferred to Narve. A Sanskrit lyrical poem, titled *Sri-Śivarājyābhiśekakalpataru* mentions that the temple of Saptakotiśvara was renovated by Shivaji (Pissurlencar 1967: 76).

successful Maratha campaigns. Similarly, a number of Sarasvats occupied the middle-level administration as revenue-collectors (Gordon 1993: 144). In the Malva states of the Shindes and the Holkars (Maratha commanders who established independent states after 1732), Sarasvats served at all levels of administration and thus played a significant role in these polities. Thus, at the core as well as in the peripheral Maratha regions, Sarasvats were a force to be reckoned with, alongside the Chitpavans and other Brahman communities.

As the Sarasvats' participation in the Maratha administration advanced further, they successfully sought the patronage of the Peshva for their temples in Goa. The aforementioned Naro Ram Rege was the *kulāvi* of the temple of Śāntādurgā in Kavalem; Ramachandra Malhar was the *kulāvi* of the temple of Mangeśa in Phonda. Naro Ram was instrumental in securing the Peshva's donation to the temple of Śantadurga in the form of village Kavalem in 1739 (Sohoni 1937: 101). Similarly, Ramachandra Malhar secured grants continuously from the Peshva to his patron deity in Goa. Malhar's contribution to the development of the Maratha state also earned him a reward of thirty acres of land from the Peshva (Gunjikar 1884: 130). Acknowledging the importance of the Sarasvat maṭhas at Khanapur and Kavlem, Madhavrao Peshva made several grants for their maintenance in 1764 (Sohoni 1937: 122).[87] Furthermore, in a letter addressed to the Portuguese Viceroy, the Peshva requested the Portuguese authorities not to disrupt his donations to the temples of Śāntādurgā and Mangeśa.

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[87] For the original letter of Nanasaheb Peshva's donation to Khanapur Matha in 1764 see Gunjikar 1884: 28

The Peshva's support to the temples in Goa was certainly not surprising, given their increased beneficence towards religious establishments and local cults in order to consolidate their royal credentials in orthodox religious terms. Acording to Bayly, it is during Peshva rule that the religious ideology of *varṇāśramadharma* or the view that everybody in the society must abide by a pre-determined class and stage of life sanctioned by scriptures and priests became more powerful than earlier. The Chitpavan Peshvas' ancestors were not royal dynasts, but Chitpavan individuals with modest means; they functioned as ordinary revenue collectors (deshmukhs), traders, cultivators, and priests in Konkan. It is precisely because of these humble origins that the Peshvas had the greater need to assert their kingly credentials. They rigorously encouraged Brahmanical caste conventions and distinctions and endorsed "supra-local Brahmanical worship and learning" to present themselves as just and legitimate Dhārmic forbearers of the state (Bayly 1999: 67-68; cf. Gavali 1988: 143). While this policy led to a heightened sense of awareness among people in matters of purity and ritual distinction between Brahmans and non-Brahmans,[88] ironically, its effect on intra-Brahmanical relationship was just as pronounced. Caste- and ritual-distinctions among different Brahman communities were either created anew or reinforced with a newfound vigor as the Brahmans vied with one another for a bigger share of the pie. Restrictions among Brahmans regarding inter-dining and intermarrying were observed more carefully than before. Who inter-dined with whom and who was eligible to render priestly duties at whose household became commonly-

[88] For various instances of sharp demarcation between the Brahmans and the Untouchables on the basis of purity and pollution in Maharashtra under the Peshvas, see Gavali 1988: 130-132.

accepted markers of the ritual status of various Brahman communities. The view that Brahman communities of equal ritual status inter-dine and intermarry became normative; by contrast, refusal by one Brahman caste to inter-dine or intermarry with another implied the lower ritual status of the latter. During the reign of Chimaji Appa (1707-1741), son of the first Peshva Balaji Vishvanath, the Chitpavans once refused to inter-dine with Devrukhas and cited letters from various *paṇḍits* that sanctioned their decision; the Devrukhas, on the other hand, also brought letters from religious authorities in Aurangabad stating that "no demerit is attached if you take food in the house of a Devrukhe" (Gavali 1988: 107). Similarly, on a few occasions the Chitpavans and the Karhadas banned mutual inter-dining and even threatened to ex-communicate each other (Gavali 1988: 107). The Deshasthas considered themselves to be ritually superior to the Chitpavans; as a result of this, the Peshva himself was disallowed to descend the staircase used by the Deshasthas at the sacred *tīrtha* of Nasik.

While caste-distinction among Maharashtrian Brahmans intensified during the Peshva period, differences between the Sarasvats and Maharashtrian Brahmans as *pañcagauḍas* and *pañcadraviḍas* were felt more acutely than ever: Sarasvats were beginning to successfully carve their own space in areas dominated by the Maharashtrian Brahmans. In the era when creating ties between two Brahman groups and acknowledging each others' ritual purity through ritual interaction – whether by dining, marrying, or rendering priestly services – was ultimately a means to secure a higher position in the social and political hierarchy among Brahmans, underscoring how a

Brahman group was different from others was equally crucial to *undermining* the influence of that group. The efforts of Maharashtrian Brahmans to isolate Sarasvats as members of the *pañcagauḍa* category were clearly intended to weaken their position in the religious and political domains of the Maratha state. At this point it is important to mention that although the *pañcagauḍa-pañcadraviḍa* divide had emerged earlier than the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the encounter between the Sarasvats and Maharashtrians as members of these two groups and the ways in which differences between them were articulated in the socio-political environment of early-modern Maharashtra must be noted as a new chapter in the history of these categories. As discussed earlier, the consumption of fish by the Sarasvats was identified as the characteristic custom of the *pañcagauḍa*s which was not allowed beyond the regional boundary of that custom (north of the Vindhya Mountains). The theoretical stipulation that certain customs are valid only within the bounds of certain regions beyond which the customs were sinful as regional faults (*deśadoṣa*s) is found in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. It is difficult to ascertain whether the textualization of this notion in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* was concurrent with the Sarasvat—Maharashtrian Brahman conflict in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the various layers of the text were composed at different points of time. However, one thing is clear: the most articulate and frequent invocation of this notion occurred during these centuries to highlight the "impurity" of the Sarasvats. Among the Maharashtrian Brahmans – for the Chitpavans and Karhadas in particular – demarcating two distinct spheres of ritual status for themselves and the Sarasvats was a

means to asserting their orthodoxy; therefore, they considered it a sin to inter-dine or intermarry with the latter. The Peshva himself supported restrictions on inter-dining and intermarrying by meting out stringent punishments to those who violated them: a letter from a Brahman officer named Govinda Sivaram (written in the eighteenth century) to an associate mentions that the former's colleague, Baji Narsi, brought Raghoba Page's cousin to dinner. Sivaram did not know that the cousin was Śeṇavī. He complains that Baji Narsi did not inform him of this and speculates that it is perhaps because Narsi felt awkward and was rather lenient towards matters of caste. When the Peshva came to know of this violation, he fined the Śeṇavī Brahman for ten thousand Rupees (Kale 1929: 108). Even in his personal life, the Peshva ardently followed the restriction against inter-dining with the Sarasvats as the following instance indicates. Jivaba Kerkar, a prominent Sarasvat commander of the Peshva, once invited his master to share a meal to conclude his religious fast. The Peshva was hesitant as Jivaba was a Śeṇavī. Only after being told that the cook was a "Brahman" – and after all, Jivaba was a brave and loyal commander – did the Peshva eat a tiny bit of food.[89] Clearly, even loyal military and administrative service rendered by the Sarasvats could not help their "inferior" ritual status in the Peshva court.

Such an environment favored not just the Chitpavans, but also the Karhadas who wielded less power in Goa as priests compared to the elite Sarasvat landlords in the region. In the Maratha country, however, the Sarasvats were a minority and the Karhadas

[89] The incident is narrated in a *bakhar* of the battle at Kharda (Valavalikar 1945: 108-109).

deemed themselves superior to them, both ritually and class-wise. Texts such as the *Nirṇaya* became, for the Karhadas, a principal means to articulate and generate in scripture the "evidence" of their dominance. Although the purpose of the narrative was to compare the Sarasvats with the Karhadas, it also functioned both as a model *of* and a model *for* the distinction between the "pure" Maharashtrian Brahmans in general and the immigrating "impure" quasi-Brahmans.

CONCLUSION

Like the authors of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*, those of the *Nirṇaya* were conscious of their learned audience situated in the royal courts or religious *maṭha*s. Accordingly, they constructed discourses that were projected as authoritative Brahmanical scriptures in idiom and content; nevertheless, they were – in reality – articulations of their rivalry with other Brahman castes. However, the *Nirṇaya* demonstrates the role of texts in expressing, reinforcing, and engendering identities of Brahman castes in ways that are both similar and different from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Śatapraṣnakalpalatikā*. Much similar to the other two texts, the *Nirṇaya* relies on an "historical" account to compare the past of the Sarasvats to that of the Karhadas and thereby justify a hierarchy between the two groups which existed in contemporary Maharashtra. Similarly, the narrative deploys etymological derivations of the caste-designations Śeṇavī and Karhada to encapsulate the past of these communities, revealing how names had become synonymous with the communities themselves. However, unlike the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Latikā*, the text deploys these features to *subvert* the previous

embarrassing narratives of the Karhadas' origin and to portray the community's much exalted past by making Sarasvats the inferior "other." A more significant departure lies in the way in which it explicitly uses Shivaji as a symbol of royal patronage and indicates what was ultimately at stake in the competitive atmosphere of early modern Maharashtra. The hierarchy between Shivaji and his court pundits on the one hand and the Sarasvats on the other clearly seems to be the narrativized representation of a political reality.

The use of the Dharmaśāstras – yet another distinct feature of the *Nirṇaya* – is intended to obtain validation of the discourse of hierarchy from these scriptures on quintessential Brahmanical *dharma*. The text appropriates and adapts the model of ideal Brahmanhood to define precisely who fulfills the criteria for a true Brahman community. In other words: the theoretical discourse of the Dharmaśāstras regarding the duties and rights of the Brahman *varṇa* was selectively drawn upon to create criteria that favored or disfavored Brahman *jātis* such as the Karhadas and the Sarasvats.

However, as much as the ideals of Brahmanhood define and shape the status of Brahman *jāti*s, the appropriation of this discourse also underscores precisely which ideals are considered crucial from among a wide repertoire of paradigmatic codes for Brahmanhood. Indeed, a vegetarian diet, non-secular occupations, and *sannyāsa* are ideologically presented as the distinct marks of a Brahman. When implicated in the Karhada-Sarasvat contestation, they serve to imply the inferior status of the Sarasvats on the one hand and the authenticity of the Karhadas on the other. However, if the consumption of fish and the practice of secular occupations easily puts the Sarasvats in

the ranks of *Vaiśyas*, the criterion of *sannyāsa* required the Karhadas to do some theoretical maneuvering. The Karhadas imply that the Sarasvats can take up *sannyāsa*, but they are allowed to do so only due to the latter's *previous* status as Brahmans. In its appropriation of the Dharmaśāstras to lend scriptural legitimacy to the hierarchy between the Karhadas and the Sarasvats, the *Nirṇaya* functions along similar lines as the role of medieval commentaries and *nibandhas* of the Dharmaśāstras noted earlier. As we will see in Section Two, this *modus operandi* of the *Nirṇaya* was to assume a more intense form in the debates of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 4: The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*: the Sarasvat Perspective

The *Nirṇaya* and the *Latikā* present an image of the Sarasvats from outside their own community: they are quasi-Brahmans who, because of their faulty diet, have lost their privileges. How did the Sarasvats view themselves? Which factors dominated their self-representation? These questions are critical, for they provide us with the comparative perspective against which we understand other narratives. The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* – a chronicle encapsulating the history and development of the Goan Sarasvats – was written in Old Marathi in 1721 by an anonymous Sarasvat from Goa; it affords us a few glimpses into the Sarasvats' self-perception. This chapter focuses on some of its important aspects: the crucial phases and episodes in the Sarasvats' history, the differences and discords among the Sarasvats, their relations with non-Sarasvats, and their own response to the controversy over eating fish. In discussing the above, we will also see how the *Konkaṇākhyāna* relates to the previous narratives – particularly to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Nirṇaya*.[90]

A Sarasvat Brahman named Shripad Vyankatesh Wagle edited and published the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* in 1909. He claimed that his edition was based on a very old manuscript (Wagle 1909: 1). Wagle had several specific reasons for publishing the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*: as he explained in his introduction, he hoped the book would assist the Sarasvat

[90] The name of the author is unclear. Yet he states a number of facts about himself: he is one among the many Sarasvat Brahmans in the Sasashti region in Goa; he belongs to the Kauśika gotra. He wrote the treatise in *śake* 1643, on Shriram Navami in the bright fortnight of an auspicious month, near village Shivapur (*uttarārdha* VIII. 118 – 123).

community's unification movement by providing a comprehensive history. The Sarasvat unification movement was in vogue during the early decades of the twentieth century: an effort by a few members of the community, it sought to unite various Sarasvat sub-castes who were bickering with one another and threatening what appeared to these members as the entire community's unity. They felt the problem's urgency: this fragmentation was keeping the community from reaping the socio-economic benefits enjoyed by homogeneous and unified castes (Conlon 1974: 351-365). Wagle was one of these members with a deep commitment to unification. He hoped the book would highlight the views of the wise ancestors regarding the Sarasvat unity (Wagle 1909: 1).

Wagle turned to the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*, for its author had expressed similar concerns two centuries earlier: the Sarasvat community was fractured into several small groups quarreling amongst each other – the Bardeshkars, Kudaldeshkars, Pednemkars, Keloshikars, and Rajapuris. Initially, these groups were simply identified by their geographic locations; eventually, they became independent and rigid groups with their own distinct identity-markers – *gotra*, family deities, and regional affiliation. Subsequent disputes over status, social, and ritual issues led to further rigidity. The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*'s composer wished to acquaint the Sarasvat masses with the reality of their homogenous communal past and to dispel the illusion of the various internal sub-groups. He openly rued: "the great caste of Sarasvats got divided into several groups, and no one thought about the consequences. All stooped to lowness. Had they been united, they would have attained greatness and honor in the world (*uttarārdha* III. 31-33)". Ultimately, he

asserted, there was only one caste of Gauḍa Sarasvat Brahmans; it was unfortunate that people had assumed erroneously that the caste had several subdivisions. He also lamented that these subdivisions often fought amongst themselves out of their false pride and arrogance and that there was hardly any inter-dining and intermarriage between these groups. He hoped his composition would point out the futility of internal dispute. Given the striking similarity between Wagle and the *Koṅkaṇākhyana's* composer's concerns, it is not surprising that Wagle looked to this text as a narrative that could validate his own efforts for unification.

TITLE, CONTENTS, AND SOURCES

The narrative's title consists of two terms: *koṅkaṇa* and *ākhyāna*. Konkan is the name of the coastal strip of western India which includes Goa – the Sarasvat homeland. *Ākhyāna* denotes a tale, story, or legend: usually, this genre contains the narration of either an individual's story or a past event through poetry and prose-commentary. In terms of form, our narrative is a lyrical poem with each verse divided into quarters. It unfolds as a live dialogue between the poet-narrator and an audience member. Members of the audience often intervene, questioning or sharing information with the poet-narrator, who responds by answering or commenting. The text is divided into two parts – *pūrvārdha* (the first half) and *uttarārdha* (the second half): the poet explains that the first half recounts the incidents in the previous *yuga* (*māgila yuga*), while the second treats episodes in the present *yuga* (*hey yuga*). Alternately, the poet often refers to this temporal division by using the term Dvāparayuga for the previous age and the term Kaliyuga for

the present. There are sixteen chapters in all, equally divided between the first and second halves. The *pūrvārdha* recounts the Sarasvats' establishment in Konkan and Goa by Paraśurāma, the development of various regionalized sub-groups, *gotra-pravara*, and the Sarasvats' regional deities. The poet repeatedly underscores that these three elements are interconnected and inseparable from one another. This section also eulogizes and describes the history and significance of various regional gods and goddesses as well as local temples. The *uttarārdha* explains the development of intra-communal differences which eventually split them apart into several mutually opposing factions. The author illustrates how trivial differences exploded and assumed great proportions due to the false pride of these factions' individual members. Lastly, he elaborates on how the interaction between Sarasvats and non-Sarasvats left a significant impact on the former.

What sources does the poet use for his historical narrative? Unlike other Sanskrit narratives, which largely rely on Sanskrit scriptures like the Purāṇas and Dharmaśāstras, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* is remarkable for the variety of its sources. The poet acknowledges that he has derived most of his episodes from information given by old and wise Sarasvat men; he deems his sources reliable and appeals to those who suspect their authenticity to approach these wise men directly. In recounting relatively recent history – such as the Sarasvats' expansion within Goa after their establishment by Paraśurāma, their internal disputes and split into distinct factions, and the mediation of regional kings in resolving these disputes – he cites inscriptions (*śīlālekhā*), copperplates (*tāmrapaṭa*), and royal edicts (*śāsanapaṭa*). For instance, in the fifth chapter of the *pūrvārdha*, the author

identifies various regions in Goa by their ancient names. Based on copperplates issued by Vijayanagar's kings, he states that the town now known as Kuḍavāla was originally Kuśasthalī, mentions that Bāradeśa was known as Bahirdeśī, and so on. He also asserts the authenticity of these sources: "Previously there were kings like Acyutarāya, and Krisṇarāya. Similarly, there was Mādhavarāya. We must regard the copperplates of all these kings authoritative (*pūrvārdha* V. 120, *cf*. V.124)."

In describing events occurring in hoary antiquity, the poet relies on Purāṇas such as the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Bhairavakhaṇḍa*. In accordance with these two types of sources, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* subscribes to both the linear notion of time (where events occur in a straight chronological sequence) and the cyclical notion (evident in the traditional four-*yuga* system): in addition to references to the Dvāpara and the Kali ages, the narrative abounds in calendar-dates (in the *saṃvatsara* and *śaka* calendars). The language is simple and matter-of-fact, lacking figures of speech. The tone is candid and honest – and especially so when describing an interesting anecdote, a piece of community gossip, or admitting to his people's follies. Occasionally, when preaching the virtues of unity against the vices of dissent, the tone becomes didactic. Overall, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* represents a fascinating specimen of popular history. In terms of its subject matter, language, tone, form, and sources, it is distinct from the Sanskrit narratives discussed so far. The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* aims to reach an audience other than the scholarly *śāstris* and *paṇḍits* of the *dharmasabhās* and *brahmasabhās*. The poet himself describes his audience as consisting of both discerning Sarasvat men and the community's ignorant masses

(*pūrvārdha* I.11) The wise among his audience – as we shall see – are well-informed and aware of important scriptures such as the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*; the ignorant masses, however, are unaware of any such scriptures. Nonetheless, both kinds of men are – after all – Sarasvats; as such, the poet claims they need to be reminded of their once-united community's glorious past.

THE *SAHYĀDRIKHAṆḌA* AND THE *KOṄKAṆĀKHYĀNA*

As mentioned earlier, portions of the first half dealing with the Sarasvats' establishment in the morally-superior Dvāpara age cite the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* is the only pre-colonial narrative invoking the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* to validate the Sarasvats' claim to nobility. To accomplish this, it retells the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* account of Parasurama's establishment of the Brahmans: this appears in the first chapter in the voice of an audience member who first tells the tale as he knows it; he then requests the poet-narrator to elaborate upon the community's later history:

> Śri Bhārgavarāma moved the ocean with his fourteen arrows and created a piece of land extending a hundred *yojana*s. The greatness of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* is indeed known to all. The region was called *caudācala* because it was magically created due to the movement (*calana*) appearing in the ocean due to those fourteen (*cauda* in Marathi*)* arrows. Then in his new role, Rāma wished to perform a divine sacrifice. However, he could not find any Sarasvats in south who were capable of performing one. Immediately he went to the northern region and respectfully brought a community of Brahmans along with their family deities. He brought the Kānyakubjas, the Utkalas, the Gauḍas, and the Maithilas. Among them, the Sarasvats were most prominent, as they were appropriate for the task of performing sacrifices. He also chose the righteous ones desiring to obtain sacrificial fees from among the Draviḍas -- the mighty Gurjaras and Mahāraṣtriyas, Karnāṭakas, Āndhras, Malyālas. Apart from these ten-fold

> Brahmans, Bhārgava established many others in a new role, giving them various places (*pūrvārdha* I. 41-49).

It is evident from the above that the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* introduces two major changes to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* account. Departing from that text's ahistoric description of the ten-fold Brahmans, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* inscribes this notion into the Paraśurāma legend. While the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* mentions that Paraśurāma brought Trihotra Brahmans (one of the five Gauḍas) from the north, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* attributes the migration of the entire community (the five Gauḍas and the five Draviḍas) to him. Similarly, whereas the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* mentions that Paraśurāma brought the Trihotra Brahmans into Gomāñcala, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* replaces the ambiguity of the term *Trihotra* with the term *Sarasvat* in order to make explicit the connection between the Sarasvats and the five Gauḍas. Furthermore, it celebrates the Sarasvats' history by extolling their prominence among the Gauḍas; it accords prestige to the five Draviḍas by associating them with Paraśurāma. We may also note that the above account replaces the ambiguous term Madhyadeśaga with the term Mahārāśtra. This reiterates Deshpande's argument (cited earlier in the first chapter): the term Madhyadeśaga was manipulated in order to accommodate Maharashtrian Brahmans.

These two themes – the Sarasvats' aggrandizement and the validation of the Maharashtrian Brahmans' status – reappear in the same chapter. The poet describes members of the Sarasvat caste as Paraśurāma's kin (*svakīya*), honored and established in the heart of Goa by him (*pūrvārdha* I. 52). Just as the text avoided referencing the Trihotra Brahmans, the narrative circumvents the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* reference to deities

from the Trihotra region (whom Paraśurāma is said to have brought into Goa). Instead, it claims that Paraśurāma asked the Sarasvats to fashion idols of metal, stone, wood, or clay, and worship them wholeheartedly.

In the following example, we note a distinct syncretism in the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*: instead of appropriating the Paraśurāma legend exclusively for the Sarasvats' glorification, the text accommodates the description of Paraśurāma's establishment of the Chitpavans and Karhadas. In its account of Konkan's creation, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* cites a verse from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* describing Paraśurāma's creation of the *saptakoṅkaṇāḥ* (seven Konkans) (*Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* VI. 47): these are seven distinct regions along the Konkan coast – Kerala, Tuliṅga, Gaurāṣṭra (the last two are located in the northwest coast of Karnataka), Koṅkaṇa, Karnāṭa (Karnataka), Karahāṭa, and Barbara. All but the final two are clearly locatable. [91] In its commentary to this description, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* identifies the Brahmans in these two regions as Chitpavans and Karhadas; it further explains that Paraśurāma honored them by giving villages and sacred regions to them. However, this is not in line with the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, which does not mention that the residents of these two regions are Chitpavans and Karhadas. Furthermore, nowhere does the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* refer to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* derogatory descriptions of the

[91] Among all these regions, Karhāṭa and Barbara are not clearly identifiable. Karahāṭa is unlikely to be Karhad, the region of the Karhadas in the hinterland, as all other regions in this list are coastal. With regard to Barbara, scholars from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries offered a few speculations. Valavalikar (1945) and Gunjikar (1884) argued that Barbara region was located somewhere near Egypt, the Sahara Dessert, and the Mediterranean Sea. Valavalikar cited ancient Egyptian inscriptions from 1300 BC with the words Barbara and Barbarata. Vishvanath Mandlik (1870), a Chitpavan scholar offered a similar hypothesis by identifying Barbara with a region in north Africa. These hypotheses do not explain why Barbara is mentioned as one of the seven Konkans.

Chitpavans and Karhadas. There are two possible explanations for this: either the poet had access to a different manuscript of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, or he used an oral version. Later we investigate other accounts in the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* which treat Maharashtrian Brahmans with a similarly respectful attitude. Those accounts also suggest that the poet's admiration of these Brahmans is more than just a reflection of his personal syncretism: it reflects the political environment in which he lived.

THE SARASVATS AFTER THE *SAHYĀDRIKHAṆḌA*

The *Latikā* and the *Nirṇaya* delineate a monolithic past of the Sarasvats: their violation of normative vegetarianism cost them their Brahmanical rights. In contrast, the *Koṇkaṇakhyana* presents the Sarasvats' past as a complex amalgam which gradually evolved through distinct affiliations to three factors: regions, family deities, and *gotras*. It chronicles this evolution as a part of history that happened after the episodes described in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. In the first chapter, after a summary of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* account, the listener implores the speaker to elaborate further on the Sarasvats' deities, regions, *gotra-pravara*, condition in the present (Kali) age, and the origin of the sub-groupings (Bardeshkar, Kudaldeshkar, and Pednemkar). Heeding the request, the author praises the listener for his wisdom and reiterates that the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* narrates ancient history – Paraśurāma's gift to the Sarasvats, his departure from Gomāñcala to practice penance, and how the Brahmans stayed in the region because of his order – but it contains no account of events occurring after that. As this is recent history (*alikaḍila vartamāna*), he reasons, it is not to be found in any of its *ślokas* or commentaries. He

assures the listener that the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* recounts the later arrangement of the Sarasvats which one can directly observe in the present age (*pūrvārdha* I.76-80).

In the following chapters, the poet narrates detailed accounts of the Sarasvats' settlement in three major provinces within Goa: Sāsaṣṭī (a region consisting of sixty-six villages), Tisavāḍī (a region of thirty villages), and Bāradeśa (a group of twelve settlements). He identifies these regions in southern Goa, demarcated from the northern part by the Aghashini River. The northern part consists of regions like Peḍanem and Kuḍavāla. He describes the names of villages, prominent *tīrthas*, the deities in these regions, and explains how the Sarasvats of various *gotras* chose to live in certain villages. The poet asserts that the Sarasvat families scattered across Goa obtained their distinct identities from their affiliations to three core factors – *gotra, devatā* (deity), and *kṣetra* (sacred region): Brahmans of particular *gotras* lived in villages that were sacred due to a particular deity's presence. The village's deity was the patron deity of the Sarasvats therein. The poet repeatedly underscores that the three factors are inseparable from one another and that their specific combination remains unique to every Sarasvat family. For instance, Brahmans of the Atri and Bhāradvāja *gotras* settled in Malape; Malape's patron deity was Mūlavīra (*pūrvārdha* V.31-32). The Brahmans in Parule were of the Dhanañjaya, Sāṃkhyāyana, and Bhāradvāja *gotras* and worshipped the deity Ravalanātha (*pūrvārdha* V. 53-53). The significance of these constituent elements of Sarasvat identity is evident in the poet's definition of the true son of the soil: "He is the one who is able to

identify his region, deity, and *gotra*. Without the verification of these three factors, no one accepts him as a Sarasvat (*pūrvārdha* IV. 44)."

The narrative also explains how Sarasvat residents acquired their designations based on their respective regions: Sasashtikars, Bardeshkars, Pednemkars, and Kudaldeshkars. (It is a common practice in Maharashtra and Goa to form family names by adding the suffix *–kar* – which denotes residency – to the name of the family's place of origin.) Gradually, the poet explains, the various Sarasvat groups assumed a distinct identity and used their names to indicate their distinction from one another. The author repeatedly stresses that the groups in these regions branched out from a single root. Eventually, however, these groups forgot their common root and gave precedence to their individual identities (*pūrvārdha* III. 40-41). The author narrates several incidents that caused the expansion of the community in new villages. He defines new villages as those whose history is known and ancient villages as those whose origins are not known (*pūrvārdha* VI.11). He explains how the community expanded by various means: migrating into other villages, annexing villages to their settlement, or cultivating land. For instance, the son of a Sarasvat officer at Mhāḍagaon had a fight with his father and migrated to the Mhāgaṇa village, a land full of *khājanas* (arable pieces of land lying along the coast). There the villagers appointed him as the Kamata (the presiding officer of the *khājanas*). He settled in this village, expanded his family, and worshipped Ravalanātha, the village deity (*pūrvārdha* VI. 7-9). Similarly, a village head of Kelośī extended his rule over Bāndoḍe – a village with a well-known temple – by installing his

own deity in that temple (*pūrvārdha* VI. 11-12). Yet another Sarasvat decided to establish a new village on an auspicious piece of land. He tested the auspiciousness of a place by seeing if a tiger and a lamb could live together therein when tied together: he discovered such a place in a forest. He cultivated the forest and made a village, establishing his family deity there (VI. 16-18). This nuanced depiction of the Sarasvats' regional history and the emphasis on *gotra*, region, and deity as the central criteria of Sarasvat communal identity presents a strikingly different image of Sarasvat self-identity. We conclude that *within* the community, these elements were more significant than those selected by the *Nirṇaya*'s authors based on the Dharmaśāstras – diet, occupation, and asceticism.

CONFLICTS AMONG SARASVATS

How did the various Sarasvat groups that branched out from the original community assume distinct, rigid identities? In other words: when did these groups declare their independence from one another? In the second half of the narrative, the poet vividly describes the incidents which caused conflict among different groups and led to their mutual separation. These incidents indicate the personal and political motivations of the individuals who were instrumental in creating the separated groups. They depict the community's internal dynamics and its members' interpersonal relationships and thoughts. The ultimate goal of these accounts is to enable the audience to critically assess their own behavior and understand the demerits of internal quarrels.

Let us examine some instances that caused the formation of different factions. The first chapter of the second half explains why Pednemkars and Kudaldeshkars

separated: once upon a time, there was a wedding ceremony in a Pednemkar household; various groups – including the Sasashtikars, the Tisvadikars, the Bardeshkars, and the Kudaldeshkars – were invited. When the ritual of *saptapadi* (circumambulating the sacred fire seven times) began, someone asked the bride to be mindful of her clothes while going around the fire: she replied that she knew how to take care of this. Other Sarasvats argued with suspicion, wondering how she could know if it were her first marriage. There was an argument between the Pednemkars and other Sarasvats. The latter felt insulted and left the venue. When someone suggested that the Pednemkars perform *prayaścitta* (expiation) for their insulting behavior, they declined on the grounds that they had not done wrong. The remaining groups ostracized them from the Sarasvat community; this led to their identity as a separate caste (*uttarārdha* I. 1 – 20).

The poet narrates another story: how the Kudaldeshkars were separated from the Sarasvat community and formed an independent group. During the reign of the king of Vijayanagar, Venṭama was the army chief in the Kuḍavāla (Kudal) region. Around the same time, the Sarasvat community had ostracized a Brahman from Kudval for demanding unreasonable honor at a local wedding. This Brahman – named Māīṇakara – had asked for the honor of foot-worship at the wedding, although he was not worthy. When Māīṇakara persisted, the Sarasvats ostracized him. No one invited him to have a meal in the *śrāddha* ceremony, nor did anyone accept any food or water from him. Even when his daughter reached a marriageable age, the members of his community ridiculed and insulted him, refusing to accept his daughter as their wife and daughter-in-law. When

Venṭama came to know this, he demanded Māīṇakara's daughter be married to him: it was his prerogative to marry banished girls. Māīṇakara agreed out of fear; however, he planned a stratagem with his close relative – Devalīkara (from Devalī) – to attack and kill Venṭama. When Venṭama reached Māīṇakara's household, Devalīkara attacked him. Unfortunately, Māīṇakara's daughter was caught in between and was accidentally killed. The coup was exposed and the caste-members enraged. They ostracized Māīṇakara again with more stringent rules. When Devalīkara wished to arrange for a *prāyaścitta* for Māīṇakara he too was banished. Ostracized in this manner, the members among the Kudaldeshkars formed an independent community (*uttarārdha* VI. 29 – 72). The poet claims to have verified this from the Bardeshkars, the feudal lords of Kuḍavāla, and the Mānjarḍekaras, the prominent residents of the Kuḍavāla. He also claims to have asked three senior members of the Kudaldeshkar community who agreed that these incidents had indeed taken place. The poet concludes by criticizing the individuals in these incidents for considering themselves to be above the caste and for falling prey to their arrogance and pride. He accuses them of forgetting their roots and stooping to low levels by separating themselves from the caste.

THE SARASVATS AND THE MAHARASHTRIAN BRAHMANS

The *Konkaṇākhyāna* elaborates upon not only the Sarasvat community's inner dynamics but also tells various tales concerning the Sarasvats' interaction with other communities in Goa. Its author aims to explain how their relations with these

communities influenced their development and how these other communities viewed and understood them. We noted earlier the poet's respectful and syncretistic view towards Maharashtrian Brahmans in the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*'s adaptation of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. Such a view may have been a result of his tolerant disposition, evident elsewhere in his criticism of arrogant and foolish men who live in their small worlds without being able to appreciate the different ways of others, rejoicing in the pain of others and languishing in their progress (*uttarārdha* VII. 67-68). Therefore, unlike the discourse in the *Nirṇaya* and the *Latikā* directed against the Sarasvats, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* depicts Goa as a space of harmonious co-existence between Sarasvats and Maharashtrian Brahmans, particularly the Karhadas. The Karhadas of Goa had enjoyed the patronage of the Kadamba kings in the twelfth century, and later received that of the Vijayanagar king Madhava in the fourteenth century. The Karhadas also worshipped various deities in Goa as their patron or family-deities (Athalye 1947: 16). As mentioned in the first chapter, instances of conflict between Karhadas and Sarasvats were not uncommon. The *Koṅkaṇakhyāna*, however, focuses on their congenial relationship. It describes how intermarriages between members of these two groups were not uncommon and how the Karhadas accepted the Sarasvats' family deities as their own after intermarrying with them (*uttarārdha* VII. 8). Similarly, Sarasvats who married Karhadas embraced the gods of the Karhadas, while continuing to worship their previous gods (VII. 9-10).

The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* further states that, in addition to the Karhadas, the Sarasvats intermarried with other minor Brahman groups in the region such as the Padyes and the

Kramavantas; furthermore, both their sons and daughters wed the Karhadas and these Brahman communities. The narrative describes an interesting practice among couples consisting of Sarasvat wives and husbands from other Brahman castes: the son of such a couple would go to his maternal side, inherit property from both sides, and maintain either his paternal family name or combine both paternal and maternal family names (*uttarārdha* VII. 32-35, 39-41). Instances when a non-Sarasvat son-in-law forsook his father's side and joined his father-in-law were common. The poet narrates the story of a Karhada Brahman who married the daughter of a Sarasvat Brahman and expanded his father-in-law's property (*uttarārdha* VII. 45-46). In a surprising revelation, he asserts that intermarriages between the Gauḍas and the Draviḍas are not uncommon in Goa nor in the Gauḍa country. He also claims to have faithfully reported this practice based on his own observation (*uttarārdha* VII. 59).

This description of intermarriage between the Sarasvats and Karhadas and between the Gauḍas and Draviḍas is significant. If the poet's claim is true, it presents a complete reversal of the events that transpired in the Maratha region. In the previous chapter, we discussed how a stark distinction between the *pañcagauḍas* and the *pañcadraviḍas* was strictly maintained in the reign of the Peshvas. Intermarriage and inter-dining between the Sarasvats and the Maharashtrian Brahmans in the Maratha country were rare. The description in the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*, however, does suggest that in Goa – still largely under Portuguese rule and away from the Peshva's dominion in the early eighteenth century, the time of this text's composition – this distinction was

insignificant. The Sarasvats and Karhadas recognized each other's ritual status to be equal by intermarrying; they may also have inter-dined. Clearly, the power-relation between these two communities varied regionally; so too did the importance of the Gauḍa/Draviḍa distinction. Karhadas who claimed to be superior to Sarasvats in the Maratha country were unable to do the same in Goa, due to the latter's dominant socio-economic position. The interaction between Karhadas and Sarasvats in Goa versus the same interaction in Maharashtra illustrates how the hierarchy of ritual purity was embedded within regional configurations of power.

In a chapter dealing with the designation Śeṇavī, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* suggests a profound change in the power-relation between the Sarasvats and Maharashtrian Brahmans when the former entered the Maratha dominion. An audience member poses a question to the poet-narrator: why do those outside the Sarasvat community refer to it by the by the term Śeṇavī, when the name is hardly used in Goa? The poet-narrator explains: Goa was under the reign of the Vijayanagar kings until the *mleccha* king (the Adil Shah of Bijapur) seized northern and southern Konkan. Residents from both these kingdoms started to intermingle. Scribes from the Sarasvat community came forward to describe their region (*deśavṛttānta*) to others. The poet explains that Śeṇavī was the titular designation of those Sarasvats who pursued the scribal profession. He claims that this name was derived from Sanskrit and was used conventionally (*uttarārdha* IV. 28). When others asked the Śeṇavīs to narrate their caste's history, they replied that they were from

the Kuḍathale (Kuśasthalī) region. Since then, the Sarasvats came to be known in the *mleccha* country as Kuḍathale (*uttarārdha* IV. 6-9).

The poet further narrates an episode indicating how the Śeṇavīs were subjected to scrutiny and a mistaken identity when the Maratha dominion spread towards south Konkan and Goa. One-hundred and sixty-five years after the reign of the *mleccha* king, Chatrapati Shivaji came to rule Konkan at an auspicious time. In *śake* 1565 (1643 CE), Shivaji visited Kudal (a town in the Sindhudurg district); he also visited Rajapur (the trading port in Ratnagiri). During his visit to Rajapur he met scribes whom he mistakenly thought were Maharashtrian Brahmans. The scribes informed him that they were Śeṇavī. Again in Kudal and Salshi, Shivaji only came across Śeṇavīs. The king and the Marathas erroneously believed this to be a distinct caste. Even when the wise Maharashtra Brahmans asked the Śeṇavīs various questions about their community, none of them were able to cite the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and assert their identity as Sarasvats. Since that time, in the Maratha region, the entire community of Sarasvats came to be identified as Śeṇavī (*uttarārdha* IV. 11-18). The poet further adds that in the regions where the *mleccha* king ruled – as well as in Goa – the Sarasvats were popularly called by the name Koṅkaṇe (residents of Konkan). [92]

In the same chapter, the author repeats the story of the meeting between Shivaji and the Śeṇavīs, adding significant details. When the Maharashtrian Brahmans met the

[92] The narrative mentions other titles among the Sarasvats. For instance, when the region was under the control of Kannada kings the names Hegaḍe and Pai came into existence. The Kannadigas called the village chief Hegade, while the name Pai was commonly used in Konkan as the abbreviation of the honorific suffix appaiyyā such as in the names Rāmappaiyyā or Krisnappaiyyā (*uttarārdha* IV. 22-24).

Śeṇavīs they inquired about their history, *dharma*, conduct, *gotras* and *pravaras*. They also asked if the Śeṇavīs were entitled to the *ṣaṭkarma* and carried out the sixteen *saṃskāras* that were a Brahman's duty. Unaware of their history, the Śeṇavīs simply replied that they were Brahmans from Goa, members of three *gotras* and entitled to recite the Gāyatrī *mantra*. The Maharashtrian Brahmans noticed other Sarasvat groups, such as the Pednemkars and Bardeshkars, and asked the Śeṇavīs to describe them. The Śeṇavīs could not provide an appropriate answer: they were very confused and barely knew their own history. They refused to acknowledge these other groups as members of their community because they were rivals at present. The Maharashtrian Brahmans asked them various other questions and raised doubts; the Śeṇavīs were unable to convince them. Noting this utter confusion, the Maharashtrian Brahmans concluded that Śeṇavī was a community different from the Brahman community. They remained unaware of the larger community of Sarasvats and other small groups that were part of this community. This misunderstanding prevailed for a few years as none sought to clear it. Later, a few learned Śeṇavīs endowed with *vṛtti*s in the Konkan region went to Shivaji's capital at Raigadh. Shivaji asked Gāgābhaṭṭa questions regarding the Śeṇavīs' status. Gāgābhaṭṭa affirmed that they were Brahmans entitled to the Vedic duties. After the Sarasvats' status was clearly understood in the royal court, it became well-known in the outside world as well (*uttarārdha* IV. 91 – 109). The poet concludes by reiterating the importance of knowing one's history: his community should learn from such incidents and narrate their glorious past instead of babbling like fools (*uttarārdha* IV. 112-113).

The account's most striking feature is its close affinity to the *Nirṇaya*'s account: despite their different details, the similarities in the key motifs are glaring. Let us recall that the *Nirṇaya* describes Shivaji's curiosity about the "Śyenavī" community and his appointment of his court's eminent scholars to investigate their *dharma*. It mentions Gāgābhaṭṭa as the chief of this council, which comprised other prominent authorities. The council considered an account from the *Padmapurāṇa* describing the Śyenavīs' consumption of *śyena* (hawk) to weather a drought and their subsequent loss of three out of the total six Brahmanical rights. The council also consulted the Dharmaśāstras and concluded that they were not Brahmans but *Vaiśyas*: their mode of occupation suited that of the *Vaiśyas*. As symbols of royal and religious authority, Shivaji and the council of prominent scholars in the *Nirṇaya* illustrate the power hierarchy between Sarasvats and Maharashtrian Brahmans. The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* corroborates this symbolism through various overlapping motifs: the exalted status of Shivaji as a noble king, his supposed ignorance of the Śeṇavīs, his consultation with scholars at his court, the questions raised over the Śeṇavīs' Brahmanical status, Gāgābhaṭṭa as the highest Brahmanical authority, and the privileged position of the Maharashtrian Brahmans in deciding the Śeṇavīs' status. The poet's respect for Shivaji and the Maharashtrian Brahmans is evident in his description of Shivaji's entry into Konkan as auspicious and that of the latter as *vicakṣaṇa* (sagacious) (*uttarārdha* VII. 16). The previous chapter discussed ways in which Shivaji patronized temples and communities in Goa to achieve an iconic status as a

noble Hindu king. Therefore, the poet's embarrassment at the Śeṇavīs' inability to adequately explain their identity to the king and his Brahmans is quite palpable.

Despite their shared assumption of the hierarchy between the Śeṇavīs and the Maharashtrian Brahmans, the *Nirṇaya* and the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* depart from each other. While the *Nirṇaya* emphasizes Sarasvats' diet and occupation as the criteria of Brahmanhood, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* mentions only the *ṣaṭkarma* and the privilege to chant the Gāyatri *mantra*. The most radical difference, however, is evident in the end verdict regarding the Śeṇavīs' Brahmanical status. While *the Nirṇaya* rejects their Brahmanhood, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* presents an inversion of that verdict: it asserts the success of the Śeṇavīs in convincing Gāgābhaṭṭa of their Brahmanhood and obtaining its ultimate acknowledgement from Shivaji.

How can we explain this? Their similarity suggests that there is a grain of truth in the reported encounter between the Maharashtrian Brahmans and Sarasvats. These two narratives draw upon it and appropriate it according to their different biases. Alternately, one of these narratives follows the other and seeks to challenge its discourse. Their mutually contentious conclusions warrant their acceptance as authentic accounts. At best, we can consider them as narrative-representations of an incident that may have been true.

CONTROVERSY REGARDING CONSUMING FISH

The narratives considered so far demonstrate that the consumption of meat was at the heart of the non-Sarasvats' diatribe. The *Latikā* presents the consumption of fish as the main cause of the Sarasvats' loss of three Brahmanical rights. The *Nirṇaya* alleges

that they ate hawks during a drought and refuses to acknowledge their Brahmanical status as a result of the broken vegetarianism. Despite its high accolades for the Trihotra-Sarasvat Brahmans, the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* implies the controversial aspect of this practice by terming it their *deśadoṣa*. The previous chapter also discussed how the consumption of fish became the chief marker of the Sarasvats' ritual unfitness, precluding their inter-dining with the Maharashtrian Brahmans.

How did the Sarasvats themselves view this practice? The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* indicates that among the Sarasvats, too, it was a contentious matter and led to a rift within the community. The fifth and sixth chapters of the *uttarārdha* contain intricate accounts of disputes among various groups of Sarasvat Brahmans. Here we will focus on certain relevant parts. One of these accounts mentions two groups of Sarasvats: the first group was established in Goa by Paraśurāma in the Dvāpara age; the second group migrated into Goa from the Gauḍa country. The leader of this second group was Deva Śarmā, a Gauda Brahman of the Vatsa gotra. He established the temple of Māṅgīśa, the local manifestation of Śiva.[93] When Deva Śarmā settled in Goa, his brother-in-law Lomeśa Śarmā and his nephew followed him. These three men came to be collectively known as the Trivarga (triad). The Trivarga initially resided in Kelośī and Kuśasthalī before making them their permanent homes. To extend their lineage, they got married and had abundant sons and daughters (*uttarārdha* V. 90-92). In spite of their residence in the southern part of the Vindhyas, these three men continued to practice the customs of the

[93] The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* also mentions this.

Gauḍa country and therefore degraded themselves (*uttarārdha* V. 100). The reference here is to the practice of consuming meat in general and fish in particular, considered sinful according to the rule which states that eating meat is only acceptable north of the Vindhyas. However, the account adds, the first Sarasvat settlers whom Paraśurāma had established in the region were not sinful, as their conduct was in conformity to Paraśurāma's order (V. 101).[94] The Brahmans of these two groups neither intermingled nor intermarried: the meat-consuming Trivarga group was impure, according to the other group.

There was a prominent group among the group of "pure" Brahmans: collectively termed the Aṣṭagrāmī, they were the residents of eight villages in the Sāṣṭī province – Mahāda, Verṇem, Bāṇāvalī, Kuḍatarī, Śaṃkhāvalī, Rāyacūra, Loṭalī, and Nāgavem (*uttarārdha* V. 8-9). After some initial hesitation, the Aṣṭagrāmī group welcomed and accepted members of the Trivarga group through intermarriage. The Trivarga group gave up the practice of consuming fish and was absolved of its once-degraded status (*uttarārdha* V. 111). Later, however, the Trivarga and Aṣṭagrāmī groups engaged in a mutual dispute over their regional administration rights. The local rulers had given the privilege of local administration to the Aṣṭagrāmī group; the Trivarga group usurped this honor and displaced the Aṣṭagrāmīs, giving rise to a bitter conflict.

[94] The meaning of this verse is not very clear. Two interpretations are likely: either Paraśurāma instructed them not to consume meat, or even if they consumed meat, it was not a sin, as the great Paraśurāma had established them.

A local king summoned these groups in order to resolve their dispute and asked them to recount their respective histories: the Aṣṭagrāmī group reiterated that it belonged to the Gauḍa Brahmans established in Goa by Paraśurāma and asserted that it had received honors and privileges from local kings since time immemorial. They added that the Trivarga group arrived in Goa recently and lacked kinship ties with the region's indigenous Brahmans. It also alleged that the Trivarga group sinned when it continued to eat fish after its migration from the Gauḍa country. When the Aṣṭagrāmī group established marital ties with the Trivarga group, the latter was able to wash off this sin. The Aṣṭagrāmī group argued that had they not accepted the Trivarga group, this sin would persist; they leveled various other allegations against the Trivarga. Hearing these arguments, the king ruled in favor of the Aṣṭagrāmī group and ordered the Trivarga group to reconcile (Wagle 1909: 66-69).

This interaction between two waves of Sarasvat settlers is significant: it counters the monolithic concept that the entire community accepted the practice of eating meat. Contrary to this non-Sarasvat belief, different groups within the Sarasvat community held varying attitudes. Power struggles between different groups led to the emergence of a hierarchy of purity based on this custom. The struggle between the Trivarga and the Aṣṭagrāmī groups was – as the above indicates - basically about securing privileges from local kings. These groups, particularly the Aṣṭagrāmi group, staked their claims to these privileges through their purity: those who did not eat flesh were purer and superior to those who did. This discourse of purity was based on claims to greater antiquity and

nativity. The Aṣṭagrāmi group claimed to be free of the sin of consuming meat because it had older antecedents and was closely associated with Paraśurāma. By corollary, it insulted the Trivarga group as newcomers lacking a connection to Paraśurāma; furthermore, they alleged that as recent migrants, the Trivarga continued to adhere to their native – but no longer appropriate - practices. Patronizingly, this "older" group argued that the "new" Sarasvats became pure only when the former deemed that it was so through intermarriage. The theoretical axiom prohibiting the consumption of meat south of the Vindhyas underlay the arguments of this "older" group; it also formed the base of the anti-Sarasvat tirade in the Maratha country: the same adage was invoked in a structurally similar rivalry over patronage between "older" and "newer" Goan Sarasvats.

CONCLUSION

As the only pre-colonial narrative written by the Sarasvats, the significance of the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* is immense. A comprehensive chronicle, it depicts Sarasvats' nuanced world and portrays the variously-expressed Sarasvat self-identity. This portrayal counters the essentialist and simplistic image of the Sarasvats in the *Nirṇyaya* and *Latikā*. As if responding to these derogatory accounts, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* evinces the first intimations of how early-eighteenth century Sarasvats called upon the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* to assert their claims to an exalted past. The narrative retells the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* account but introduces elements indicative of its author's desire to forge stronger links between the Sarasvats and their ancestors, whom Paraśurāma had introduced into Goa. By avoiding the term Trihotra Brahmans, claiming that Paraśurāma brought the Sarasvats

into Goa, and asserting that they are his kin, the text strives to claim an *unambiguously* noble past.

In a parallel attempt, it portrays the Sarasvats' later development as an uninterrupted progression of their history which had begun with their establishment in Goa in the previous *yuga*. If the sacred region of Goa and Paraśurāma are the chief hallmarks of the Sarasvats' antiquity, their later history evolves through various permutations of three elements: affiliations to a particular region, to that region's deity, and to particular *gotras* and *pravaras.* These three elements recognize the multiple intra-communal distinctions, while still providing a cohesive and all-embracing identity. The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* highlights another significant aspect regarding the Sarasvats: while other narratives portrayed the consumption of meat as the most radical point of difference between the Sarasvats and Maharashtrian Brahmans, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* indicates how the Sarasvats themselves were divided over this custom. Its account of the Trivarga and Aṣṭagrāmī groups reveals that a hierarchy of purity based on this practice existed *within* the Saravat community. Just as in the Maratha region, this hierarchy was created in the context of disputes over patronage.

Despite its Sarasvat-centric approach, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* acknowledges the high status of the Maharashtrian Brahmans, suggesting that the poet was well aware of the power differential between the Sarasvats and the Maratha state. The narrative was written in 1721, well after Shivaji's foray into south Konkan and Goa and his subsequent patronage to the Sarasvats and their temples during the tumultuous Portuguese rule.

Furthermore, the Sarasvats' migration into the Maratha region was largely stable during the early eighteenth century. The narrative reflects the Maratha state's growing influence and the methods by which Sarasvats sought the validation of their status from Maratha kings and Brahmanical authorities. The tale of the Śeṇavīs' switch from ambiguity to assertiveness regarding their identity in the context of their engagement with Shivaji and the Maharashtrian Brahmans illustrates this perfectly: this is additionally important, as it presents an alternate version of a similar episode recounted in the *Nirṇaya*. It is difficult to pinpoint which of these two narratives came first or which is written as a response. However, both these narratives represent – according to their different perspectives – the shared reality of a differential power-relation between the Sarasvats and the Maratha state within which they operated. The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna's* description of Maharashtrian Brahman communities is a less-direct acknowledgement of their higher political power. In its version of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa's* account, it attributes to Paraśurāma the establishment of the *pañcadraviḍas*, Chitpavans, and Karhadas; similarly, it endorses intermarriage between the *pañcagauḍas* and *pañcadraviḍas* in Goa, departing from the dominant view, which strictly prohibited this practice.

Despite its comprehensive scope, we cannot consider the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* as representing the entire gamut of Sarasvat identity: it only makes a passing reference to the community's sectarian affiliations. The Sarasvats were known to follow two major sectarian traditions – Smārta and Vaiṣṇava – which often engaged in bitter disputes with one another. The narrative only mentions in passing the institutions of *maṭha* and

guruparamparā – prominent features of the community since at least the seventeenth century (Conlon 1977; Keni 2003). Moreover, as we shall see in the final chapter, neither did all Sarasvats – particularly during the colonial period – share the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*'s respect for Maharashtrian Brahmans, nor did they consider it to be an authoritative account of their own history.

PART II: COLONIAL MAHARASHTRA

Introduction to Part II

The last decades of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a major political upheaval in Maharashtra: the Peshva fought the British, a tough adversary, in a series of battles. Three Anglo-Maratha wars were fought between the 1790s and 1818; of these, the Marathas won the first battle and the British won the last two. In the final battle in 1818, the British dealt a final blow to the debilitated Maratha state; this resulted in the complete surrender of the Maratha confederacy by Peshva Baji Rao II (1775-1851), the last Peshva. The British annexed the Maratha territory in 1818, commencing various developments in western Maharashtra; the coastal city of Bombay stood at the epicenter of these shifts.

Following the collapse of the Peshva government, a large number of communities – including the Brahman community (now rendered jobless) – migrated to Bombay. As a chief center of trade and British administration, the city was home to an eclectic mix of communities that had started migrating there since the early eighteenth century. The city was much more than *just* cosmopolitan. Bombay was one of the first cities in colonial India to experience the onset of modernity in administration, legislation, trade, communication networks, industrialization, and urbanization by the mid-eighteenth century: there were a number of technological developments in transportation and communication; the emergence of various kinds of public associations – formed along common bonds of language, ethnicity, profession, and caste – characterized the social sphere; a distinct public domain was emerging through various platforms available for the exchange of ideas between these groups; most importantly, Bombay was one of the few

cities witnessing the introduction of the Western education that brought about a profound social change in western Maharashtra. The paradigm of material and social progress had slowly started to percolate from the epicenter of this city into the nearby hinterland regions such as Poona from the third decade of the nineteenth century onward.

In what ways did the various Brahman communities living in the city participate in this dynamic environment? What ramifications did the changing society have for their caste- identities? Were they able to set aside previous differences and respond to the new order in unison; or, unable to do so, did they continue the legacy of their deep-seated rivalries? If they did engage in disputes, in what ways were these disputes similar/dissimilar to those in the pre-colonial era? This section will attempt to answer these questions. However, the answers are not straightforward: as we shall see in the following, the Brahman class split up along various lines of ideologies and secular goal – each of these distinct groups responded uniquely to the new order. Accordingly, there were *multiple* Brahman identities impinging upon one another, adding different dimensions to intra-Brahmanical negotiations. Before we dwell upon the set of identities relevant to this project, an in-depth review of the specific conditions that led to the creation of these distinct factions within the Brahman class is in order.

First we consider the changes in the educational system. Undoubtedly, the colonial education system set in motion a process of enormous transformation in the religious, social, and cultural spheres; debate over this triggered conflicts among Brahmans. Ravinder Kumar's extensive analysis (1968) portrays ways in which deliberate educational policies led to the emergence of two distinct ideologies among

Brahmans: the liberalist/reformist and the orthodox. In the early years of the nineteenth century, the colonial administration – inspired by utilitarian ideals – deemed Western education as an effective means to accomplish two goals: first, to propagate Western ideals and values in order to address what they perceived as the problems of social backwardness and the inability of the indigenous elite to mediate between the masses and the government; second, to develop a class of educated elite that would operate at various levels of state administration and endorse the British rule (Kumar 1968a: 95). Under the directive of Mountstuart Elphinstone – the first Governor of Bombay from 1819 to 1827 – the policy to introduce Western education was implemented by opening English schools and colleges (Kumar 1968a: 95). The steady enrollment of Brahmans in these institutions started after the collapse of the Peshva government in 1818. Unemployed skilled literati in search of employment gravitated towards Bombay and Poona. While the new education policy retained the traditional knowledge of the Sanskrit scriptures in a few institutions, it gradually placed more emphasis on the instruction of utilitarian disciplines including math, science and law. This enterprise of the government paid off with the emergence of a new, liberal generation of Western-educated Brahmans after the 1850s. This was the first generation of liberal Brahmans – the "new Brahmans" as Kumar terms them – that took up employment opportunities in the state administration and other professional careers in law, science, and literature, forsaking their traditional religious vocations. These Brahmans represented the new both in their professions and their ideas: they believed in rationalism as the basis of ethical thought; they were convinced that social progress was the natural right of every individual; they believed that a scientific-

rational view was conducive to the material progress of the society; they had faith in the inseparability of material and social progress. Through Western methods of inquiry and criticism they were keen to reassess what they saw as the spiritual and material degeneration of contemporary Hindu society. Eager to counter the existing religious beliefs and practices with the newly-learnt ideals of egalitarianism and social justice, they differed remarkably from their predecessors. In the years to follow, these new Brahmans were to play a key role in gradually bringing about various social reforms by conjoining their efforts to a political movement that eventually became an all-India nationalist movement. Prior to the era when confrontations with the colonial government and the nationalists became intense around 1890s, these liberal-reformist Brahmans had to confront a powerful group at home.

In contrast to the Brahmans who turned to Western education, the majority of Brahmans – consisting of *śāstris* and *paṇḍits* – insisted on traditional Sanskritic learning and steadfastly maintained their allegiance to the traditional forms of institutions, norms, and practices; for want of a better term, Ravinder Kumar terms these the "orthodox" Brahmans. The education policy of the state had a far-reaching impact on them too, particularly with regard to the institution of Dakṣiṇā (donation) initiated in the Peshva regime. It was the richest and the most popular institution among Brahmans, as it aimed at the preservation of Brahmanical tradition and learning by patronizing erudite Brahmans. Those Brahmans in general (and the Chitpavans in particular) who were able to demonstrate a proficiency in sacred texts and traditional sciences before a committee of *śāstri*s and *paṇḍits* were given handsome prizes in cash or kind. While the state

provided Brahman scholars this most prestigious endorsement of their learning and acknowledged Brahmanical supremacy, Brahmans returned the favor by extending unconditional support to the political authority of the Peshvas. In short, the Dakṣiṇā was the symbol of an informal alliance between the state and the Brahmans (Kumar 1968a: 102).

After the collapse of the Peshva rule, the fate of the Dakṣiṇā hung in limbo. In spite of his bias against the institution of caste and the hegemony of Brahmans, Mountstuart Elphinstone was acutely aware of the significance of this privileged group in the socio-religious sphere of Maharashtra. Therefore, instead of openly challenging this class by disrupting their traditional source of support, the Governor decided to retain the basic function of the Dakṣiṇā. Simultaneously, however, he appropriated the fund to propagate Western education by gradually diverting a portion of it to reward Brahmans excelling in subjects such as mathematics and law in addition to those demonstrating proficiency in Sanskritic learning. In doing so, his motive was to not only gradually wean Brahmans off their traditional learning and encourage them to learn the Western sciences, but more importantly to win the loyalty of this most influential group by presenting the government as its primary benefactor. Elphinstone's plan was initially successful: the Brahmans indeed looked upon the scheme as a reward for erudition and saw the government as a supporter of Brahmans and Brahmanical lore (Kumar 1968a: 98-101).

In the 1830s the British officials felt that the scholarly competence of Brahmans who availed themselves of the Dakṣiṇā was far below expectation. Moreover, they had the impression that the funds were being used primarily to strengthen the Brahmans'

proclivity towards traditional values instead of swaying them over to the Western forms of learning. The functioning of the selection committee also appeared shrouded in corruption and favoritism (Kumar 1968a: 101). As a corrective measure, the officials revoked the committee and made the eligibility for the Dakṣiṇā more stringent in 1834. In 1836, the government decided to not allot any additional Dakṣiṇā fellowships and gradually reduce the existing prize amount. The move was immediately met with bitter protests from the orthodox Brahmans of Poona, who petitioned the government to revoke its decision. They argued that the Dakṣiṇā encouraged the study of the Vedas and Śāstras which helped build the foundation of Hindu society and provided an ideological framework for both the religious and secular pursuits of Hindus (Kumar 1968a: 102). The government paid no heed to this demand and continued to weaken the Dakṣiṇā while retaining the policy of encouraging western learning among the Brahmans.

In the following decades, the bourgeois class of the new Brahmans frequently clashed with the orthodox Brahmans. In the 1850s they openly challenged the orthodox by imploring the government to expand the scope of eligibility for the Dakṣiṇā to encompass works in Marathi, English, and Prakrit as well as to include individuals from non-Brahman castes. The underlying logic of their argument was that the ideals for which the Dakṣiṇā was initiated in the Peshva period were too arcane to accommodate the new values for social progress and that the intellectual horizon of Brahmans was ready to embrace social changes (Kumar 1968a: 104).

The orthodox Brahmans found themselves in an awkward position due to the stance of the liberal Brahmans and the British government. Although numerically greater

than their liberal counterparts, they could do little to prevent the government from drastically reducing the amount of the Dakṣiṇā (the amount had gone down from Rs. 28,000 in 1839 to Rs. 12,000 in 1857) and from eventually incorporating it entirely in the Education Department (Kumar 1968a:107). The response of the orthodox class was indicative of their weakened position under the new regime; this constrasted sharply with their dominance in the religious and social institutions of the previous era such as the caste-assemblies mediating between the state and individual Brahman members (Kumar 1968a:107). With the diminishing support from the British government, the orthodox were reduced to a relatively lower standing than the liberals.

The above review highlights the ways in which negotiations with the new government became essential for both contending groups to secure their respective ideological and financial objectives. The relationship of the orthodox class with the government was complex: they could not fully reconcile themselves to the state policies that directly affected their control over society. On the other hand, they were left with little choice but to depend on the state for patronage and confirmation of their societal status. For the liberals, the support of the government was crucial for their own educational and vocational development. More importantly, they were keen to establish themselves as mediators between the government and the masses at the legislative level; hence, it was important for them to weaken the hold of the orthodox over society. The liberals began to accomplish this goal through the authority of the government, which ultimately tipped the scales in their favor.

Brahman Castes among the Liberals and the Orthodox

So far, we have seen how the colonial education policy was instrumental in the creation of two factions within the general Brahman class. What was the response of distinct Brahman *castes* within these two groups to the transforming world around them? For answers, we must turn to the specific ways in which prominent Brahman castes engaged with developments in educational, commercial, civic, literary, and religious domains. While emphasizing further differences between the orthodox and secular-liberal ideologies, historians have discussed the dynamic roles of Brahmans in these domains: they functioned as elites, intellectuals, reformers, and traditionalists, alongside members of other communities. As much as these studies have focused on the various roles of Brahmans, they have only given a cursory mention to the castes of these Brahmans. There have been few attempts to understand the extent to which concerns of caste were central to the Brahmans' mutual negotiations in the above fields. Yet, by paying careful attention to the Brahmans' castes as mentioned in some of these studies, we will be able to draw certain significant conclusions in this regard.

We will start by looking at the presence of liberal Brahmans in secular and professional activities. If the emergence of a public domain is one of the features of modernity, Bombay was well on its way to it by the early decades of the nineteenth century. The public sphere in the city was thriving with the formation of numerous public associations based on caste, status, religion, education, commerce, and civic activities, associations that were to play an important role in the development of nationalism in the 1890s (Masselos 1970). Associations with overtly secular and liberal goals dominated

this public culture; Brahmans along with members of diverse castes and religions were very much a part of it. Apart from the Christian, Konkani Muslim, Bohra, Surti Bania, Parsi, and Gujarati communities, the Maharashtrian community was mainly represented by the Sarasvats and Sonars or Daivajna Brahmans. Members of these two communities had migrated to the city in the late eighteenth century and had developed corporate affiliations with other trading groups. With regard to finances, Jagannath Shankershet – a famous philanthropist and educationist from the Daivajna Brahman community – was one of the few Maharashtrian bankers among the predominantly non-Maharashtrian bankers from the Gujarati, Parsi, and Marwari communities (Masselos 1970: 13-15). After Bombay became the administrative center of the Bombay Presidency, professional groups of literate Brahmans were on the rise, eager to earn their living by working in the state administration. The most prominent members of these groups came from the Chitpavan and Karhada communities to whom the prospect of securing a government job seemed appealing after a loss of their livelihood in the Maratha government. Thus, as early as the 1830s, scores of Chitpavans and Karhadas – along with the scribal community of Prabhus – worked as agents, clerks, translators, and interpreters of English in the state administration.

In the late 1840s and the early 1850s, recent college graduates from the Chitpavan, Karhada, and Sarasvat communities – along with other high-caste Hindus – founded associations such as the Students' Scientific and Literary Society to conduct regular discussions of social, religious, scientific, and educational topics in English. Some of the leading members of the Society later founded an association named the

Paramahansa Mandali with the objectives of opposing the institution of caste and bringing about social reforms. Similarly, leading professionals and former Bombay University alumni from the Chitpavan, Karhada, and Sarasvat castes also started organizations such as the Prarthana Samaj to oppose orthodoxy and encourage social reforms such as the abolishment of the caste-system, raising age of consent for marriage, and permitting widow remarriage (Masselos 1970: 27). Similarly, in the development of the urban sphere in western India, Chitpavan, Sarasvat, and Karhada communities – alongside those from the non-Maharashtrian communities – participated in the financial, legislative, and municipal affairs of the city (Dobbin 1970).

Although the triad of the Chitpavans, Karhadas, and Sarasvats was more prominent in general than other Brahman groups, within that triad the Chitpavans were the most prominent. Zelliott's study (1982) of the Maharashtrian intellectuals' contribution to social change notes that the Chitpavans were the largest community in the intellectual and liberal class emerging in Bombay. They were the quickest to sense employment opportunities in the new regime and, accordingly, also the most enthusiastic to go to colleges and universities for Western-style learning. Soon they occupied a majority of the administrative positions and undertook the bulk of activities for the development of the Marathi literary sphere from the 1830s until the 1860s (Zelliot 1982: 32-33). Gordon Johnson attributes the dominance of the Chitpavans to their already-superior status in society arising from their kinship with the Chitpavan-Peshvas, (Johnson 1970: 99-101). Zelliot's description of the activities of Brahmans from other castes also suggests that in spite of their numerical strength, during the 1840s and 1850s the

Chitpavan liberals functioned hand-in-hand with like-minded intellectuals from the Karhada and Sarasvat communities. The latter joined the Chitpavans in the pursuit of Western education in premier institutions such as the Elphinstone College of Bombay and engaged in collaborative efforts in the professional, political, and social fields to bring about progress in society. Some of the most prominent and successful college graduates in this group included eminent Chitpavan scholars like V.N. Mandlik and M.G Ranade. Both shared a common ideology concerning social reform with Sarasvats such as Bhau Daji, the very first indigenous physician in the city, R.G. Bhandarkar, a great Sanskritist, and K.T Telang, the well-known Barrister of Law and Indologist (Zelliot 1982: 63).

From the above discussion it is evident that members from the Chitpavan, Karhada, and Sarasvat castes were brought together by the shared ideology of secular and social progress; they were able to pursue their goals individually or collectively within the framework of various organizations. When engaged in collaborative efforts, they were able to shake off the caste-prejudices of their predecessors to work alongside fellow Brahmans of other castes. It would be far-fetched to suggest that these individuals were not really caste-conscious or were unaware of the distinctions of ritual status among Brahmans. I emphasize: in keeping with their ideology, neither did the Brahmans let their mutual caste-distinctions hinder their shared pursuits, nor did they engage in any caste-conflicts outside the scope of these pursuits. Besides a common ideology, however, their reluctance to engage in caste disputes seems to stem also from their political aspirations. The Brahman intelligentsia was consciously working toward portraying itself as the representative of the indigenous population to the government. It held the birth-based

model of social hierarchy to be one of the prime reasons for what it saw as the lack of social progress and – most significantly – the absence of political autonomy in the country. Any successful bid for its role in providing able and egalitarian leaders would have required a show of solidarity within itself. Any instances of caste conflicts would have only undermined its moral and political credentials, ultimately thwarting its political goals. Therefore, irrespective of whether they actually refused to subscribe to caste and ritual hierarchies within the Brahman class, their collaborative endeavors certainly demonstrated little regard for these hierarchies and the influence of their predecessors' conflicts from the previous era.

Before we proceed to discussing concerns over caste within the orthodox community, let us pause briefly to consider the position of a Brahman caste that figured prominently in the Maratha epoch. The above discussion makes the Deshastha Brahmans conspicuous by their absence in the socio-political scenario of Bombay. Zelliot notes that of all the Brahman communities, the Deshasthas – satisfied with their previous religious duties as priests, teachers, and literate village accountants in the Deccan Plateau – responded least to the British (Zelliot 1982: 33). In Bombay and Poona they were content with receiving aid from the Dakṣiṇā fund and undergoing traditional learning in colleges supported by that fund. Excepting rare instances when they actively supported or protested the policies of the British Government, they seemed to be uninterested in the secular benefits of Western education. However, there seems to be another reason for their diminished presence at the helm of the social and the political activities. As mentioned in the first section, the Deshasthas had migrated into the peripheral territories

of the Maratha state situated in Madhya Pradesh (Gwalior, Indore), Tamil Nadu (Tanjore), and Karnataka (Mysore) in order to serve Maratha commanders during the eighteenth century. Their rivalry with the Chitpavans in the Peshva court also led to their ouster from the political center at Poona. Thus, the Deshasthas were already gradually drifting away from the main political turf in pre-colonial Maharashtra. The isolation of the community that had once dominated the administrative core in Shivaji's times reached its culmination in the colonial era.[95] However, as we see later, the prestigious ritual status of this caste continued to be invoked in some very significant developments.

Let us now consider the caste-affiliation of the orthodox Brahmans. In the following we will first consider how orthodox Brahmans occupied a distinct ideological niche and asserted their identity against the ideals embraced by the liberal and other rivaling ideologies. While reviewing the specific incidents of the orthodox Brahmans' engagement with their adversaries, we will focus on the caste-affiliation of the orthodox individuals. As I mentioned briefly earlier, while the English-educated Brahmans were in the process of embracing modernity through their professional and ideological affiliations, the orthodox Brahmans espoused a traditional or conservative sphere of ideas and practices. It must be noted that the very notions of modernity and tradition were constructed through the encounter between the Western ideals propagated by the state (and the supporting indigenous groups) and those that were embedded in an older, pre-colonial socio-religious frame of reference. In contrast to the state and the liberals, the

[95] For a similar comparison between the Deshasthas and Chitpavans in the nineteenth century, see Johnson 1970: 98

orthodox *śastris* and *paṇḍits* sought to guard what they perceived to be the authentic tradition of Hinduism from the onslaught of Western values and institutions. Despite a few occasions of disagreement over what precisely constituted the core of authentic Hinduism (Tucker 1976: 332), at a broader level they agreed that certain key elements lay at its heart. Some of these elements included: the unquestioned acceptance of the supreme authority of the Śruti (revealed scripture, e.g., the Vedas) and Smṛti (remembered scriptures, e.g., the Dharmaśāstra texts); a strict adherence to the norms of purity and pollution among castes; the uninterrupted and unaltered continuation of socio-religious models such as the *varṇa* system; the maintenance of existing customs which the orthodox believed to be sanctioned by scriptures (some of these customs included child-marriage, the prohibition of widow-remarriage and female education, and the enforcement of rigid boundaries in the social interaction between members of different castes); last but not least, the belief in the supremacy of Brahmans as the guardians of sacred knowledge and the moral-religious order within society. As Masselos (1970: 86) notes, the central premise of their beliefs was the assumption that the social and religious were mutually inseparable and, therefore, the sentiment that any change in the former signified an interference with the latter.

The state and the liberals were not the only audience against whom the orthodox struggled. They faced a formidable challenge in the Christian Protestant missionaries and evangelicals who were active in western India since the 1830s (Tucker 1976: 322). In their mission for proselytization they attacked traditional Hindu beliefs based on the Purāṇas such as polytheism, the fantastic deeds and the superhuman forms of the gods,

and their ambivalent relationship with the devotees. They also challenged what they saw as the deficiencies of Hinduism: rituals and religious practices that appeared to be rooted in superstition and idolatry, the apparently non-cohesive, inconsistent, and mutually-contradictory nature of Hindu scriptures, the use of scriptures to support the morally unfair caste-hierarchies and social inequality, the inability of Hindu beliefs to accommodate social change, and the supreme position of priests who had lost sight of their spirituality. In particular, social practices like widow-burning (*satī*) were to them downright abhorrent and anti-humanitarian (O'Hanlon 1985: 52-53). The missionaries' criticism of Hindu beliefs and institutions derived from their own beliefs in the originally sinful nature of the human soul, the importance of moral deeds and repentance, and the redemption of the sins of idolatry and polytheism. These doctrines were embedded in the larger ideological framework of belief regarding the existence of a single impersonal God and His relationship with the human world. To the missionaries, God was the unique source of all creation: one who remained separate from human constructs but judged all beings on the criterion of morality, over and above man-made social and religious regulations. Furthermore, the harmony and regularity of the natural world was a testimony to God's ultimate creative power. Religious and scientific truths were mutually inseparable inasmuch as the latter only uncovered the perfect design of the natural world by God. Because the missionary polemics attributed the material and social progress of the West to the belief in the objective truths of Christianity, it gained sympathy with a section of liberal and reformist Hindus who were eager to see similar progress in their homeland. As a result, the missionaries' efforts at conversion were beginning to see some

success in the early 1830s (O'Hanlon 1985: 54-55). The orthodox *śāstris* understood this to be a grave threat to the very existence of the Hindu religion, its beliefs, and institutions. In order to attack Christianity they undertook public debates with the missionaries and the reformist Hindus who appeared to have come under their sway. While the challenge to their goals posed by the government policy on the Dakṣiṇā fund was serious enough, they deemed the challenge to their ideology graver as it threatened an end to the orthodox order itself.

While tracing the link between Hindu traditionalism and the rise of a nationalistic ideology in the late nineteenth century, Tucker (1976: 322) describes some of the grounds on which the orthodox confronted their adversaries from the 1830s to the 1870s. After 1818 the new government decided not to interfere in the existing social or religious matters of Hindus; as a result, these matters were left to its traditional guardians – the Brahmans. As Christian evangelicals attacked the Hindu beliefs of idol-worship and polytheism and propagated conversion to Christianity, the orthodox *śāstris* took it upon themselves to defend their *dharma* through intense debates. In 1830, Lakshman Shastri Keni (a Sarasvat Brahman) and Morbhat Dandekar (a Chitpavan Brahman) engaged in a bitter argument with John Wilson (a Scottish Presbyterian) over the validity of Purāṇic beliefs and the superiority of Hindu deities like Viṣṇu over Christ (Tucker 1976: 323). By the 1840s missionary schools were functioning in a number of cities in western Maharashtra, posing a more concrete threat to Hinduism. During this period, the issue of religious conversion became a major bone of contention between the orthodox and the evangelists, with the former often emerging victorious.

Even as the orthodox were growing increasingly aggressive against the evangelicals, by the 1850s they clashed publicly with Western-educated reformists who were championing the abolishment of polytheism and the caste-system. Chitpavan Brahmans like Gangadhar Shastri Phadke reacted to the reformist organizations of "Hindu recreants" by publishing tracts attributing the degeneration of Hinduism to foreign rule and the reluctance of Western-educated Hindus to preserve their tradition (Tucker 1976: 325-326). Another Chitpavan Brahman named Krishna Shastri Sathe delivered a series of lectures underscoring the significance of *sanātana dharma,* the eternal socio-religious order dependent on the maintenance of *varṇāśramadharma* (the fixed order of castes and stages of life of individuals). He accused the liberals of violating the norms of *dharma* and promoting *varṇasaṃkara* (the mixing of castes through intermarriages leading to the doom of social order) by blindly accepting Western ideals. He also alleged that through its policies the state was indirectly encouraging lower castes to abandon their traditional roles and create social anarchy (Tucker 1976: 326-327).

Between the late 1850s and the 1870s there arose a small section of moderate orthodox Brahmans that sought to reach a middle ground by calling for a radical reassessment of Hinduism while simultaneously emphasizing that it be done in the light of the authority of the Vedas. One such *śāstrī* was Vishnubuva Brahmachari (Vishnu Bhikaji Gokhale), a Chitpavan Brahman, influential philosopher, and orator *par excellence*. He sought to propagate his message through public lectures and writings. Another Chitpavan Brahman named Mora Shastri Sathe sought to defend Hinduism not by completely rejecting Western ideas, but by accepting and applying *some* of those ideas

to understand the core values of Hinduism and thereby promote social welfare. He founded the Kalyānonnāyaka Maṇḍalī, an organization that attempted to bridge the gap between the orthodox and the liberals and to bring about social progress in the country. There were others, like Vishnu Shastri Pandit (a Chitpavan Brahman), trained in the priestly duties as well as in the Western sciences, who joined hands with the Western-educated liberals to realize the common goal of social progress.

However, such moderate orthodox *śāstrīs* were rare. Until the late 1870s, the views of the staunchly orthodox *śāstrīs* held sway in matters related to giving a Sanskrit education to non-Brahmans, widow-remarriage, religious conversion, and the minimum age of marriage for Hindus. In the late 1860s and early 1870s, Poona became a more prominent hub for the orthodox Brahmans than Bombay, as it was less cosmopolitan and more resistant to change (Tucker 1976: 330). As the former capital of the Peshvas, it bore a strong traditional Maharashtrian ethos; hence, it was more conducive to the formation of multiple social networks among the orthodox *śāstrī*s. These *śastrīs* rigidly continued to champion orthodox values through the establishment of organizations such as the Hindu Dharma Vyavasthāpaka Maṇḍalī (the Conglomeration for the Protection of Hindu Religion). Some of the bitterest protests for the sake of orthodoxy were launched from the city, earning the Brahmans there the condescending title "Poona Brahmins" from the British. Most of these Brahmans were Chitpavans. This community – the second largest among Brahmans after the Deshasthas– had dominated the social and religious circles of

the city since the days of the Peshvas.[96] However, the power of the orthodox (whether situated in Poona or elsewhere) was on the wane. With the emerging nationalistic ideology in the 1880s and 1890s, however, the liberals successfully portrayed the *śāstris*' understanding of Hinduism as inadequate to achieve independence. Gradually the orthodox reconciled their differences with the liberals to forge a common nationalistic alliance (Tucker 1976: 348).

So far, it is clear that until the 1870s the orthodox strove to present themselves as *the* representatives of Hinduism, which they considered as the only way to restore the socio-religious balance in a society disrupted by the presence of a foreign government. However, attentiveness to the caste of the orthodox Brahmans mentioned above indicates that most of the stalwart champions of orthodoxy came from the Chitpavan community. Compared to the shared contribution to the reformist movement from the Chitpavan, Sarasvat, and Karhada castes, the predominance of Chitpavans in the orthodox campaign is too conspicuous to deny their appropriation thereof. This argument certainly does not suggest that the orthodoxy itself was a Chitpavan preserve or that no other community subscribed to the orthodox ideology. Prominent Brahmans from other communities such as the Sarasvats (e.g., Lakshman Shastri Keni) did share similar concerns over the protection of the *sanātana dharma*. A number of lay Brahmans from major and minor Brahman communities must have lent their support to the orthodox cause. However, well-known instances where non-Chitpavan Brahmans led the front appear to be rare.

[96] Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Poona 1881, p. 99

There is ample scope to believe that the Chitpavans considered themselves to be the only forerunners for *dharma* and made a conscious effort to present themselves as the leaders of the orthodox. Their initiative in the matter appears to have been quicker and more sustained than that of any other community.

How do we explain the Chitpavans' hegemonic position? Was it an anticipated, obvious outcome or the result of conscious deliberation? To a lesser extent, their pre-eminence was only to be expected, considering their political and social domination in the days of the Peshva which simply continued in the colonial era. However, to a great extent it was a matter of making deliberate efforts. As a relatively-unknown community before the eighteenth century which had experienced a meteoric rise under the Peshvas, the Chitpavans arduously wished to preserve their status and power amid new challenges. They succeeded in different ways. On the one hand, those concerned with secular success seized new opportunities in education and administration, where they were joined by other communities. We have dealt with this topic at length earlier, but it is important to reiterate here that the number of these individuals was significantly small. A majority of the Chitpavans saw the traditional religious ideology as a means to regain their political power. The association of religion and power was a model that was reinforced in the Peshva regime. Let us recall that the Peshvas had reinforced the model of a hierarchical society with the Brahmans at the apex; they purported to present themselves as authentic Dhārmic rulers. With the support of the Chitpavan rulers, the community had successfully elevated its own ritual status vis-à-vis other Brahman communities and had striven to sustain that status by rigorously adhering to the norms of ritual purity.

Similarly, the institution of Dakṣiṇā favored the Chitpavans over the other Brahman castes, placing them at a higher material advantage. Thus the Peshva reinforced the correlations between political leadership, ritual supremacy, and a higher social status for the community. When the conditions under colonial rule threatened to affect the traditional Brahmanical norms and institutions, they posed a direct threat to the position of the Chitpavans. For a large section of the Chitpavans, therefore, the assertion of Brahmanical models and their own ritual supremacy was the only way to prevent their potential ouster from the social and political spheres. In other words: beneath their concerns for orthodoxy were strong undercurrents of concerns over their own social and political supremacy.

At this point, it is important to note that this undercurrent of the Chitpavans' own ambitions was just that: it seldom assumed an explicit form in their arguments against the reformists or the missionaries. Overtly, their arguments revolved around the antagonism between the sustenance of the Hindu tradition and the acceptance of Western ideology and social reforms; these arguments suggested a potential threat to the supremacy of the entire class of Brahmans as a symbol embodying the authentic Hindu tradition. As the Chitpavans presented Brahmanhood as the essence of orthodoxy, their defense of orthodoxy against Western values and institutions would appeal to *all* Brahmans as a defense of Brahmanhood itself. Avoiding any allusions to their own aspirations was crucial if they were to mobilize the support of the non-Chitpavans. And yet an episode (little-discussed in later scholarly or popular writings on the Brahmans of Bombay) unmasked the Chitpavans' appropriation of the orthodox cause. This episode led to a

chain of events fully bearing out the great extent to which orthodoxy was a contested terrain. It is to this episode that we now turn.

Chapter 5: The Battle for Brahmanhood: the Debate Between the Sarasvats and the Chitpavans in Nineteenth-Century Bombay

Toward the end of the 1860s, Bombay witnessed an episode that started out as an overt dispute between the orthodox and liberals but eventually turned into a clash between two orthodox factions. The two groups in question were the Chitpavans – keen to stake an exclusive claim over the orthodoxy – and the Sarasvats – intent upon claiming their share. This conflict of interests led to one of the most intense debates between the two communities; the controversy focused on the notion of Brahmanhood, itself implicit in the notion of orthodoxy. This chapter explores various facets of this debate to understand how the contested notion of Brahmanhood was conceptualized and implicated in the disputed claims to a higher caste status. I will investigate the conflict's discursive aspects as related to common themes, grounds of authority, and modes of argumentation. I highlight how the dispute functioned on multiple layers and involved different audiences beyond just its primary interlocutors: the colonial authorities, scholars, missionaries, and liberal Brahmans. Similarly, I discuss how the literary media and languages in which the debate was staged had a crucial bearing on the dissemination of the debate for different audiences. The chapter will conclude with a comparison between the pre-colonial and colonial modes of dispute. First, I review the episode that set the debate in motion.

WIDOW REMARRIAGE AND THE CLASH OF THE CHITPAVANS AND SARASVATS

In nineteenth-century India, the issue of widow remarriage constituted one of the most contentious sites for the articulation of liberal and orthodox ideologies. The controversy first started in Bengal during the 1830s and a decade later in Maharashtra. While the orthodox view of the tradition disallowed widow remarriage, one of the chief agendas of the liberal class was to reform the status of women by enabling widows to remarry. As Lata Mani (1987: 121) convincingly argues regarding the debate over *satī* in colonial Bengal, women – especially high-caste Brahman women – were the emblem of Hindu tradition according to both the liberals and the orthodox; any proposed change in the status of women was immediately and inextricably linked to the question of whether such a change affected the Hindu order. The orthodox opposed female education and widow remarriage: doing so indicated adherence to the authentic, scripturally-sanctioned Brahmanic codes. For the liberals widow-remarriage was a welcome reform: it signified social progress and a return to the tenet of equality which they understood as belonging to the once-glorious Hindu tradition.[97] The liberals emerged victorious when the British government abolished the custom of *satī* in 1826 and introduced the Widow Remarriage Act in 1856 (Chowdhry 1990: 259). In Maharashtra, the debates regarding widow-remarriage were conducted in Wai, Satara, Poona, and Nasik: places that were well-reputed as the seats of orthodox *śāstrīs* (Masselos 1970: 86). Such debates were also not

[97] Not just Brahmans, but also members of non-Brahman castes like Sonar, Sutar (carpenter), and Kayastha Prabhus (a writer caste) who had started to do well in their respective professions opposed widow remarriage. Masselos argues that aping the ways of Brahmans enabled these communities to stake claims to a high-caste status. "Opposition to internal change then was not merely a concomitant of backward looking and static traditionalism, it could also be related to changing economic status divorced from the impact of new ideas (Masselos 1970: 37)."

uncommon in Bombay. While the reformists welcomed the state's policy to ban the custom, the orthodox repeatedly continued to voice their displeasure over it as late as the early 1870s in Poona and Bombay.

Against this backdrop a controversial incident occurred. On June 15, 1868, a Chitpavan widow named Venubai from Bombay married a Pandurang Karmarkar, also a Chitpavan Brahman. On June 20th, a few orthodox Chitpavans organized a public meeting in Mumbai to protest against the marriage. During the meeting a petition for signatures was circulated among the attendees. At this time, an eminent Sarasvat Brahman named Bala Mungesh Wagale (the first indigenous Barrister of Law) intervened and insisted that the circular be handed to him. He engaged in a major scuffle with a Chitpavan Brahman named Ganesh Bapuji Malvankar, one of the chief conveners of the meeting. Malvankar refused to give the letter to Wagale, claiming that the meeting was organized only for Brahmans and that the latter was not a Brahman. Wagale allegedly snatched the letter from Malvankar, tore it up, and pushed him aside. Malvankar approached the Magistrate Court and filed an appeal with the Chief Magistrate to arrest Wagale for criminal behavior. The British government claimed to have adopted a policy of non-interference in the internal matters of castes and communities and left the resolution of such matters to caste-assemblies. However, given Malvankar's complaint over Wagale's allegedly criminal assault, the involvement of the Magistrate of Police and the court of law was inevitable. As Wagale was a prominent Barrister, the Magistrate asked Malvankar to submit – under oath – a detailed account of the events at the meeting. After Malvankar submitted his statement, the summons was served to Wagale and the

trial commenced in the Magistrate Court on June 30th, 1869 with Sergeant Atkinson as the lawyer of the plaintiff (Malvankar) and Mr. Scoble as that of the defendant (Wagale). Details of the trial and an extract from Malvankar's deposition in the court were subsequently published in the English-language newspapers the *Bombay Gazette* and the *Times of India* (Kanvinde 1869: 1-4).

During the trial Sergeant Atkinson asked his client, Ganesh Malvankar, whether he saw any members of non-Brahman castes at the meeting. Malvankar replied that there were three to four members of the "Senoy" (Śeṇavī/Sarasvat) caste and that Wagale was one of them. Malvankar also mentioned that he had warned Wagale not to sign the petition for it was not intended for the signature of reformists. Scoble, the defendant's lawyer, started to cross-examine Malvankar by asking what Wagale's caste was; Malvankar answered that he belonged to the Senoy caste. When asked whether the Senoys were Brahmans, Malvankar wished to explain his answer. He was abruptly interrupted by Scoble: "Do not suppose you come here to enlighten us all, for probably we know as much about the subject as you do." Malvankar replied that the Senoys could not be designated just as "Brahmans," but had to be qualified as "Senoy Brahmans;" the latter signified a special category of Brahmans (Kanvinde 1869: 7-8). It is worthwhile to read how Malvankar explained the difference between these two categories and how the lawyers responded to him:

> Malvankar (M): Brahmins are those who cannot eat animal food and who can dine with each other.

Atkinson (A): That would be very agreeable no doubt, if they would only do it, but I want to know from you, for though you are a Brahmin you are under oath, and you can be punished if you perjure yourself, for the penal code does not exempt you from punishment for breaking your oath, now were not the Senoy Brahmins called there?

M: The Senoy Brahmins were not called there.
A: Suppose you had an orthodox Senoy Brahmin who was against re-marriage would he not have had a right to attend the meeting?

M: No, *only the Brahmins* were called to attend.
A: You don't mention in the circular that only this particular class of Brahmins was to attend the meeting?

M: It was particularly understood by the authorities that *only Brahmins and not Senoy Brahmins* are to come to discuss as to authority.
A: Now is this society of yours composed exclusively of Brahmins of the description you have mentioned?

M: Yes.
A: No outsiders, no Senoys, were there no Senoy members of that meeting?

M: The members were all Brahmins without exception, at least I think so.
A: Are you sure?

M: I cannot exactly say they were all Brahmins, but unless they were Brahmins they were not members.

[Atkinson makes Malvankar admit that he only intended the petition to be signed by Brahmans, but that he was not sure whether all signatures were those of Brahmins alone and no one else.]

A: On this particular Sunday you wanted money only from Brahmins?
M: Only from Brahmins on that day.

A: Would you not take money from Senoy Brahmins that day?
M: On that day I could not because it was not authorized by members of the meeting.

A: You are a Brahmin?
M: Yes

A: He is a Senoy Brahmin?

M: Yes

A: Will you explain the difference?
M: There are four classes of Brahmins. Brahmin is the only denomination; others use animal food, fishes, and we don't.

[This is a typing error. What Malvankar means is there are four classes of people.]
[At this point the Magistrate intervenes –]

Magistrate: I will undertake to show you millions of animals in the food you eat every day.

A: Was it a meeting convened exclusively for Brahmins, or could any other kind of Brahmins attend?
M: They might have attended but we did not call them. Most of the present were Brahmins of our party.

A: The object of that meeting, if I understand you, was for the Brahmins to have a discussion. If I am a good Brahmin, could a Brahmin discuss a religious matter with me?
M: No, he cannot; *not if he is acting on the principles of Shastar*.

A: Can he discuss with a Senoy Brahmin?
M: No, not as to the Shastar.

A: Why not?
M: If a Senoy Brahmin wants to get any information from us, he can ask and we can give it, but they (Senoys) cannot discuss. We can give it, but they cannot discuss with us because *we Brahmins have the six rights, and they have the three rights*. They can give but cannot receive.

A: Oh I understand you. You cannot discuss religious questions with such a man.
Prosecutor: The other rights I will tell you. They (Senoys) cannot teach a Brahmin but they will be taught. They cannot offer any offering except through a Brahmin—they can offer. These are the distinct things (Kanvinde 1870: 10-11) (parentheses mine, emphasis in the original).

At the end of the interrogation the magistrate ruled against Malvankar's plea for criminal action against Wagale by declaring that Wagale was a Brahman himself; thus he did not commit a crime by attending the meeting organized for Brahmans (Kanvinde

1870: 2). From the verdict, it seems as though the main part of the trial revolved around establishing his Brahmanhood and then seeking evidence for physical assault. Therefore, arriving at a precise definition of the term "Brahman" was crucial for the court. Malavankar's understanding of this term derived from a pre-colonial frame of reference: diet formed the basis of the distinction between the Sarasvats and other Brahmans; the Sarasvats were entitled to the three out of six ritual actions (*trikarmī*), and other Brahmanswere entitled to all six (*ṣaṭkarmī*). This distinction had become pervasive as a result of narratives such as the *Latikā* and the *Nirṇaya*. The same distinction now appeared in Malvankar's answer as a means to differentiate between the Senoy Brahmans and "Brahmans." His explanation described the Senoy Brahmans as quasi- or semi-Brahmans whose consumption of meat made them eligible only to engage in the three actions: performing a sacrifice (not officiating it), learning *śāstrārtha,* (the purport of scriptures) through others (but not teaching others), and giving donations to others (but not receiving any). Let us note again that these three rights were common to the twice-born classes (*dvija*) – Brahmans, *Kṣatriyas*, and *Vaiśyas*. The remaining three rights were exclusive to Brahmans. Designating the Sarasvats as *trikarmī* Brahmans relegated them to a *Kṣatriya*- or *Vaiśya*-status.

As a corollary, Malvankar defined "pure" Brahmans as those who abstained from the consumption of meat and were entitled to the six actions: accepting donations, officiating sacrifices, teaching *śāstrārtha* to others, and the three rights given above. He then implied that he and his community were "pure" Brahmans who complied with both these criteria of authentic Brahmanhood. Malvankar also underscored that his assertions

were based on the *śāstras*, an important source of authority on matters regarding Brahmans. By invoking a pre-existing frame of reference and scriptural support, Malvankar reiterated the notion of pure-Brahmanhood versus quasi-Brahmanhood and appropriated this notion to cast an inseparability between three factors – Brahmanhood, scriptures, and the Chitpavan caste.

Malvankar's defense could have had a sympathetic audience in a *brahmasabhā* of Brahmans; yet, judging by the format of the trial, the questions raised by the defense lawyer, and the comments of the magistrate, it is evident that the colonial court of law functioned very differently. They were curious to know what the scriptures said, but were under no obligation to accept their authority. Unconcerned at best – and suspicious at worst – with Malvankar's traditional explanation of things, they raised questions from a common-sense point of view ("I will undertake to show you millions of animals in the food you eat every day."). They emphasized their own authority and ability to decide upon the matter at hand, independent of what the learned *śāstrī* pleaded ("Do not suppose you come here to enlighten us all, for probably we know as much about the subject as you do."). With no sympathy from the court for his status or for the sources of authority he invoked, Malvankar's defeat was anything but surprising. Yet, because the incidents leading up to this trial were sensational and controversial, and because the officialdom of the legal court was involved, the trial attracted much publicity in two newspapers: *The Times of India* and the *Bombay Gazette*. After this, though the trial itself had come to an end, Malvankar's testimony took on a life of its own.

THE DEBATE IN PRINT MEDIA

Malvankar's testimony in the Magistrate Court was published in the *Times of India* on July 3, 1869. As expected, the report became controversial among Sarasvat and Chitpavan *śāstris* as they engaged in intense debates on behalf of Wagale and Malvankar (respectively). The debates used the media of newspapers; ironically, these newspapers were founded by the adversaries of the orthodox – the Protestant missionaries – in the 1830s to aid in disseminating their propaganda (O'Hanlon 1985: 50-52). Because of their wide reach, the newspapers became more than just a powerful medium for the spread of Sarasvat and Chitpavans arguments: they were now also a major trigger, instigating further debates. The newspapers in Bombay and in other coastal towns (such as Ratnagiri) published arguments and counter-arguments between the two sides, expressing them – for the most part – in the form of letters. After the details of the Malvankar-Wagale trial became public, Bhavani Vishvanath Kanvinde (a prominent Sarasvat scholar in Bombay) compiled and published all these letters as a book in a bid to make the Sarasvats aware of how their community was defended against the onslaught of the Chitpavans. The book was rather elaborately titled: "*Sārasvata brāhmaṇa urpha śeṇavi kiṃvā konkaṇe brāhmaṇa yānviṣayi kityek citpāvanādi nindakānnī vartamānapatrādvāre va dusryārītīne je majkūra praghata kele hote, tyānce ra.ra.Bhavānī Viśvanātha Kānvinde va dusare kityek sārasvata brāhmaṇa yānhī je yathārtha khaṇḍaṇa kele to sarva majkūr;*" or, in English: "*The Chitpavans and other detractors had published through newspapers and other means criticism regarding the Sarasvat aka Śeṇavī aka*

Konkane Brahmans. This is the report of the successful refutation of that criticism by the honorable Bhavani Vishvanath Kanvinde and several other Sarasvat Brahmans.”

An association named Sārasvata Brahmasamūha (Sarasvat Brahman Association), over which Kanvinde presided, financed this publication. The association’s key objective was to provide institutional and financial support to Sarasvats in and around Bombay. They sought to accomplish this by appointing priests from the Sarasvat community in Sarasvat households and also by training their members in the Vedic sciences; the unstated goals, however, were to check the growing influence of the Chitpavans in the city and to defend the Sarasvats from the challenges posed by their rivals (Kanvinde 1870: 116). This book, an important – and perhaps the only – surviving record of the Sarasvat-Chitpavan rift in 1869, was itself a product of that conflict. By claiming to succeed in defending the Sarasvats, it became both a model of and for the Sarasvat identity. In the following we will examine a selection of the letters published therein and focus on some of the key issues raised in a bid to define Brahmanhood. Furthermore, we will also see how both Sarasvats and Chitpavans sought to establish their respective claims to Brahmanhood by taking recourse to various grounds of authority.

The first response to Malvankar’s testimony was by Kanvinde himself. He published three letters which he had written to Malvankar in a Marathi newspaper named *Mitrodaya* on August 1 and August 8, 1869; the letters had remained unanswered. They recapitulated the events at the court as well as Malvankar’s arguments (that the Sarasvats were *trikarmī* Brahmans because they consumed animal products while the Chitpavans were the superior *ṣaṭkarmī* Brahmans by reason of their vegetarianism). At the beginning

Kanvinde made a disclaimer that he had no intention to hurt Malvankar or the Chitpavans; he was curious to hear Malvankar's explanation of his statements on the Śeṇavī caste "because Malvankar is a reputed *śāstrī*, his statements would not be without the support of the Śāstras." He urged, similarly, that "because the Chitpavans are superior to the Sarasvats, making it difficult for the latter to analyze the reasons for their own inferiority, it would only be appropriate if Malvankar explained his position by quoting exact scriptures." He posed the following thirteen questions to Malvankar:

1) There are several castes within the Brahman class: which are *ṣaṭkarmī* and which are *trikarmī*; which scriptures support this dichotomy?
2) What is the scriptural basis proving the existence of the *trikarmī* Brahmans ?
3) Would the Śeṇavīs have been eligible to perform all six actions had they not eaten fish? Do they lose the right to perform the three actions of *yājana* (officiating at sacrifices), *adhyāpana* (teaching the Veda), and *pratigraha* (accepting alms) just because they eat fish?
4) In Bengal, Gauḍa Brahmans consume fish according to their custom. How many of their six privileges should be taken away and based on which scriptures?
5) Which scriptures prove that the Chitpavans are superior to the Śeṇavīs?
6) Among the Śeṇavīs there are two sects: the Smārtas and the Vaiṣṇavas. Monasteries of both are found at various places in the country. A few years ago, Śeṇavī *svāmī* (priest) Shrimat Purna Prajnatirtha had gone to Banaras and the local *śāstrīs* had honored him by giving a *mānapatra* (letter of honor). Similarly, even the *paṇḍits* of Poona had honored him on his way from Banaras. Did these

learned men from Banaras and Poona commit a mistake by honoring a Śeṇavī priest?

7) If the Śeṇavīs are *trikarmī* Brahmans, how does one account for the existence of *maṭhas* and *sannyāsins* among them?

8) Do the Śeṇavīs not inter-dine at all with other Brahmans? What is the meaning of food?

9) Which scripture authorizes the assumption that the Chitpavans are superior to the Śeṇavīs because they do not eat fish and that the latter are inferior because they do?

10) The Gurjara Brahmans and the Chitpavans do not inter-dine with each other. Are the Gurjara Brahmans ineligible for the three actions as well?

11) Have the Chitpavans and the Deshasthas inter-dined since time immemorial? Do these communities also intermarry?

12) Our caste boasts of a number of *upādhyāya*s (priests) who have employed minor priests from the Chitpavan community to carry out Vedic rituals. If we are *trikarmī* Brahmans, must we get rid of those Chitpavan employees? Similarly, what kind of penance should Chitpavans undergo for having performed rituals alongside Śeṇavīs?

13) The Peshva donated a village to a Smārta *maṭha* of the Śeṇavīs at Nasik. In that *maṭha* the Deshastha Brahmans carry out priestly functions. Is it not surprising that an authentic Brahman like the Peshva offered *dāna* (donation) to the *trikarmī*

Brahmans? Did the Peshva and the Deshastha Brahmans commit a mistake? (Kanvinde 1870: 21- 22)

In his attempt to question Malvankar's argument, Kanvinde underscored certain factors central to his understanding of Brahmanhood. Some of these notions reiterated what Malvankar stated in his testimony while others introduced new themes into the debate. Malvankar had identified Brahmanhood with the right to *ṣaṭkarma* and a vegetarian diet. Kanvinde accepted that the entitlement to *ṣaṭkarma* implied Brahmanhood; a Brahman, by definition, was entitled to officiate and perform sacrifice, teach and learn the Vedas, and accept and give *dāna*. The very term *trikarmī* Brahman was an oxymoron: by coining it, argued Kanvinde, Malvankar had demonstrated his own ignorance.

While the *ṣaṭkarma* constituted an acceptable criterion of Brahmanhood, the criterion of a vegetarian diet did not. Rejecting the claim that the inclusion of meat made the Sarasvats *trikarmī*, he asked Malvankar to formally define the very concept of food. By doing so, he insinuated that the Chitpavans' identification of food with vegetarian food was questionable. Obviously, Kanvinde would have gained little by correlating diet with one's Brahmanical status: the dietary practices of his community had repeatedly come under attack in the past, placing the community on the defensive.

While defending the status of his community in relation to the *ṣaṭkarma* criterion, Kanvinde invoked additional (and mostly extra-dietary) criteria to assert the superior status of his community and challenge that of the Chitpavans: the tradition of *sannyāsa*, the practice of priesthood, historical antecedents indicating royal patronage, and

annavyavahāra (inter-dining) with other Brahmans. He drew various conclusions on these bases that proved the Śeṇavīs' Brahmanhood. First, they were Brahmans because they had a long-established practice of *sannyāsa*: this was evident in the prevalence of *svāmis* and *maṭhas*. Second, one could not only find Śeṇavī priests engaged in priestly duties, but also see them as superiors and supervisors over Chitpavan priests. Third, the Śeṇavī *maṭhas* had received ritual gifts from the Peshva in historical times. Finally, they inter-dined with other Brahman communities: their status was on par with that of those other Brahman castes.

Kanvinde raised suspicion over the Chitpavans' Brahmanical status by claiming that their practice of inter-dining with the Deshasthas was questionable: the latter had refused to inter-dine with the Chitpavans at a certain point of time. Kanvinde's reference to inter-dining between the Chitpavans and Deshasthas merits some explanation: in addition to intermarrying, inter-dining between two or more communities signified the relative positions of the statuses of these communities. A Brahman caste agreeing to inter-dine with another Brahman caste signified that it endorsed the ritual status of the latter caste; the refusal to do so implied the inferior status of the latter. As seen in the previous section, the Peshva refused to inter-dine with one of his commanders because the latter was a Sarasvat Brahman. In the ritual (and not the political) hierarchy amongst Maharashtra's Brahmans, the Deshasthas occupied the highest position as Maharashtra's original Brahman inhabitants (Johnson 1970: 98). Therefore it is likely that inter-dining with the Deshasthas was a benchmark against which other Brahman groups in Maharashtra could establish their ritual status. These groups could also use this criterion

against one another. As we shall see later, certain indigenous and colonial sources claimed (based on information provided by Brahmans) that before the rise of the Chitpavans under the Peshvas, the Deshasthas considered them too inferior to share tables; as the Deshasthas saw their own position weaken with the political ascendancy of the Chitpavans, they agreed to inter-dine with the Chitpavans. There is no historical evidence confirming the veracity of these statements as of yet. Those who shared this information were not friends of the Chitpavans. By asking if the Chitpavans and Deshasthas had inter-dined since time immemorial, Kanvinde insinuated that the Chitpavans' status itself was inferior compared to that of the Deshasthas: this rendered them ineligible to hurl accusations at others.

Kanvinde's argument not only indicated what he deemed to be the key signifiers of Brahmanhood, but also subtly invoked certain grounds of authority that established his community as such. Kanvinde appealed to the cardinal sources of *dharma* recognized in Brahmanical judicial discourse: the Śāstras (scriptures – mainly the Vedas and Smṛtis) and the *ācāra* (customary practice) of noble men (in this case, the Sarasvats and Bengali Gauda Brahmans). His appeal to scriptural testimony was straightforward: which Śāstras supported the two-fold division of Brahmans into *trikarmī* and *ṣaṭkarmī*? Which Śāstras alleged that the Śeṇavīs were *trikarmī* Brahmans because they ate fish? Where did it state that the Chitpavans were superior because they were vegetarians? In the domain of *ācāra*, Kanvinde portrayed the Sarasvats as a reputed community known to have the practice of *sannyāsa*, as evident in the presence of ascetics and monasteries. However, his appeal to *ācāra* regarding the issue of consuming fish seems somewhat contrived. Kanvinde argued

that the Bengali Brahmans consumed fish as a customary practice and yet still retained a full-fledged Brahmanical status with the right to all six actions. He implied that as a prestigious and noble community of Brahmans, their *ācāra* was standard and could be normative. By sharing with them the *ācāra* of consuming fish, the Sarasvats achieved a status equivalent to that of these Brahmans: if the Brahmans in Bengal retained their status so could the Sarasvats. While highlighting the custom's normativity, however, he downplayed its regional aspect. The rule that consuming meat to the north of the Vindhyas was not sinful (whereas doing so to the south of the Vindhyas was sinful) had been well-established since the pre-colonial era and was part of a shared assumption among Maharashtrian Brahmans. The custom of eating fish was acceptable not because Gauda Brahmans practiced it and thus made it normative, but because it was practiced *in Bengal*: such would have been the response of a non-Sarasvat Brahman. Indeed, a Chitpavan Brahman later pointed this out to Kanvinde.

In addition to these two traditionally recognized sources of *dharma*, Kanvinde called upon a relatively recent yet significant authority: scholars with expertise over matters of *dharma* and its sources. This authority was embodied in the *paṇḍits* of Banaras and, to a lesser degree, those of Poona. As the most-distinguished and thriving center of Brahmanical learning with a pan-Indian appeal, Banaras was home to the crème de la crème of experts in all disciplines. Beyond their scholarly pursuits these intellectuals were actively engaged with the socio-political order around them in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They acted as intermediaries in political negotiations, offered counsel to royal patrons, engaged in debates over contemporary transformations in the

religious order, and presided over adjudications on important social and religious matters (O'Hanlon and Minkowski 2008: 386). A number of prominent intellectuals in the city migrated from the Maratha region in the early modern period, maintaining ties with their homeland by sharing a network with their counterparts at home. Together, both sets of experts adjudicated over disputes on ritual rank and the status of communities in the Maratha region, including those between the Brahman groups. Similarly, even outside the scope of such disputes and debates, an acknowledgement of one's status and rank from a Banaras *paṇḍit* carried a unique authority of its own. Letters containing either their verdict in a particular dispute or simply their recognition of one's ritual status and privileges were accepted as proof of one's standing. To a lesser extent, similar prestige was accorded to *paṇḍits* and *śāstrīs* of Poona, which was often hailed as the "Banaras of the South" for its similar atmosphere. Therefore, by claiming that a Sarasvat ascetic was honored by the *śiṣṭavidvadjana* (virtuous men of learning) of Banaras and Poona, Kanvinde took recourse to a *very* prestigious authority. If the highest authorities acknowledged the Sarasvats' Brahmanhood, how could an allegation from an ordinary *śāstrī* count as legitimate? This was his implicit argument. However accurate or inaccurate, Kanvinde's arguments proved seminal for the way in which further debate was carried out. The authorities he invoked and the themes he underscored – *sannyāsa*, priesthood, royal patronage, and inter-dining, in addition to *ṣaṭkarma* and diet – became the pivot around which contentious claims from both sides revolved.

From the Chitpavan side the most comprehensive and controversial response to Kanvinde came from a Brahman who called himself "Kalyāṇecchū, the well-wisher of

the Brahmans and Śeṇavīs." As a champion of the Chitpavans and likely a Chitpavan himself, Kalyāṇecchū wrote a series of letters in defense of his community. His views are the most symbolic of how the Chitpavans laid exclusive claims over Brahmanhood. His first letter appeared in a Marathi newspaper in Ratnagiri called *Jaganmitra* on September 18, 1869. Kalyānecchū did not deny the centrality of *ṣaṭkarma, sannyāsa,* inter-dining, and receiving royal patronage in Brahmanhood; nor did he question the validity of the *pramāṇas* that Kanvinde had invoked: he sought, instead, to demonstrate how Kanvinde's arguments were incongruous in various ways. Regarding Kanvinde's challenge to give scriptural proof for the categorization of Brahmans into *ṣaṭkarmī* and *trikarmī*, with the status of the Śeṇavīs as *trikarmī* Brahmans, Kalyanechu had a counter-argument: all Brahmans were invariably *ṣaṭkarmī* – there was no category of *trikarmī* Brahmans. The Śeṇavīs were not *ṣaṭkarmī* Brahmans: they were not Brahmans at all. Therefore, there was no need to provide a scriptural basis to prove the category of *trikarmī* Brahmans. In his next argument Kalyāṇecchū asserted patronizingly: if at all the Śeṇavīs were Brahmans, they were *trikarmī* Brahmans because they consumed fish. Concerning the Bengali Brahmans, he underscored the point Kanvinde had chosen to downplay: the custom of eating fish was acceptable among these Brahmans because they resided north of the Vindhya Mountains; as such, they were free of any taint and of any risk of being reduced to *trikarmī* Brahmans. The Śeṇavīs, on the other hand, consumed meat *south* of the Vindhya Mountains; therefore, they were guilty. The *pramāṇa* for this regulation, argued Kalyaṇecchū, was the *Manusmṛti* (Kanvinde 1870: 36-37).

Kalyāṇecchū rejected every "proof" that Kanvinde offered. Countering arguments that the *ācāra* of *sannyāsa* was prevalent among the Sarasvats since antiquity, he demonstrated that the prevalence of *sannyāsa* in the form of *maṭhas* and *sannyāsins* (ascetic-renouncers) was only a recent phenomenon among the Sarasvats. This therefore disqualified itself as a reliable criterion: an *ācāra* could qualify as a criterion only if it was rooted in antiquity. Similarly, the claim that a Sarasvat *sannyāsin* had been honored by the *śāstrīs* of Poona and Banaras was non-verifiable at best and dubious at worst; equally doubtful was the claim that the Śeṇavīs had received royal patronage from past Maratha rulers. Reality was the exact opposite: at the behest of the Śaṅkarācārya (the highest religious authority for Brahmans in Maharashtra), Shivaji had declared the Śeṇavīs to be *trikarmī* Brahmans and had issued decrees prohibiting them from practicing *sannyāsa*. Furthermore, the argument that the Peshva had bestowed donations on the Śeṇavī *maṭhas* and *sannyāsins* was insufficient to establish any special recognition of the Śeṇavī's credentials, for it was quite common for any king to patronize all religions and traditions in his kingdom. For instance, the Peshva gave donations to Muslim mosques, while the British supported several Hindu temples. There was nothing exclusive in the Peshva's patronage; this was not in any way indicative of the Sarasvats' supposedly-glorious history (Kanvinde 1870: 40).

Kalyāṇecchū was suspicious and dismissive of Kanvinde's claim to a noble history for the Sarasvats and their *ācāra* of *sannyāsa*. His argument to prove the superiority of the Chitpavans over the Sarasvats was blatantly presumptuous. The logic of his arguments was simple: Brahmans were superior to all other *varṇa*s and the Śeṇavīs

were not Brahmans (thus they were included among all other *varṇa*s); therefore, the Chitpavans were superior to them (Kanvinde 1870: 37). The implication was obvious: the Chitpavans were Brahmans, whereas the Śeṇavīs were non-Brahmans; they were inherently inferior to the Brahman *varṇa*. His response to Kanvinde's question regarding the definition of food was equally pretentious: "*anna* (food) is that which is made from grains, or it could simply mean cooked rice (Kanvinde 1870: 38)." Taking into account this definition, he argued, inter-dining between Śeṇavīs and Brahmans was impossible: a non-vegetarian item such as fish could not called food in this sense; therefore, any inter-dining between those who ate "food" and those who did not was practically impossible.

Kalyāṇecchū's reply to Kanvinde proved highly controversial: Kanvinde and several other Sarasvats jumped into the fray. In his September 27, 1869 letter to the *Jaganmitra* of Ratnagiri, Kanvinde bitterly criticized Kalyāṇecchū's attempt to brand the Sarasvats as non-Brahmans, pointing out the shortcomings in his arguments by citing logical inconsistencies and the lack of scriptural testimony. In particular, he challenged the claim that the Śaṅkarācārya deemed the Sarasvats *trikarmī* Brahmans: although the Śaṅkarācārya was the highest authority for the *pañcadraviḍa* Brahmans (such as the Deshasthas), he wielded no power to create Brahmans as did Paraśurāma. (The reference was to the account in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* pertaining to the creation of Konkan and the establishment of Sarasvats by Paraśurāma.) Moreover, Kanvinde argued, even the Śaṅkarācārya's statements were meaningless without any scriptural support: his judgment could be considered valid only in conjunction with scripture; if he adjudicated in defiance of scripture, his decision was invalid. Similarly, the acknowledgment of *paṇḍits* from

Banaras was far from being fake or unverifiable, contrary to what Kalyāṇecchū believed. A Sarasvat *svāmi* named Shrimat Purnaprajna visited Banaras and received a letter of honor in Sanskrit from *dharmādhikārins* well-versed in all Śāstras (*sakalaśāstrampanna dharmādhikārin*) including Dhundiraj Sharma, Kashinath Shastri, Bapudev Shastri, Rajaram Shastri, and others. The letter variously demonstrated the respect of these *paṇḍit*s. They addressed the *svāmi* with the titles *śrimat paramahaṃsa parivrājakācārya* (The Ascetic of the Highest Paramahaṃsa Order and the Preceptor of Wandering Ascetics) and *śrimat vaiṣṇavasiddhāntapratiṣṭhāpanācārya* (The Establisher of the Vaiṣṇava School of Thought). An elaborate salutation in the beginning announced: "may the salutations of the several *paṇḍits* from the sacred region of Varanasi, preceded by a salutation to god Narayaṇa, and accepted with affection by the honorable one, shine forth (Kanvinde 1870: 42). The letter also described the purpose of the *svāmī*'s visit: from his monastery near the mountains and forests of the southern country, the honored ascetic undertook a pilgrimage to the Ganges at Banaras. While he stayed at a monastery there, all the local *paṇḍits* paid him a visit and worshipped his feet. On his way back, the Sarasvat *svāmi* was honored by the *paṇḍits* of Poona (including Kittura Nrisimha Acharya, Gopala Acharya, and Atmaram Shastri, etc.). They too acknowledged his honor in Banaras in a Sanskrit letter: "as the honorable one returned from his pilgrimage to Banaras, we went to meet him. At that time having witnessed his deliberation on various Śāstras such as Vedānta, etc., we realized that you are the knower of all Śāstras, you are the illumined one (Kanvinde 1870: 42)." Both letters bore signatures from the respective *paṇḍits*. Yet, Kanvinde mockingly asserted, this imitation of Śaṅkarācārya (that is,

Kalyaṇecchū) asked for proof! In the end, Kanvinde expressed his determination: he would not entertain any base (*halkaṭ*) letters without citations from scriptures or pay attention to anyone "whose only intention was to criticize others" (Kanvinde 1870: 47).

An anonymous Sarasvat Brahman reiterated Kanvinde's argument regarding the Banarasi *paṇḍits* by publishing (in the famous newspaper *Induprakāśa*) what he claimed to be a letter from other *paṇḍits* in Banaras. The letter – signed by twenty-six *paṇḍits* – described how Raghav Rege (a Gauda Sarasvat Brahman of the Kauśika *gotra*) approached them to inquire whether his community was eligible for "Brahmanhood characterized by the right to the six actions beginning with sacrificing, etc.," (*yajanaprabhṛtiṣaṭkarmādhikāraviśiṣṭabrāhmaṇatvam*). These *paṇḍits* consulted previous decisions by other *paṇḍits* at Banaras and Poona (such as Gopinath Shastri Agashe and Tryambak Shastri Shaligram) for similar queries. Based on these decisions they concluded that the Śeṇavīs' Brahmanical status and their right to the six actions was established beyond any doubt (*nirvivādam eva*). In fact, certain Brahmanical practices of this community – performing the *upanayana* (initiation) ceremony with Vedic mantras, conducting the *śāuca* rite, and announcing their names with the suffix *śarman* – were respected as instances of *śiṣṭācāra* (the normative conduct of the virtuous). The letter also replied to those who denied the Brahmanhood of the Sarasvats on the basis of their consumption of fish. It argued that it was an established custom among the Gauḍas (*gauḍānām tad ācāradarśanāt*). However, also because they were among the Gauḍas, the custom of their inter-dining with the Draviḍa Brahmans did not exist. The letter concluded by reiterating the *paṇḍits*' authorization: the Sarasvats were full-fledged

Brahmans with the right to the six actions. In his own letter, the Sarasvat remarked how wretched it was that the Banarasi *paṇḍits*' opinion could come under the suspicion of those who otherwise consulted them on every other matter (Kanvinde 1870: 26-27).

Another Sarasvat Brahman – under the penname "Pañcākṣarī, who puts sanity into the wild people" – challenged Kalyāṇecchū's arguments in a letter to the Marathi newspaper *Mitrodaya* on September 18, 1869. For the most part, Pañcākṣarī's response questioned and argued against the historical "facts" mentioned by Kalyāṇecchū by supplying a set of counter-facts. For instance, the claim that the Śaṅkarācārya had declared the Śeṇavīs as *trikarmī* Brahmans was false. If it were true, asked Pañcākṣarī, why did he allow the Śeṇavī *maṭhas* and *svāmis* to continue to exist in the Maratha country? If Shivaji had issued decrees to disallow the community from practicing the priesthood and *sannyāsa*, why did that just king not execute those decrees? Why did he instead endow generous donations for the maintenance of the Śeṇavī *maṭhas*? If the Śaṅkarācārya and the king were keen to oust the Sarasvats, would that not have been evident in *itihāsa* (history)? The truth – Pañcākṣarī claimed – was that the Chatrapati and the Peshva had both granted an *agraharam* of villages near Kolhapur to fifty-four Śeṇavī Brahmans and honored them as *ṣaṭkarmi* Brahmans. Śeṇavī *maṭhas*, strewn across the country from Rameshvaram to Badarikedar, had regularly received handsome gifts from other kings surpassing those given to any Chitpavan *sannyasin*. Similarly, Kalyāṇecchū's suspicion regarding the honoring of a Śeṇavī *sannyasin* by *paṇḍits* in Poona and Banaras was misplaced, for concrete evidence was available to establish the veracity of this incident: the June 28, 1861 and February 7, 1863 editions of the *Vartamānadīpikā*

newspaper carried a detailed report of the *paṇḍits'* worship of the *sannyāsin* in Banaras and Poona, along with their names and signatures. Pañcākṣarī believed that these *paṇḍits* were the highest kind of *śiṣṭas*, for they hailed either from the primary seat of all Vedic learning ("*sarva vidyānce ādipīṭha*," i.e., Banaras) or from the chief center of erudite learning in the South ("*dakṣinetila vidvattece mukhya sthāna*" i.e., Poona). However, he added: "there is no place here to write the names of all those *paṇḍits*. And even if I write a couple of names, there is no scope that an ignorant person, a frog-in-the-well, would recognize them" (Kanvinde 1870: 50-52).

Pañcākṣarī further insisted that the Śaṅkarācārya, the highest authority for the Chitpavans, had no power over the Śeṇavīs:[98] he owed his roots to a Gauda Sarasvat Brahman (Kanvinde 1870: 52). Pañcākṣarī's reference here was to Gauḍapāda, the eighth-century CE Advaita guru, who had been Ādi Śaṅkara's grand-guru. Gauḍapāda was a venerable figure for the Sarsavats, for they believed him to be the founder of one of their most important *maṭhas* in Goa. The chiefs of this *maṭha* referred to themselves as *Śrimatgauḍapādācārya* as a way of declaring their exalted lineage (Wagale 1900:1). Oblivious to the anachronism, Pañcākṣarī claimed that Gauḍapāda was a Gauda Sarasvat Brahman: this proved that Sarasvats were superior to Chitpavans. By making the above claim, he also suggested that the tradition of *sannyāsa* was much older in his community; hence, Sarasvats were more authentic Brahmans than Chitpavans.

[98] The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency Vol. XVIII (1885) describes the Chitpavans as *smārtas* and followers of the Śaṅkarācārya (p.111).

After Pañcākṣarī's letter was published, another Sarasvat Brahman with the pseudonym Viśvāmitra wrote an elaborate response to Kalyāṇecchū in three extensive letters in the *Vartamānadīpikā*. A number of Viśvāmitra's arguments were similar to those of Kanvinde and Pañcākṣarī – but his were particularly acerbic and sarcastic. In the first of his three letters (dated October 23, 1869) he called Kalyāṇecchū "a petty middleman between Kanvinde and Malvankar," "someone who spoke incoherently, inebriated with arrogance." He argued: "it was quite proper that a person who was formerly a *kaivartaka* (fisherman) needed to be educated by the wise" (Kanvinde 1870: 62-62). (The taunt's basis lay in the *Sahyadrikhanda* account regarding the Chitpavans' origin as lowly fishermen.)

According to Viśvāmitra, while both Malvankar and Kanvinde agreed that the Śeṇavīs were Brahmans, their main contention lay over whether the Śeṇavīs were *ṣaṭkarmī* or *trikarmī*. By alleging the Śeṇavīs to be non-Brahmans and declaring that all Brahmans were *ṣaṭkarmī*, Kalyāṇecchū had actually falsified Malvankar's claim that Śeṇavīs were Brahmans: "Your name means 'the one who seeks welfare' but you have done great harm to your poor friend Malvankar!" He challenged Kalyāṇecchū to cite the *Manusmṛti* verse that described the Sarasvats' loss of Brahmanical privileges due to the consumption of fish. He also expressed his apprehension: "a foolish and ignorant person would be unable to do so." Similarly, he questioned Kalyāṇecchū's ability in logical reasoning: "the Chitpavans were superior to all others, Śeṇavīs were among all others, i.e., non-Brahmans; therefore, the Chitpavans were superior to the Śeṇavīs." Without any

proof of the Śeṇavīs' non-Brahman status, Kalyāṇecchū's argument was utterly absurd (Kanvinde 1870: 65).

Viśvāmitra reiterated the arguments of the other Sarasvats regarding patronage received from the Peshva and Shivaji to highlight the exalted history of the Sarasvats. He also alleged that the *ācāra* of *sannyāsa* among the Chitpavans was doubtful: none of the *sannyāsins* hailed from the Chitpavan community (Kanvinde 1870: 68). Viśvāmitra's second letter posed a series of questions challenging Kalyāṇecchū's claim that priesthood was a recent custom among the Śeṇavīs: What was the meaning of "recent?" Who served as the Śeṇavīs' priests in old times? Had Chitpavan priests existed since antiquity? Did Chitpavans act as priests for the Śeṇavīs in all places and times? Viśvāmitra's own answer to these questions was that fifty or sixty years ago, in regions dominated by the Chitpavans and Karhadas, Śeṇavī householders unable to find priests from their own community hired priests from these two communities for ritual duties. In regions dominated by Śeṇavīs, however, only Śeṇavīs had acted as priests for several generations. Therefore, he argued, priesthood was a recent phenomenon among the Chitpavans and Karhadas and not among the Sarasvats (Kanvinde 1870: 72-73).

The most important part of Viśvāmitra's response concerned the issue of food and diet. As mentioned earlier, these were the highlights of Malvankar and Kalyāṇecchū's anti-Sarasvat polemics. These Chitpavans equated "food" with vegetarian food and posited vegetarianism as a criterion for Brahmanhood. Furthermore, this was not just their own individual opinion: it was propagated through contemporary dictionaries and encyclopedias which were sponsored by the state government in order to standardize the

vernacular languages for better administration and communication with the indigenous population. The government appointed panels of indigenous experts (mostly Brahmans) to assist the British editors. In the case of Marathi, the members of the panels were mostly drawn from the Chitpavan community – their Marathi was considered to be generally purer than that of others.[99] Those who stood at the helm of scholarly production also controlled the boundaries of permissible norms and practices in accordance with their own interests. The Chitpavans were able to appropriate this position to their advantage by defining the standard meaning of words according to their own biases. Such discourse in vernacular dictionaries wound up supporting the Chitpavans' claims to ritual and moral superiority over meat-eating communities. This was evident in Kalyāṇecchū's argument that the definition of *anna* (food) was cooked rice or something made from grains, and that this precluded the Sarasvats from inter-dining with other Brahman castes.

In his counter-argument, Viśvāmitra pointed out that the source of Kalyāṇecchū's definition was the *Mahārāṣṭra Bhāṣecā Kośa* (Dictionary of Marathi), a creation of Brahmans: Jagannatha Shastri Kiravanta, Bala Shastri Ghagave, Gangadhar Shastri Phadke, Ramachandra Shastri Janvekar, and Parashurama Shastri Godbole – most of whom were Chitpavans. Viśvāmitra's reference here was to one of the earliest Marathi-Marathi dictionaries prepared by these experts of Marathi; the panel comprised Maharashtrian Brahmans of various castes – Chitpavans, Karhadas, and Deshasthas.[100]

[99] The association between "pure" Marathi and the Chitpavans was observed particularly in case of the Chitpavans of Poona. See The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency Vol.XVIII, p.101 (1885).

[100] The dictionary project was sponsored by Bombay Education Society, which had employed a small group of *paṇḍits* and *śāstrīs* to assist in the preparation of vernacular grammars and translations. The *śāstris*

The dictionary, published in 1829, was prepared under the direction of J.T. Molesworth (the well-known linguist who eventually compiled the first Marathi-English dictionary, drawing on the above dictionary) and Captain Thomas Candy (a principal of the Sanskrit College of Poona) at the behest of Mountstuart Elphinston (Deshpande 2007: 426). Viśvāmitra cited the definition of the word *anna* in the dictionary: "*anna* is that which is made by frying, roasting, and cooking grains, etc., for the sustenance of life. For instance, rice, flatbread, *puris* (fried bread), etc. On special occasions, grains are also called *anna* (Kanvinde 1869: 74)." In its exclusion of meat as food, this definition was a blunt manifestation of the bias of Chitpavans and other vegetarian Brahmans. More importantly, the inscription of this identification of food with vegetarian food in the normative discourse of the state-sponsored Marathi dictionary lent authority to the arguments of Chitpavans like Kalyāṇecchū. In his counter-argument, Viśvāmitra noted – with much anguish – that the standardized discourse in such dictionaries was not free from the biases of their Brahman authors (Kanvinde 1869: 74-75).

Viśvāmitra gave yet another reason for his complaint over the definition of *anna*. On the basis of this definition, Kalyāṇecchū had argued that Brahmans refused to eat at Śeṇavī households owing to the Śeṇavīs' faulty diet (which included items not considered to be proper food). Viśvāmitra dubbed this argument baseless: according to the *rūḍhi* (a close synonym of *ācāra*), it was the Gauda Brahmans who first refused to eat with Dravida Brahmans; several years after the arrival of Gauda-Sarasvats in Konkan from

listed here hailed from Poona, Konkan, and Vasai regions, and none of them had lived in Bombay prior to their employment in the project (Naregal 2004: 148-149).

Trihotrapur, they began dining with the Dravidas out of a sense of mutual affection and a long-standing friendship. In regions such as those to the south where the Śeṇavīs were dominant, however, they still did not eat with several other Brahman communities, including the Chitpavans (Kanvinde 1870: 75).

Viśvāmitra reiterated Kanvinde's argument that the Chitpavans' own status was doubtful, as the Deshasthas refused to share a meal with the Chitpavans before their political ascendancy. He claimed that it was only when the Peshvas assumed complete control over the state that the Deshasthas were *forced* to inter-dine with the Chitpavans, especially in Chitpavan-dominated regions. Although the Peshvas empowered the Chitpavans to join ranks with the Deshasthas, in Satara – and in other majors hubs of the Deshasthas in the South: Kumbhakonam in Tamil Nadu and Udupi and Phalamar in Karnataka – the Deshasthas not only refused to inter-dine with the Chitpavans, but even avoided seeing their faces in the morning (Kanvinde 1870: 78-79). As such, the Chitpavans, the British, and the Muslims were on par with one another in terms of what their political pre-eminence afforded them:

> There is no means stronger than political power to uplift a community. For instance, all Hindus know that no one is inferior to Muslims. But under the reign of Muslim kings look how their worth increased! Hindus will not tolerate a Mahar or a Mang,[101] but don't they now sit with the Muslims with their hips brushing against one another's? And don't they also entertain Muslim whores? When the English had just entered Pune, Hindus would talk to them from a distance and clean up with cow-dung the seats they used. But today, would any *śāstrī* wash his clothes after touching an Englishman (Kanvinde 1970: 79)?

[101] Lower castes among the Hindus who were long considered untouchables.

As an orthodox Hindu, Viśvāmitra's frame of reference for purity was related to the Muslims and British. As a Brahman, however, his identity and purity were defined in relation to another Brahman community whose rise to power – similar to that of the Muslims and British – was instrumental in securing a higher-than-deserved social and ritual status. Likewise, he insinuated that the condition of the Deshasthas was comparable to the orthodox Hindu populace: forced to downgrade its own status to the less pure, but politically superior, communities. There was no better indicator of how political fortunes artificially altered one's status than the transient *rūḍhi* of inter-dining between Deshasthas and Chitpavans. If – in the end – it was all about political power, in what way were the Chitpavans' denigrations of the Sarasvats based on any valid ritual criterion? This seemed to be the subtext of Viśvāmitra's argument.

Let us recapitulate some of the themes around which the contentious claims to Brahmanhood revolved in the debate between the Sarasvats (Kanvinde, Pañcākṣarī, and Viśvāmitra) and the Chitpavans (Malvankar and Kalyāṇecchū). The first group defended the Sarasvats' status by emphasizing the existence of *sannyāsa* and priesthood and the receival of royal patronage – claims that the Chitpavans strongly disputed. Similarly, if the Chitpavans stressed the criterion of a vegetarian diet to denounce the Sarasvats, the Sarasvats undermined the significance of this and instead highlighted the practice of inter-dining to counter-challenge the Chitpavans' claims to authentic Brahmanhood. More importantly, the arguments from both sides based on these motifs – excepting vegetarianism – were staked historically. By citing various instances from the past and referring to great historical personages such as Shivaji and Gauḍapāda, the Sarasvats

attempted to prove the uninterrupted prevalence of the tradition of *sannyāsa*, priesthood, and royal patronage to indicate their superiority over the Chitpavans. By depicting a disjuncture in the custom of inter-dining between Chitpavans and Deshasthas in the past as well as the present, they portrayed the former's status as inferior. The Chitpavans challenged these claims either by denying the veracity of these instances or by presenting a set of counter-facts.

The above account also demonstrates how the claims of both groups rested on appeals to *ācāra* and the approval of *śiṣṭas*. While Kanvinde argued that the custom of consuming fish was not sinful – as it was prevalent even among the pure Brahmans of Bengal – Kalyāṇecchū countered that the custom of eating fish to the south of the Vindhya Mountains rendered the Śeṇavīs *trikarmī* Brahmans. Similarly, according to Kalyāṇecchū, as the *ācāra* of inter-dining was not evident between Śeṇavīs and Chitpavans, the status of the former was questionable. For Kanvinde, the lack of this *ācāra* in the case of Chitpavans and Deshasthas was enough to prove the former's inferior status. The approval of *śiṣṭa*s – such as the *śāstrīs* at Poona and Banaras (two well-known centers of traditional learning) – was a crucial testimony for the Sarasvats to establish the exalted tradition of *sannyāsa*; whereas – according to the Chitpavans – on the basis of a recommendation from the Śaṇkarācārya, Shivaji curtailed the rights of the Sarasvat *sannyāsins*.

In what follows, we examine some of the ways in which the two themes of *ṣaṭkarma* and diet featured in the debate via the invocation of the third *praṃāṇa*: scriptural testimony. We will consider how two types of scriptures – mythical narratives

and Dharmaśāstras – were used differentially to substantiate the Brahmans' respective claims of adherence to the above criteria.

NARRATIVES OF THE PAST AS SOURCES OF HISTORY

The use of mythic narratives such as the Purāṇas and caste-narratives as sources of "history" had become a common norm in the nineteenth and the twentieth century. Dalmia (2001) notes that this period was marked with a distinct "historicizing tendency" – various social groups vied against one another to prove a higher *jāti* status by claiming a more ancient history; to do this, they used the Purāṇas and caste-history narratives. Moreover, she notes, these sources were also used in the historical writings of various groups of scholars. Although the European model of historiography was becoming increasingly popular among newly-emerging indigenous historians in regions such as Bengal, historians in more traditional areas – like Banaras – continued to rely on traditional, Sanskritic modes of historiography (such as those found in the Purāṇas) to construct their accounts of various castes (Dalmia 2001: 60). The British ethnographers and Orientalists also made use of Purāṇic myths and genealogies in order to write codified and standardized accounts of the history of the country and its peoples (Dalmia 2001: 61). Similarly, by perspicaciously blending pre-colonial Sanskritic narratives, vernacular caste-histories, and genealogies with the works of British ethnographers, nationalist historians attempted to construct a homogeneous Hindu-centric history of India (Dalmia 2001: 62). Through the works of these authors, pre-modern narratives acquired the reputation of being textual authorities – authentic scriptures that could be

drawn upon to substantiate the "history" of a group; this "history" could then be deployed to accomplish the social or political goals of that group.

Functioning in an environment where the use of older narratives was both common and essential in writing what was considered authentic history, the Brahmans' recourse to a similar strategy was not surprising. They had access to two narratives: the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Latikā*; the invocation of these narratives was critical to support their respective arguments for a superior Brahman status. Before we examine how these two narratives were deployed, it is important to first understand *why* they became a crucial part of the debate. Apart from the contemporary historiographical trend that impelled the use of these older narratives, certain factors intrinsic to the debate and its participants also necessitated their usage. First, as explained above, the arguments of both Brahman groups were characterized by a strong "historical" tendency: citing instances from the past was a critical means for these groups to challenge each other's claims regarding their adherence to the core elements of Brahmanhood. However, these instances were part of their *recent* past, spanning only the preceding two centuries: beginning with the reign of Shivaji and ending only a few decades earlier to the debates, around the 1820s. (Consider for instance, their claim that Shivaji allegedly stopped patronizing the Sarasvat *maṭha*s, or that it was only around fifty years prior to the debate that the Chitpavans' career as priests of the Sarasvats had begun.) The recent past was not a certain, definite past: riddled with conflicting claims, challenges, and denials from both sides, it could never be the appropriate yardstick to prove either glorious or lowly historical antecedents. Moreover, citing episodes from the recent past was subject to

challenges: these episodes came across as reports, rumors, or hearsay – either wholly unsubstantiated or substantiated with weak evidence, itself susceptible to further challenges. On the other hand, only the incidents of the ancient past could be the more reliable indicator of the "true history" of either community. These incidents appeared to the Brahmans to be true and more valid because they were adduced through Sanskritic sources such as the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Latikā*. Claims based on these two narratives were a sharp contrast to arbitrary claims based on hearsay. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* had already assumed the status of an authoritative scripture through citation in later narratives and invocation as reference material in the *brahmasabhās* convened by the state. Likewise, we have discussed the discursive features through which the *Latikā* sought to establish its status as an authoritative scripture for the history of various communities in Maharashtra. It is not surprising, therefore, that Brahmans sought to appropriate the status of these narratives in their arguments in order to depict the glorious history of their own caste and the lowly history of their opponents.

A few more factors made the implication of these narratives in the debate rather indispensable. We must keep in mind that the orthodox *śāstrīs* and *paṇḍits* – whose dependence on scripture as a crucial means to evaluate a notion or practice was well-known – constituted the primary audience of these arguments. These narratives had played a key role as the basis of judgments in the caste-assemblies and *brahmasabhā*s of erudite *śāstrī*s and *paṇḍits* in the previous century; the deployment of the narratives in contemporary debates was a reiteration of that very model of adjudication, in contrast to the colonial modes of adjudication that paid little heed to scripture (as evident in the

Malvankar-Wagale trial). Similarly, the use of the narratives was also a means for the orthodox *śāstrīs* from both sides to reaffirm and display their own mastery of the scriptures: they sought to resemble the erudite *paṇḍits* of the previous era in order to gain acceptance within orthodox circles.

Yet the invocation of the narratives in the colonial period differed from that in the pre-colonial period in one significant aspect: in pre-colonial Maharashtra, the narratives were deployed within the framework of institutions such as the *brahmasabhās*; they were not made part of the public sphere, where they would have been accessible to an audience outside the limited and privileged audience within the *sabhās*. In other words: the discourse based on the narratives was institutionalized but not publicized. In the nineteenth century this discourse became more individualized and publicized. It was through the negotiations between the Sarasvat and Chitpavan *individuals* that the narratives came to be redefined as the authoritative sources of their respective caste-histories. The debate emerging from these negotiations came to be articulated not within any institutional framework, but within the widely accessible public domain that arose as a feature of colonial society. Contemporary mass media in the form of printed books, pamphlets, and newspapers – in addition to practices such as public lectures, debates, and discussions – were some of the crucial forums and platforms in the public domain which allowed an individual to articulate, share, and reaffirm his/her own ideological position or to contest that of others.' As the intra-Brahmanical debate conducted through the medium of newspapers deployed the discourse in the narratives, both the contents and the image of these narratives as authentic sources for the Brahmans' history was publicized among

a wider audience. This dissemination resulted in further consolidation of their identities and led to greater mobilization among these groups, perpetrating further debates, as we see in the following.

Let us recall in brief that the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* contained noble accounts regarding the establishment of the Sarasvats in Goa and derogatory accounts regarding the origin of the Chitpavans. Accordingly, the Sarasvat and Chitpavan individuals appropriated either of the two narratives to assert their own identity and to undermine that of the other through arguments over each other's historical antecedents. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*'s description of the tenfold Brahmans and its account of the Brahmans from Trihotra formed the mainstay of the Sarasvats' defense. After Kalyāṇecchū's response to Kanvinde was published, an anonymous Sarasvat Brahman wrote a letter in the October 16, 1869 edition of the *Vartamānadīpikā*: dismissing the very category of "*trikarmī* Brahman," the Sarasvat argued that the right to perform the *ṣaṭkarma* was embedded in the very definition of "Brahman." He asserted that the *śāstrādhāra* (scriptural support) for the identification between a Brahman and his right to the *ṣaṭkarma* was the *Skandapurāṇa* (the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*) which described the *pañcagauḍas* and the *pañcadraviḍas*. He also pointed out that the Sarasvats were enumerated among the *pañcagauḍas*, who were said to be entitled to all six actions in the following lines from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*: "*Gāyatri* is the chief mantra of all these Brahmans and they are eligible to perform prescribed rituals. They are entitled to perform the six actions according to the injunctions in the scriptures, and this right should not be questioned (*Skandapurāṇa adhyāya*. 81, *śloka* 6)." In spite of this scriptural evidence, argued the Sarasvat Brahman, the ignorant Chitpavans

– aware of neither history (*itihāsa*) nor the Dharmaśāstras – made foolish accusations that Gauda (Sarasvat) Brahmans were *trikarmī*. The true history of the Sarasvats, he claimed, was to be found in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, the knowledge of which was a sign of wisdom:

> I speak not to those who speak only for the sake of criticizing others, but to those who are wise yet unaware of the knowledge contained in the scriptures. Gaudas are among the ten-fold Brahmans who were established in the Gomāñcala by Paraśurāma, and this is validated by the following *pramāṇa*: "Then Paraśurāma brought ten Brahmans into the Gomanchala. These Brahmans were residents of Trihotrapura and belonged to the group of the *pañcagauḍas*. They were established in five *krośa*s of the Kuśasthalī region. Bhāradvāja, Kauśika, Vatsa, Kauḍiṇya, Kāśyapa, Vasiṣṭha, Jamadagni, Viśvāmitra, Gautama, and Atri – these were the ten sages, *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa adhyāya* 81, *śloka* 48-50" (Kanvinde 1870: 59).

While the Sarasvats could boast of a lofty past, the Chitpavans – he asserted accusingly – were a community of obscure origins that lived near the ocean and had to be purified to become Brahmans. He supported his claim by citing a passage from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* (Ch. 81, 34-38) describing how the fishermen (*kaivartakas*) met Paraśurāma, how he sanctified them, and made them Brahmans: they were known as Chitpavans for they were purified near a funeral pyre. To add insult to injury, the Sarasvat also explained the word *kaivartaka* by citing its dictionary meaning: "*kaivartaka* is a fish-eating fisherman, or a son born out of the adultery between a *Kṣatriya* woman and a hunter." Just as the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* account of the Sarasvats' lofty history was authentic, he implied, so was its account of the inferior origin of the Chitpavans. The "proof" in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* was irrefutable: there was no other *pramāṇa* as great as the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* that could challenge its authority (Kanvinde 1870: 60). This Sarasvat's positing of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* as the most authoritative scripture for their

eminent history and the Chitpavans' lowly antecedents was soon replicated in subsequent letters written by other Sarasvats.

Inspired by the anonymous Sarasvat's exposition of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, other Sarasvats also began to cite the text in order to support their arguments. Their core argument revolved around the *pañcagauḍa/pañcadraviḍa* categorization in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*; they used this to counteract the Chitpavans' emphasis on the *ṣaṭkarmī*/*trikarmī* distinction. For instance, Kalyānecchu had argued that the Chitpavans were pure Brahmans entitled to the *ṣaṭkarma*; as Brahmans, they were superior to non-Brahmans: therefore, the Chitpavans were superior to the Śeṇavīs. In response, Viśvāmitra cited the description of the ten-fold Brahmans in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*: "Brahmans are known to be tenfold – five *gauḍas* and five *draviḍas*. Among the *pañcadraviḍas* are included the Draviḍas, Tailaṇgas, Karnāṭas, Madhyadeśagas, and Gurjaras. The five *gauḍas* are the Trihotras, Agnivaiśyas, Kānyakubjas, Kanojayas, and Maitrayaṇas." Based on this description, Viśvāmitra put forth the following logical propositions:

a) All kinds of Brahmans were subsumed under the ten-fold scheme, but the Chitpavans were mentioned among neither the *pañcagauḍas* nor the *pañcadraviḍas*: therefore, the Chitpavans were not Brahmans.
b) Those who came under the ten-fold Brahmans were entitled to perform the *ṣaṭkarma*; because the Chitpavans were not Brahmans, they were ineligible to perform the *ṣaṭkarma*.

> The ten-fold Brahmans were superior to all other *varṇa*s and the Chitpavans were not listed among the ten-fold Brahmans.

Therefore, the Chitpavans were not superior to the members of any *varṇa* (Kanvinde 1870: 65-67).

In order to establish that the Sarasvats' lineage originated in antiquity and that it had continued until the present times, Viśvāmitra substantiated the accounts in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* with the help of empirically observable practices. First, he cited a portion in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* describing how Paraśurāma brought Brahmans from Trihotra into Gomāñcala and appointed them to worship the deities Maṅgeśa, Mahālakṣmī, Mahālasā, Śāntādurgā, and Nāgeśa. Next, Viśvāmitra asserted that presently all of these were the family-deities (*kuladevatās*) of the Sarasvat Brahmans alone, and did not belong to any other community of Brahmans. As the practices of the Sarasvats corroborated the accounts in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, it was beyond doubt – argued Viśvāmitra – that the Śeṇavī Brahmans were the Trihotra Brahmans enumerated among the *pañcagauḍas*; as such, they were far superior to the Chitpavans (Kanvinde 1870: 65-66). The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* also indicated, he further claimed, that the Chitpavans owed their origin to the Sarasvats: the fact that Paraśurāma brought the Trihotra Brahmans into Goa proved that he revered them and deemed them his preceptors. If Paraśurāma was the guru of Chitpavans (as he had made them Brahmans), and the Śeṇavīs were the gurus of Paraśurāma, what more evidence was required to establish that the Śeṇavīs were the grand-gurus of the Chitpavans (Kanvinde 1870: 66-67)!

While for the Sarasvats the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* was a authentic source of their history, for the Chitpavans this was far from the case. Faced with allegations of having obscure origins (based on the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* account), Chitpavan debaters such as Kalyāṇecchū avoided mentioning the text – let alone acknowledging it as scripture. However, they had recourse to the *Latikā* to strengthen their case against the Sarasvats. Kanvinde had challenged Kalyāṇecchū to produce a *pramāṇa* to support the latter's claim that the Śeṇavīs were entitled only to the three actions. Responding to this challenge in his letter to Kanvinde, published in the November 29, 1869 edition of the *Jaganmitra*, Kalyāṇecchū cited a portion from the account of the Gauda Brahmans' origin in the *Latikā*:

> Due to the consumption of meat, the Brahmans were censured among people. Regretful, they approached the sages who gave them a penance and a separate caste status. The sages also bestowed upon the Brahmans a right to perform the three actions – performing sacrifice, learning Vedas, and giving alms--and named them *Śaṇavī*. After bathing, the Brahmans would draw fish by a net made of hemp (*śaṇasūtra*). Therefore, they were called *Śaṇavi* (Kanvinde 1869: 94).

Kalyāṇecchu asserted that Mādhava's *grantha* (treatise) provided the reliable scriptural testimony for the fact that the Śeṇavī group was a distinct caste eligible only for three actions. In addition to this *pramāṇa*, there existed other authorities, such as the Purāṇas, the Smṛtis, the decisions of *paṇḍits* based on the Smṛtis, and Shivaji's decrees issued proving the same. (In his earlier letter he had claimed to have seen Shivaji's decrees banning the Śeṇavīs to undertake the other three actions.) These authorities only reinforced Mādhava's account. The agreement among all these sources was too obvious to deny the Śeṇavīs' lowly status, he argued (Kanvinde 1870: 91).

While Kalyāṇecchū regarded the authority of the *Latikā* on par with the Smṛtis and the Purāṇas, Kanvinde viewed it with utter disregard. First, he criticized Kalyāṇecchū for citing only a few selected verses from the account of the Śeṇavīs' origin while ignoring the first ten verses in the same account; these verses described how the Gauḍa Brahmans – engaged in the *ṣaṭkarma* – resorted to eating meat during a twelve-year drought. He then cited those ten verses and sarcastically remarked that the Śeṇavīs must be grateful to Mādhava as he had at least acknowledged that they were Gauḍa Brahmans. However, he argued, Mādhava did not give any evidence from the Śāstras to support his fanciful story of how the Śeṇavīs lost their privileged rights due to the consumption of meat during a drought. Kanvinde also raised several questions to undermine the credibility of the narrative. He argued that Mādhava had not supplied precise information regarding the regions affected by the drought, the exact time of the drought, the king who reigned during that time, or the sages who were approached by the Śeṇavīs:

> The sages were unaware of the following injunction in the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti.* "One does not incur sin by eating meat on the following instances: when one's life is in danger, when meat is offered in the *prokṣana* ritual, or when it is used for preparing offering in the *śrāddha* ritual." I do not think that Brahmans of yore were as ignorant as the Brahmans of today! Granting that the Brahmans had approached the sages for a penance, what was the nature of that penance? Also, assuming that some kind of penance was given, why were the three actions withdrawn from the Śeṇavīs, if they had become pure after undertaking the penance? After they took the penance, what scope could possibly remain for any kind of impurity? Therefore, all wise men would agree that Mādhava's fictional story is apocryphal (Kanvinde 1870: 95-96).

Kanvinde sought to further undermine the text by pointing out how it failed to correlate to the "facts" that proved the credentials of the Sarasvats: though the *Latikā* was

composed in *śake* 1611 (CE 1689), the Sarasvat *maṭhas* were well-established all over India from Banaras to Rameshvaram much before that period. Similarly, he pressed on, the chiefs of these *maṭhas* – and not the Śaṇkarācāryas of the *pañcadraviḍa* Brahmans – presided over the Sarasvat caste. If the Sarasvats were *trikarmī* Brahmans, how was the custom of *sannyāsa* prevalent among them, and how did a Gauda Brahman (Śaṇkara's teacher Gauḍapādācārya) bestow spiritual knowledge upon Śaṇkara?

In addition to his general criticism of the *Latikā* in his letters to Kalyāṇecchu, Kanvinde reserved a separate section in his book for his choicest criticism. This section contained entire chapters from the *Latikā* regarding the origin of the Chitpavans and the Karhadas. Preceding these accounts was his elaborate criticism of the text. He alleged that Mādhava was not a learned *paṇḍit* but just an ordinary Karhada Brahman who attempted to ameliorate the negative depiction of his community in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* by constructing a story of their noble past. (Let us recall that in its alternate version the *Latikā* traces the origin of the Karhadas to the holy region Karahāṭaka and describes the Karhadas as Brahmans of the highest status.) Second, he argued, Mādhava was biased against all other Brahman communities: this was evident in his accounts of the lowly origin of other Brahman communities, in particular, those regarding the Sarasvats and the Chitpavans. Third, he alleged that Mādhava's accounts were based on his own whims – not on authentic scriptural *pramāṇas* such as the *Mahābhārata* and the Smṛtis. Last but not least, he criticized Mādhava's knowledge of Sanskrit as being extremely meager: this was evident in the numerous grammatical errors of gender, number, and verb declension.

In short, according to Kanvinde, the *Latikā* was a completely unreliable and mediocre *pramāṇa*, unfit to be cited in any dialogue between *śāstrīs*.

When Kanvinde dismissed the *Latikā* as an inferior work, there was more to his dismissal than what he mentioned. He highlighted how the text suffered from the problems of chronology, consistency, and conformity to empirical evidence. At a subtle level his criticism was based on the well-established criterion for an archetypal scripture: a true scripture was that which originated in a trans-human (*apauruṣeya*) divine source. It contained eternal truths that went beyond the limits of human time, space, and knowledge. The *Latikā* failed to conform to the above criteria and ceased to be a true scripture: the author and time of the *Latikā* were located in the ordinary past. It seemed like an ordinary *grantha* (book) by an ordinary author named Mādhava who was not even well-versed in Sanskrit, and whose biases for or against a community were too blatant to conceal. By contrast, an authentic Purāṇa like the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* was a reliable *pramāṇa*: a quintessential scripture, a trans-historic, divine revelation that contained the "true" account of the Sarasvats' past. As such, any other account of the Sarasvats' "history" would be reliable only if it were based on the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. Kanvinde's conception of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* is evident in his criticism of Mādhava for not having consulted the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* before writing the story of the Sarasvats' past: "Surely, Mādhava did not think it was necessary to look at the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the following lines – 'Then Paraśurāma brought ten sages into Gomāñcala. These sages were residents of the Trihotra region and were included among the *pañcagauḍas*. They were established in the Kuśasthalī region in Gomāncala. Bhāradvāja, Kauśika, Vatsa, Kauḍiṇya, Kaśyapa,

Vasiṣṭha, Gautama, Viśvāmitra, Atri, and Jamadagnī – these were the ten sages. Bhārgava also brought great deities of Trihotrapura into Gomāñcala, such as, Māṅgirīśa Mahādeva, Mhālasā Mahādevī, Śāntādurāa, Nāgeśa, and Saptakoṭīśvara, the holy one" (Kanvinde 1870:96-97).

Kanvinde suggested that yet another authoritative source of *itihāsa* – similar to the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* – was the *Mahābhārata*, which also contained a true account of the Sarasvats. He cited a story from the *Mahābhārata* according to which a terrible twelve-year drought made all the sages too weak to protect the Vedas. Then, Sarasvatī ordered Dadhīca's son – the sage Sārasvat – to consume fish and protect the Vedas. The sage obeyed the order; after the drought ended he handed over the Vedas to other sages. Kanvinde believed that this story from the *Mahābhārata* explained why the Sarasvats were forced to consume fish in order to carry out the noble duty of protecting the Vedas. He alleged that instead of focusing on how the *Mahābhārata* had highlighted the noble past of the Sarasvats, Mādhava had constructed a deceitful account by using only a portion from the *Mahābhārata*: "Therefore, why should one not think that this latter-day (*arvācīna*) Mādhava was a Sarasvat-hater? And if Kalyāṇecchū considers Mādhava's frivolous and childish work authoritative, good for him!" (Kanvinde 1870: 97)!

Yet Kanvinde had betrayed his interest in the text as a useful means to attack his detractors by publishing the accounts on the origin of the Chitpavans and the Karhadas from the *Latikā*. By publishing the account of the Karhadas (which portrayed the community as noble) he sought to support his claim that the work was biased towards the Karhadas. By exposing the Chitpavans' account, which attributed the origin of the

community to an unholy mixture between impure Brahman women and sinful foreigners (*mleccha barbaras*), he sought to question the status of the Chitpavan community. For Kanvinde, the credentials of the *Latikā* were suspicious with regard to the past of the Sarasvats, but acceptable with regard to that of the Chitpavans. This "work of fiction" – which could not stand logical scrutiny, was full of internal inconsistencies, and had no basis in the Śāstras to back its claims – ceased to be such when it supported his attempts to insinuate the lowly past of the Chitpavans. Furthermore, in order to disseminate the accounts of the Chitpavans and Karhadas among a wider audience with a limited knowledge of Sanskrit, Kanvinde also published Marathi translations. Through the publication of its contents and their translation in a printed book, the *Latikā* was to reach a number of Brahmans – both Sarasvats and Maharashtrian Brahmans– whose opinion and support was critical to both Sarasvats and Chitpavans.

Their arguments indicate the distinct ways in which Brahman debaters appropriated the discourse in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and *Latikā* to support their respective claims to authentic Brahmanhood. Both sides presented either of these narratives as an authoritative *pramāṇa* when doing so either confirmed their respective self-images (which they sought to present to the other side), or undermined their opponent's image. However, the debaters – especially Kanvinde – justified their belief (or lack thereof) on the authority of a narrative by subtly invoking the criterion of timelessness and the divinity of scripture. Kanvinde rejected the *Latikā* not only because it termed the Sarasvats as *trikarmī* Brahmans, but also because it seemed to be nothing but the apocryphal work of a recent author, lacking the characteristics of a trans-human scripture.

While rejecting the *Latikā*, Kanvinde simultaneously implied that the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* – a Purāṇa revealed by divine personages in hoary antiquity – was a valid *pramāṇa* with the true account of the Sarasvats' history. Kalyāṇecchū, on the other hand, deployed the *Latikā* in his arguments against the Sarasvats; this itself indicates that he deemed it to be an authoritative scripture. It is difficult to know how Kalyāṇecchū viewed the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*: Kanvinde's book is the only source and it alone contains his letters. If we are to rely on the available letters of Kalyāṇecchū, however, it seems that he neither rejected nor confirmed the authority of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*; instead, he maintained a complete silence. Perhaps this is because the authority of a Purāṇic text – a genre traditionally acknowledged to be authoritative – was too powerful to reject for an orthodox *śāstrī* like him.

The conflict between Sarasvats and Chitpavans was characterized not only by the appropriation of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and *Latikā*, but also by the creation of a meta-discourse built upon these narratives. Through the Brahmans' use of these narratives to bolster their claims for a superior status of their respective communities in relation to each other, these narratives too came to be defined, relativized, and placed in hierarchical relations to each other. Both these narratives and the meta-discourse commenting upon them were broadcast through print media, leading to a much greater awareness of them among the Brahman communities of Maharashtra than in the pre-colonial era. This heralded a new stage in the history of these narratives. In the pre-colonial era they reflected how Brahmanical identities were constructed around the theme of history. As such, in Geertz's terms (1973), through their decriptions of the Brahman communities the

narratives began as *models of* the Brahmanical identities in the pre-colonial era. In the colonial era they became sources of reference for the "history" of these communities. In other words, their image reached a culmination as *models for* these identities.

INVOKING THE DHARMAŚĀSTRAS

Similar to the use of the narratives, the use of the Dharmaśāstras in the debate was a reiteration of an older tradition in pre-colonial Maharashtra. As we discussed in Section I, the *Syenavijātidharmanirṇaya* offers an apt reflection of the *modus operandi* of the *brahmasabhās* in which the Dharmaśāstras were consulted to decide upon a matter of social and religious significance. However, the use of the Dharmaśāstras in the debate was also a result of certain developments in the colonial period. In the context of debates over the custom of *satī* (widow-burning) in colonial Bengal, Lata Mani (1987) has argued that through a complex interaction between indigenous scholars and colonial officials, Brahmanic scriptures – particularly the Dharmaśāstras – came to be regarded as the locus of the authentic Hindu tradition. Despite the ambivalent discourse in the Dharmaśāstras – which was often subject to multiple interpretations – the colonial legislative policy legalized or banned customs such as *satī* with the help of the Dharmaśāstras. The assumption of the colonial officials was that the Dharmaśāstras could lend a standard and homogeneous discursive foundation to state policies regarding such customs. Under the colonial regime there was a stronger drive to incorporate the Dharmaśāstras in a standardized, centralized, and legalized official discourse; this rendered them more normative than before (Mani 1987:121-128). Based on Mani's arguments, we may

conjecture that official recognition of the efficacy of the Dharmaśāstra reinforced the significance of these texts in the eyes of the indigenous intellectuals – whether orthodox or liberal – compelling them to justify their views on the basis of the Dharmasāstras.

Maharashtra followed closely in the footsteps of Bengal in projecting the Dharmaśāstras as an authoritative repository of regulations that could determine the legitimacy of indigenous beliefs and practices. In addition to state officials, Maharashtrian liberal intellectuals drew heavily on the Dharmaśāstras to discuss the validity of contentious practices such as widow remarriage, women's education, and the caste system in relation to the prevalent notions of social progress. The desire to use the Dharmaśāstras was especially acute for orthodox *śāstrīs*: to them, these texts were the most authoritative source of the tenets of the *sanātana dharma*, whose defense was critically important in the face of the threats posed by liberals and missionaries. Controversies were not uncommon: at times, both liberal intellectuals and orthodox *śāstrī*s resorted to the common ground of the Dharmaśāstras in order to support their mutually contradictory viewpoints regarding contemporary issues such as conversion.[102] If contemporary issues could be discussed using the Dharmaśāstras, how could the notion of Brahmanhood – which, in the Brahmanical worldview, was as eternal as the notions of *sanātana dharma* and *varṇāśramadharma* – be far behind?

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[102] The famous case of a Brahman boy named Shripat Sheshadri will be a case in point here. Sheshadri was converted to Christianity but wished to be readmitted to the Brahman caste in 1845. The orthodox Brahmans were against his re-conversion on the grounds that he had committed two heinous sins – coming in close contact with foreigners (*yavanasaṅgadośa*) and eating forbidden food and drink (a*bhakṣyabhakṣa doṣa*). They claimed that their stance was founded on the Dharmaśāstras. The liberal Brahmans such as Balshastri Jambhekar, on the other hand, supported Sheshadri's readmission also on the basis of extractions from the Śāstras (Wagale 1999: 134).

The use of the Dharmaśāstras in the debate over Brahmanhood was directed at two distinct audiences, both of whom believed in the authority of these texts. Explicitly, its use was imperative within the community of orthodox *śāstrīs* who agreed upon the importance of Brahmanhood but disagreed on exactly who constituted its rightful claimant. Drawing upon the charter prescribed to Brahmans in the Dharmaśāstras, each side first established the core elements of Brahmanhood. Having appropriated the discourse on the core elements of Brahmanhood, each side then defended its caste-status in relation to its rival's status. In other words: amongst the Brahmans themselves, the Dharmaśāstras were differentially appropriated in order to define Brahmanhood in terms of individual castes – the concerns for individual caste-identities were stronger and deeper than those for generic class-identity.

Implicitly, on the other hand, the use of the Dharmaśāstras was intended to convince those who subscribed to their authority as the valid source of authentic Hindu tradition, but nonetheless challenged orthodoxy and Brahmanhood. These were the colonial officials, colonial scholars, and the indigenous reformists who sought to weaken the hold of the orthodox on existing social models through the various means discussed earlier. To this audience the discourse in the Dharmaśāstras could have presented a formidable case for the understanding of Brahmanhood – not as the exploitative social organization it was portrayed to be, but rather as a legitimate notion within the authentic Hindu tradition. More importantly, each side used the Dharmaśāstras to define what it deemed to be the core elements of Brahmanhood; as such, the discourse based on these scriptures was portrayed as one primarily about generic Brahmanhood and not about

Brahman castes. By de-emphasizing the notorious caste factor, each side hoped that their colonial and indigenous opponents would accept what was being presented as core Brahmanical ideals. The acceptance of any set of these elements would only indirectly indicate the acceptance of the status of either of the two groups. Without the prestigious scriptures, the Brahmans' arguments would have appeared as a petty caste conflict: as such, it would have failed to attract a positive and sympathetic interest from their colonial and reformist adversaries. The Dharmaśāstras could bring Brahmanhood back within the ambit of what the colonial state thought of as the legitimate and retainable Hindu order. Ultimately, the conferral of this seal of endorsement by the Brahmans' opponents was just as-- if not more -- crucial as that of their supporters.

As mentioned earlier, both mythical narratives and the Dharmaśāstras constituted the body of scriptures used in the debate. How were the respective functions of these two sets of scriptures distinct? The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Latikā* were *regional* sources that recounted the history of Brahman communities: they were useful in establishing the status of these communities within the regional scheme of things (this was related to factors such as sacred places, deities, regions, and customs). Let us note that even the *pañcagauḍa* -- *pañcadraviḍa* distinction was based on a regional divide, and that the individual Brahman groups enumerated therein were named after their respective regions. However, for the contending Brahmans, staking claims to a generic, pan-Indian Brahmanical identity was far more significant than establishing their regional identity. This pan-Indian identity could not be derived from a regional historical source: it could only come from texts whose appeal and authority were accepted at a pan-Indian level. On

a broad level, the prestigious Dharmaśāstras (the *Manusmṛti* would be the perfect example here) were believed to contain theoretical doctrines that transcended spatio-temporal limits: their authority was unimpeachable for orthodox Brahmans across the country. The prescriptions and guidelines laid down for Brahmans in the Dharmaśāstras were believed to provide the most authentic theoretical matrix against which to measure the credentials of *any* Brahman community – regardless of its caste and region. Therefore, above and beyond the use of the narratives (whose authority was contentious and elicited conflicting responses from both sides), the use of the Dharmaśāstras to define the criterion for Brahmanhood was absolutely necessary.

However, notwithstanding its authority, we will see how the Sarasvats and the Chitpavans differentially appropriated the Dharmaśāstras. On the one hand, both groups identified specific markers of Brahmanhood on the basis of the Dharmaśāstra*'s* regulations in order to support their respective arguments. On the other hand, however, they challenged each other's claims by deploying various interpretive and argumentative strategies; this was also based on the Dharmaśāstras. Some of these strategies were: relativizing one set of regulations in a particular text to a set of counter-regulations, specifying the exceptions stated in the same or a different text, and establishing compatibilities between theoretical doctrines and actual practice. Through such strategies, Brahmans sought to circumscribe not just the notion of Brahmanhood, but also the discourse in the Dharmaśāstras, which – far from being homogenous – was inherently full of complexities and variances.

Arguments based on the Dharmaśāstras revolved mainly around the criteria of diet and the entitlement to the *ṣaṭkarma*. Since the Sarasvats were repeatedly named *trikarmī* Brahmans, they strove to prove that the category of *trikarmī* Brahman was non-existent and that being *ṣaṭkarmī* was embedded in the very definition of the word Brahman. For the Sarasvats, therefore, the first step was to define a Brahman in relation to his privileged rights or duties. After Malvankar's testimony in court, a Sarasvat *śāstrī* from Nasik argued in his letter to the *Mitrodaya* that all Brahmans – by default – were entitled to the *ṣaṭkarma* and that the expression "*trikarmī* Brahman" was invalid. The *śāstrī* quoted three Smṛti texts to support his argument:

> Atri says (1.13), performing sacrifices, giving alms, and learning the Veda are the three duties of a Brahman. Officiating at sacrifices, accepting alms, and teaching the Veda – these three are his means of livelihood (*vṛtti*). Hārita says (16.17), the great people have specified that a Brahman be entitled to the six actions. Śaṃkha says (1.2), performing sacrifices, officiating at sacrifices, teaching the Veda, learning the Veda, giving alms, and accepting alms – a Brahman is entitled to these actions (Kanvinde 1870: 33-34).

Alleging that the Śeṇavīs were *trikarmī* Brahmans was as fallacious as saying that one's mother was barren, the *śastrī* argued (Kanvinde 1870: 33-34). The impact of the above argument of the *śāstrī* was soon evident in the arguments of other Sarasvats such as Viśvāmitra. In his letter to Kalyāṇecchū, he referred to the *śāstrī*'s letter and underscored the argument and citations. He also asserted that the Dharmaśāstras lent a strong *śāstrādhāra* (scriptural support) to Sarasvat claims to Brahmanhood (Kanvinde 1870: 68). From the Chitpavan side, Kalyāṇecchū identified the right to perform the *ṣaṭkarma* as only one of the two exclusive markers of Brahmans (*brāhmaṇāncī*

asādhāraṇa lakṣaṇem); the other lay in one's adherence to the prohibition against eating meat (*māṃsa-bhakṣaṇa-niṣedha*):

> Here is the *pramāṇa* for this. The *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* says: "performing sacrifices, learning the Veda, and giving alms; these are the rights of *Vaiśyas* and *Kṣatriyas*. In addition to these, officiating at sacrifices, teaching the Veda, and accepting alms; these are the rights of Brahmans." Moreover, according to the *Gautamasūtras*, "In the case of the twice-born, the three rights are, performing sacrifices, learning the Veda, and giving alms; teaching the Veda, officiating at a sacrifice, and accepting alms– these are the additional rights of Brahmans" (Kanvinde 1870: 91).

Kalyāṇecchū also argued that the second criterion – the prohibition against eating meat – was applicable to Brahmans "who were on the Vedic path" and that various scriptures prescribed expiations to Brahmans for the sin of meat-eating. He supported his argument by citing the following texts:

> Yājñavalkya says, "He who kills an animal for a non-sacrificial purpose resides in terrible hell for as many days as the hair on that animal (7.180)." The *Manusmṛti* says, "Without killing animals, meat cannot be produced. Animal-killing does not take one to heaven; therefore, one must avoid meat. Knowing that meat is obtained through actions such as binding and killing animals, one must abstain from eating meat (5.48, 49)." The Śāstras enjoin expiations for one who has consumed meat. Yājñavalkya says, "If one knowingly consumes a blue jay, a bird with red feet, slaughtered meat, dried meat, and fish, one may fast for three days (7.175)." According to Bṛhad-Yama, if a Brahman eats dried meat, he must undergo the *cāndrāyaṇa* vow; if one eats worms, insects, ants, leeches, etc., he becomes pure by consuming cow's urine for three nights. *Prāyaścittenduśekhara* says, for the deliberate and repeated consumption of fish and dried meat, one should undergo the *cāndra* expiation (Kanvinde 1870: 92).

After establishing the scriptural bases for the *ṣaṭkarma* and abstinence from meat, Kalyāṇecchū alleged that adherence to these two factors was not seen in the actual

conduct (*vartana*) of the Śeṇavīs. He argued: if the Śeṇavīs were Brahmans, they would have carried out the three duties of livelihood (officiating at sacrifices, teaching the Veda, and accepting alms) in the houses of the *pañcadraviḍas*, *pañcagauḍas*, or – at the very least-- the *Śūdras*. In fact – he further argued – Brahmans from other castes carried out these duties in Śeṇavī households. He concluded that the Śeṇavīs were not Brahmans as their conduct was different from that of real Brahmans. He also alleged that the custom of consuming meat was prevalent in Śeṇavī households for a long time. Had they been Brahmans, Kalyāṇecchū argued, this tradition of eating meat should not have been evident. The Śeṇavī's digression from the rules and regulations prescribed for Brahmans in the Smṛtis was sufficient to prove that the Śeṇavīs were "a distinct, non-Brahman caste, eligible to perform only the three actions" (Kanvinde 1870: 92-93). In this way, by highlighting a correspondence (or rather, a lack thereof) between the theoretical regulations in the Dharmaśāstra texts and the actual conduct of the Sarasvats, Kalyāṇecchū was able to argue his position against them.

In his response, Kanvinde criticized Kalyāṇecchū for his selective use of "authoritative statements" in highlighting the prohibition against consuming meat. He alleged the latter of ignoring other statements that would exempt the consumption of meat from being sinful. He argued that the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* from which Kalyāṇecchū cited the rules for this prohibition also mentioned another set of rules:

> Brahmans may eat five five-nailed animals, turtles, hares, and fish such as *siṃhatuṇḍaka*, *rohita*, Boalis, and scaly fish. There are also statements from other scriptures. Manu says, "Fish such as Boalis and *rohita* are used in sacrifices and the *śrāddha* rites, respectively. Therefore, the consumption of these two fish, as

> well as that of *siṃhatuṇḍaka*, *rohita*, and scaly fish is not prohibited, *Manusmṛti* V.16" (Kanvinde 1870: 99).

If exceptions in the Smṛtis allowed Brahmans to consume certain kinds of flesh – wherein fish was clearly enumerated among the permissible foods – the Śeṇavīs were not at fault for consuming fish. (It is interesting to note how Kanvinde generalizes the above rule for the consumption of specific kinds of fish to be applicable to the consumption of any fish and then attempts to justify the practice.) Furthermore, the custom of eating fish was evident in the *ācāra* of the Bengali Brahmans; this *ācāra* was also sanctioned in the Smṛtis:

> It is well-known that in Bengal a number of Gauda Brahmans consume fish and other kinds of meat. They even give fish in offerings and donations, along with other things. When one gives fish in an offering, that offering is not to be refused, as indicated in the following Smṛti: one may not refuse an offering consisting of the *kuśa* grass, vegetables, milk, fish, perfumes, curds, land, meat, bed, seat, and grains (Kanvinde 1870: 101).[103]

The consumption of fish among the Sarasvats, therefore, could be justified on the basis of both Smṛti and *ācāra*. Similarly, even with regard to the criterion of the *ṣaṭkarma*, the Sarasvats' conduct demonstrated compliance with the Smṛtis. A numbers of priests from the community were seen engaged in the three privileged actions in non-Sarasvat households in Karnataka. Just because Śeṇavī priests did not carry out these duties at some other places did not indicate the lack of their status or eligibility, he asserted.

[103] *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* 9. 214

Kanvinde used similar strategies in order to challenge the credentials of the Chitpavans and other vegetarian Brahman communities. While Kalyāṇecchū argued – based on one set of regulations – that the Śāstras disapproved of the consumption of meat, Kanvinde pointed out another set of rules that proscribed the consumption of certain vegetarian articles of food. Additionally, he found the Chitpavans' modes of livelihood to also be at odds with regulations in the Smṛtis:

> If we are to stringently abide by the rules regarding sinning and undertaking penance, most Brahmans will be in deep trouble. When Kalyāṇecchū cited the prohibition for the consumption of meat, he probably lost sight of this Smṛti of Yājñvalkya: "onions, pigs, mushrooms, chicken, garlic, and carrots – he who consumes these accidentally, must undergo the *cāndrayaṇa* penance;" The *Manusmṛti* says: "He who deliberately eats onions, mushrooms, pork, village-chicken, garlic, and carrots, commits sin." Here, onions, garlic, and carrots are said to be on par with pigs and chicken. You will find few Brahmans in Hindustan who do not consume these. Those Brahmans are fallen, are they not? In North Hindustan, let alone Brahmans, even Hindus do not touch onions. In this part of Hindustan, however, those who call themselves Brahmans not only eat forbidden foods, but also undertake actions that are fit for *Śūdras*. Yājñavalkya says: "Selling lac, salt, meat, birds, milk, yogurt, and liquor is tantamount to a lower *varṇa* status." The *Manusmṛti*: "a Brahman who sells meat, salt, and lac falls immediately, and he who sells milk becomes a Shudra after three days."[104] "A Brahman who willingly sells goods other than those specified above, becomes a Vaishya after seven days."[105] Several Chitpavans in this part of the country, who call themselves Brahmans, sell milk, curds, etc. in shops. I have heard that a person, who calls himself *śāstrī*, sells cow's milk! Thinking that the people doing such acts are *Śūdras*, no one has ostracized them. But when it comes to ostracizing others, these very people will be at the forefront (Kanvinde 1870: 100).

In Kanvinde's argument, then, instead of the regulations against the consumption of meat, those against the consumption of certain vegetarian foods and the practice of not

[104] *Manusmṛti* 10.91
[105] *Manusmṛti* 10.92

selling certain goods were the markers of a true Brahman. The prominent Smṛtis of Yājñavalkya and Manu forbade the consumption of vegetables such as onions – this regulation was abided by authentic Brahmans and Hindus in North India. By deviating from this rule, the Chitpavans stood to lose their status not only as Brahmans but also as pure Hindus. Similarly, the Smṛtis prohibited Brahmans from selling goods such as milk, yet, in practice, the Chitpavans failed to adhere to this prohibition. It was only their predominance in Maharashtra that let the Chitpavans get away from this breach of conduct.

The above review of the arguments indicates the grounds on which Chitpavan and Sarasvat *śāstrīs* both met with and departed from each other. Both groups believed in the authority of the Dharmaśāstras in defining the essential characteristics of Brahmanhood; both conceded that the code of conduct for Brahmans laid down in the Dharmaśāstras was to be followed meticulously in practice. The acceptance of these propositions was both obvious and necessary in the debate between two orthodox groups. What is interesting, however, is that within the scope of these shared assumptions, the two sides articulated mutually divergent views by deploying various strategies. Instead of explicitly rejecting the "evidence" from the Dharmaśāstras presented by the opposite side, each side exploited the ambiguities and complexities in the Dharmaśāstra texts to present counter-evidence consonant with their own concerns and purposes. Based on different citations, the debaters construed the core essentials of Brahmanhood differently. Thus, neither group challenged that the right to the *ṣaṭkarma* was synonymous with Brahmanhood; nor did they challenge the significance of diet in defining Brahmanhood. Kalyāṇecchū's

Chitpavan-centric view equated vegetarianism with authentic Brahmanhood by citing rules from reputed Smṛtis prohibiting the consumption of meat. Without questioning the validity of these citations, however, Kanvinde demonstrated that these regulations regarding the consumption of meat were relative in light of a *different* set of rules in the same Smṛtis (as well as in different ones). He also highlighted rules in other Smṛtis to argue that even the consumption of certain vegetarian foods was tantamount to the loss of Brahmanhood. Thus, the arguments from both sides sought to define the essence of not only Brahmanhood, but – indirectly – that of the complex discourse in the Dharmaśāstras with regard to Brahmanhood as well. Both sides presented a fixed set culled from the vast repertoire of Dharmaśāstra prescriptions as the most representative set of regulations to circumscribe the "authentic" discourse on Brahmanhood.

The fate of this debate was similar to that of most debates: with both sides substantiating their arguments on the basis of scriptures (the narratives and the Dharmaśāstras) and neither side accepting the arguments of its opponents, the debate ultimately reached a dead-end. Or, at least, so it seems from Kanvinde's account, although the author claimed that the Sarasvats' defense had served their purpose (*yathārtha*). One of the most extensive and publicized debates between two Brahman groups came to an end but not to a conclusion: the debate in the Marathi newspapers soon gave way to a debate in English newspapers which reached an entirely different audience.

THE DEBATE IN ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS

Following the cessation of the debate in the Marathi newspapers, the English-language newspapers took up the question: which group held the right to Brahmanhood's custodianship? The difference between the debates in Marathi and English was much more than a mere matter of language: the differences in the debaters' aims and their intended audiences called for changes in the discursive aspects of the debate, its argumentation strategies, and the types of authorities and sources that could be invoked. These differences were the result of some concurrent shifts in the broader spheres available to Marathi and English media in the nineteenth century. Therefore, before we examine the contours of the English-language debate, let us briefly consider how these distinct linguistic spheres were created and how this came to influence the indigenous intellectuals' choice of medium.

In explicating and explaining the differences in the domain of Marathi and English, I draw on Veena Naregal's (1999) perceptive analysis of how the linguistic divide between these two languages was created in colonial Maharashtra and how that divide was critical in shaping the vernacular intelligentsia's responses to the colonial state from the mid nineteenth century to its end. As part of the state's education policy during the early decades of the nineteenth century, English was promoted as the medium of higher education; consequently, vernacular languages such as Marathi assumed a subordinate position. Nonetheless, the dissemination of utilitarian and scientific knowledge as well as the spread of modes and methods of rationalistic thought to the masses necessitated the translation of English into Marathi; people skilled in both these

languages become a precious commodity. The section of the indigenous literati that had acquired the skills of translation were now exposed to new intellectual, cultural, and political avenues. With the acquisition of a privileged socio-political position, these intellectuals were able to mediate between the state and the masses and control the nature of the discourses exchanged (Naregal 1999: 3447-3448).

Moreover, although the state projected an equivalence between English and Marathi by encouraging translation between the two, the hierarchy between these two languages was maintained implicitly in the bilingual policy. The linguistic hierarchy led to a hierarchy between those who knew English and those who knew only the vernacular: between the educated and the masses. The most conspicuous effect of the creation of these two distinct classes was evident in the initiatives of the indigenous intelligentsia to start bilingual newspapers in Marathi and English during the 1830s and '40s. The editors of these early newspapers (who, at this time, controlled the dissemination of knowledge) acknowledged the importance of English and the need to disseminate discourses in English to the masses by publishing identical versions in English and Marathi; they accorded equal status to both languages and their audiences.

The situation changed significantly after and during the 1860s: with the Bombay University's establishment and the emergence of graduates, the difference between Marathi as a medium of primary education and English as the medium of higher education became more pronounced. Consequently, the editors of the bilingual newspapers attuned themselves to the widening rift between Marathi and English and began offering two distinct discourses to two different audiences: the cultivated English-

knowing audience and the vernacular-knowing subaltern masses. The Marathi sections (directed at the latter group) indicated the editors' familiarity with the politics of the provinces: the editors articulated their own views on measures intended to improve the subalterns' conditions. The English sections, by contrast, dealt with important policy measures, court cases, government decisions, the appointment of indigenous individuals to positions of high rank, and other events that would interest an urban audience (Naregal 1999: 3450). Through the selective use of language in these bilingual newspapers, the indigenous intelligentsia manipulated the linguistic divide to climb the social ladder: from their old role as the disseminators of knowledge, they now aspired to become representatives of indigenous society to the government – they sought a politically significant, hegemonic position (Naregal 1999: 3450).

How did the creation of a bilingual sphere, the perceived superiority of English and the English-knowing intelligentsia, and the critical role played by bilingual newspapers after the 1860s affect the Sarasvat-Chitpavan debate? It seems that the orthodox Sarasvat and Chitpavan debaters – much like the editors of the bilingual newspapers – were acutely aware of the significance of both English and Marathi and exploited the divide between the spheres of these two languages to negotiate with two distinct audiences. By publishing their letters in Marathi newspapers, they attempted to reach a large number of orthodox Brahmans situated in Bombay and the hinterland who were adept in Marathi but not English. However, if the debate was to reach the elite English-knowing audience – which included not only Western-educated university-graduates, but also state officials, colonial scholars, and Christian missionaries – there

was no better language than English. The defense of Brahmanhood and a Brahman caste – portrayed as the defense of orthodoxy itself – would not have been politically significant were it not expressed in English, ironically a foreign language. Therefore, immediately after the cessation of the debate in the Marathi newspapers, the debating sides turned to the English newspapers in Bombay. The change in the medium of expression called for commensurate changes in argumentative strategies, textual authorities, and the tone in which this audience was addressed. We will also discuss how the translation of this debate into Marathi was critical to the endeavors of Brahmans like Kanvinde to mobilize the support of lay Brahmans situated in the hinterland and to consolidate their own position as the representatives of the Brahman masses.

The debate in English newspapers began with a report published in the *Bombay Guardian*, a Christian weekly published and edited since 1851 by George Bowen (an American missionary). The editor claimed that the report was based on information provided by an anonymous correspondent. Referring to Ganesh Malvankar's statement in the trial that the Sarasvats were *trikarmī* Brahmans, the report mentioned that the Sārasvata Brahmasamūha association was founded in order to defend and protect the Sarasvats by replacing the Chitpavan and Karhada priests by those from the Sarasvat community and training the Sarasvat priests in Vedic lore through the establishment of a Vedic school. It further noted that the president of the association, Mr. Bhavani Vishvanath Kanvinde, had delivered a few lectures in Marathi on the history of his community and that of the Chitpavans at the Thakurdvar temple. (The temple was one of the oldest and most prestigious temples founded by the Sarasvats in Bombay.) The most

interesting portion of the report, however, was the editor's claim that he was not interested in getting involved in the caste dispute between the Chitpavans and Sarasvats and had, therefore, omitted the remainder of the correspondent's letter. Yet, the following statement in the report was enough to betray his interest in the matter:

> We merely mention for the information of our unenlightened readers that a Brahman is a designated *Shutkurme*, because he is competent for six functions, viz. *Adyayan*, study of the Shastras; *Dan*, Alms-giving; *Yujan*, sacrificing by deputy; *Adyapan*, teaching the Shastras; *Prutigraha*, accepting gifts; *Yajan*, sacrificing personally. A Shenvi on the other hand is supposed to be without the last three privileges, and is called *Trikurme*, a man of three functions (Kanvinde 1870: 116).

The editor did not reveal the name of his correspondent but there is ample scope to believe that he was either a Chitpavan or a Karhada Brahman, keen to convey the recent controversy regarding the Sarasvats' status to the most radical opponents of Brahmans and Hinduism: the missionaries. As mentioned earlier, for the orthodox, the most powerful challenge to the *sanātana dharma* came from missionary polemics that were beginning to succeed in winning over a section of reformist Hindus. Even as the Hindu orthodoxy was increasingly defined through defiance against missionary propaganda, those who represented that orthodoxy found it imperative to define themselves against the same. Although, as champions of the orthodox, Brahmans battled against the missionaries' proselytizing drive, paradoxically, it was this very conflict which reinforced their own position as the legitimate proprietors of the *sanātana dharma*. Consequently, whom the missionaries considered as "Brahman" was critical to the self-image of those divided over the right to Brahmanhood. From this perspective, there was

more to the above report than what meets the eye: by defining the word Brahman and declaring the Śeṇavīs to be *trikarmīs* – likely according to information from the same anonymous correspondent – the missionary editor had indirectly endorsed the stance of the Chitpavans and refuted that of the Sarasvats.

Expectedly, the above piece of news evoked a strong response from the Sarasvat community. Kanvinde wrote a long letter to Bowen clarifying the latter's "misunderstanding" regarding the Śeṇavīs in order to convince him that the Śeṇavīs were entitled to the six privileges. In the June 4, 1870 edition of the *Guardian,* the editor acknowledged the receipt of Kanvinde's letter and reiterated his stance of non-interference in caste-matters. However, he politely refused to publish Kanvinde's letter: "it would not reach the eyes of those who were chiefly concerned," and it was certainly not an interesting matter for the *Guardian's* readers. He continued: "we scarcely at all occupy ourselves with the points of difference between the different denominations of Protestant Christians. Why then should we enter into a conflict between Brahmins and the Śeṇavīs?" (Kanvinde 1870: 118). Despite this disclaimer, the editor's separate mention of the words Brahman and Śeṇavī was too glaring to be lost on Kanvinde and he decided to pursue the matter further.

Due to the apparent disinterest of the *Bombay Guardian* in publishing his letter, Kanvinde approached the bilingual *Mitrodaya* and published a detailed letter in English on June 12, 1870. Referring to the *Guardian's* editor's statement that the Śeṇavīs were *trikarmī*, Kanvide alleged that the weekly had indirectly endorsed Malvankar's baseless statements in the trial. In order to prove that the Śeṇavīs were *ṣaṭkarmi* Brahmans,

Kanvinde put forth his usual arguments: the existence of the practice of *sannyāsa* among the Śeṇavīs, the grants given by the Peshva to Śeṇavī *maṭhas*, the existence of Śeṇavī priests who served their own community in Karnataka, and the presence of inter-dining between his community and the Deshasthas. He also added that the Śeṇavīs in general did not prefer the priestly profession: they were enterprising and gifted men who preferred to maintain themselves by means other than preaching and begging. The Chitpavans and Karhadas, alleged Kanvinde, strove to downgrade the Śeṇavīs, who had "an independent spirit" and "did not go completely under the sway of priesthood as others did" (Kanvinde 1870: 122).

The most remarkable part of Kanvinde's argument, however, was the clever use of sources to manipulate his target readers. He cited colonial as well as Sanskrit works: ethnographic and linguistic accounts by British scholars and the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and *Latikā*. The use of the former was clearly intended to appeal to the English-speaking audience: missionaries, state officials, and colonial scholars who were familiar with the English sources, but not with the Marathi or Sanskrit ones. The use of the Sanskrit sources was primarily to make the missionaries and others aware of these indigenous sources. In the following, we see how Kanvinde deployed and critically evaluated both sets of texts in order to support his arguments. The analysis also implies how such an evaluation had very different implications for both sets of sources.

Although the use of English sources was necessary, Kanvinde did not necessarily agree with all of them. Among the works with which he felt compelled to express his disapproval were the "two English authorities" – *the Marathi-English Dictionary* by

Molesworth (1857) and *Hindu Castes, Their Law, Religion and Customs* by Arthur Steele (1826). What portions in these texts drew Kanvinde's criticism? Steele's compendium of Hindu castes and customs claimed to be a comprehensive and standard digest based on the vast but "inconsistent" body of the Dharmaśāstras as well as on unrecorded customs which were used to determine general principles of jurisprudence on matters of caste and religion. To accomplish this purpose, the author claimed to have collaborated with the *śāstrīs* and heads of castes who were familiar with the important Dharmaśāstra texts, their commentaries, and the new and old customs of various castes (Steele 1986: iii-vii). Steele listed among his chief collaborators the eminent *śāstrīs* of Poona (Steele 1986: viii). He also mentioned the *pañcagauḍa* -- *pañcadraviḍa* categorization, but did not mention that the Śeṇavīs were the Sarasvats of the *pañcagauḍas*. In his description of the Śeṇavī caste, he claimed, "the Senvee Brahmans, being confined to three *Kurum*, or religious duties, and being less strict as to diet, are not invited to the houses of these ten subdivisions" (Steele 1986: 79).

Just like Steele's book, Molesworth's *Marathi-English Dictionary* was also compiled with assistance from a team of learned *śāstrīs* which included Chitpavan and Karhada Brahmans such as Bal Shastri Ghagave, Gangadhar Shastri Phadake, Sakharam Joshi, and Parashuramapant Godbole (Molesworth 1857: 10). (As mentioned earlier, the very same experts had compiled the Marathi-Marathi dictionary under Molesworth's supervision.) In consultation with these scholars, Molesworth defined the word Śeṇavī as follows:

> A division or distinction, or an individual caste amongst Brahmans. They have the *adhikāra* or the right of *trikarma* or one half of the appropriate *ṣaṭkarma*, i.e., they may observe *adhyayana* or sacred study, *dāna* or giving alms or gifts, *yājana* or effecting sacrifice through another, or officiating sacrifice at another; whilst they are precluded from *adhyāpana*, Teaching the sacred books, *pratigraha* or Accepting of donations, *yājana*, Offering sacrifice in or for one's own person. Their use of fish is amongst the original grounds of their degradation and preclusion.

The caste-bias of Molesworth's and Steele's Brahman assistants clearly played a key role in their description of the Śeṇavīs. Kanvinde's discomfort with these works was mainly because the description of the Śeṇavīs, although biased, had assumed an aura of authority: these works were state-sponsored and had already gained the reputation of being the standard books on Hindu castes and on the Marathi language, respectively. He refused to accept the authority of these books on the grounds that their authors had not *personally* consulted any "standard" works on Hindu castes, but merely depended on information from their Chitpavan *paṇḍits*. He also argued that not a single "standard Sanskrit work" maintained what these two books stated (Kanvinde 1870: 120). His complaint that both the *paṇḍits* and their patrons relied on works that failed to meet the essential criteria for what qualified as a "standard" book in Sanskrit was significant. This was his attempt, as a Brahman himself, to manipulate the opinion of the missionaries and the colonial scholars regarding what did or did not qualify as a reliable source for the origin of Brahman castes in general and that of the Śeṇavīs in particular.

However, while he accused Molesworth and Steele of being unreliable, Kanvinde cited some other sources that he considered to be the standard works on Brahman castes (particularly on the history of the Chitpavans). His chief argument against the Chitpavans

was that the Chitpavan claim to Brahmanhood was questionable: they had taken to the priestly profession only with the encouragement of the Peshvas and had only recently begun to inter-dine with the Deshasthas. In order to support this argument, Kanvinde cited *History of India* by Walter Hamilton: this text maintained that since Bajirao Peshva was not a Brahman of a higher class, the "purer classes of Brahmans" refused to inter-dine with him and forbade him from using the flight of stairs used by their own priests at the Nasik pilgrimage. Kanvinde mentioned that the pure Brahmans described here were the Deshasthas.[106] Kanvinde also mentioned Hamilton's statement that the "Poona Brahmans" who claimed to be extremely pure because of their abstinence from meat were "held in extreme contempt by their carnivorous brethren of Bengal and Upper-Hindustan" (Kanvinde 1870: 121). In addition to Hamilton, Kanvinde cited Christian missionary F.D.W. Ward's account that the Peshva – despite his exalted position at the head of the Maratha confederacy – "was long excluded from eating at table with any Brahmins of high caste" (Kanvinde 1870: 121). Yet another authoritative work was Col. Mark Wilk's *History of Mysore*, in which "the author had written in stronger terms about them, whom he styles Concan Brahmins, instead of Concanast Brahmins—a term they have well-succeeded in applying to themselves. The real Brahmins of Concan are Shenvees" (Kanvinde 1870: 121).

What can we say about the objectivity of the above works which Kanvinde cited? Judging by their contents alone, it seems that just as the colonial accounts regarding the

[106] By the 1880s, Hamilton's account of the Deshasthas snubbing the Chitpavans made its way into the gazetteers. See the Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency (Poona) Vol. XVIII p. 101 (1885).

Śeṇavīs were based on the information provided by the Chitpavan *panḍits*, the above accounts regarding the Chitpavans were possibly based on information supplied by the Chitpavans' adversaries – most likely the Deshasthas. Moreover, the British themselves deemed the Chitpavans staunch supporters of orthodoxy and bitter opponents of the "progressive" policies of the state. They often used the term "Poona Brahmans" condescendingly to refer to the orthodox Chitpavans of Poona. Therefore, the inclusion of the above information on the Chitpavans in their accounts was not a matter of passive acceptance but rather a matter of discerning selection on the part of the colonial scholars. In citing these sources, Kanvinde showed no concerns over the originality and objectivity of these works. In fact, he endorsed their authority by citing them because they bolstered his own argument against the Chitpavans. In his astute use of these colonial sources, Kanvinde suggested a hierarchy for readers who deemed these colonial accounts normative: the "non-standard" works of Steele and Molesworth, on the one hand, and the "standard" works of Hamilton, Wilk, and Ward, on the other. It is fascinating to see how, irrespective of its acceptance or denial, colonial discourse based on the input of Brahmans fed back into the arguments of one Brahman caste against another. Thereby, these sources ultimately implied their own indispensability and authority in defining the identities *of* Brahmans, *for* Brahmans.

However, notwithstanding the significance of the colonial accounts, Kanvinde could not disregard the Sanskrit sources. He had alleged that the colonial accounts were not based on any standard Sanskrit sources. Therefore, it was incumbent upon him to explain which Sanskrit sources qualified – or failed to qualify – as standard. His first

target was the *Latikā*: this was an unreliable source of information given by the Chitpavans to their British patrons. In his letter to the editor of the Anglo-Marathi newspaper *Mitrodaya*, he leveled a series of charges against the treatise focusing on issues such as its internal inconsistencies, lack of precise information, and the author's mediocrity and ignorance:

> In a work called *Shataprasna Kalpa Latica*, the writer has perverted the account of Sarasvat Rishi in the Gada Parwa of the Mahabharat, and has stated that because during famine Goud Saraswats began eating fish for twelve years they lost three out of six rights, a fictitious tale neither supported by any standard work of reference, nor on the face of it, does it show any mark of truth in it. At what time this event took place, what Rishi was he to whom the Gouds admitted that they used fish, under the circumstances mentioned, was a sin committed by them, what penance the Rishi prescribed, all this does not appear in the work. It does not even occur to the writer that it would look ridiculous, if he maintained that after even the penance was submitted to, the Gouds were made to lose their three rights. The writer, it seems, was ignorant that the other Goud brethren of the Shenvi alias Saraswat Brahmans, residing in the North and North-east of India not only eat fish but also meat, and yet their six rights are still in force. Some of the Poona Bhuts, by whom Gunesh Bapuji is considered a champion of Brahmanical rights, because he is a leading member of the anti-widow remarriage association, supported some months ago his assertion about Shenvi Brahmans and put forward the above essay, when I refuted the arguments and submitted the question to other learned men whose opinion I now hold, and a printed copy of which I send for your perusal. The Chitpavan Bhuts took the author of this book to be Sayon Madhaw alias the learned Vidyarunya, but unfortunately it is plain from the date given in the essay itself that Sayon Madhaw had died long before the existence of this author. This author, it appears, was a *Karada* (Kanvinde 1870: 123).

Kanvinde's criticism of the *Latikā* in this letter is strikingly similar to that which he had expressed in his earlier letter to Kalyāṇecchū. However, in the present context, his dismissal of the *Latikā* as a fictitious tale not supported by *any standard work of reference* and his attempt to prove the lack of logic or "truth" in it were directed at

colonial scholars and Western-educated indigenous scholars whose predilection for what they deemed to be rational and objective sources was well-known. They espoused the European model of historiography which described events linearly and "objectively," claiming to leave little scope for anything based on unfounded and fanciful imagination. The missionaries, similarly, were ever-critical of the Hindu accounts for providing inaccurate information on dating and authorship and for being full of internal inconsistencies and logical fallacies (O'Hanlon 1985: 58). Therefore, by highlighting the apparent internal inconsistencies, imprecision, lack of cross-reference, and the mediocre authorship of the *Latikā*, Kanvinde was attempting to alter the colonial scholars' opinion of both the source on which their accounts of the Śeṇavīs were based and also their Chitpavan informants who recommended the use of such a terrible source in the first place. Similarly, he wished to convey to the missionaries (such as Bowen) that the *Latikā* was an unreliable Hindu source for the history of the Śeṇavī Brahmans who were as orthodox and pure as any other Brahman caste. If we compare his criticism of the *Latikā* to his critiques of Steele and Molesworth, we notice how Kanvinde set up colonial and indigenous sources against each other and proved them both invalid and unreliable. On the one hand, colonial accounts by Steele and Molesworth were flawed because they were based on fictitious works such as the *Latikā* and not on any standard Sanskrit works. The *Latikā*, in turn, was inauthentic and fictitious, because it did not conform to any standard work of reference and failed to meet Western criteria for valid historical accounts.

While Kanvinde accused the *Latikā* of being fictitious and non-standard, he presented the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* as a standard Sanskrit scripture for the history of the Sarasvats. Immediately after arguing that Steele and Molesworth's works were not derived from any standard work, he described the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* account of the Sarasvats: here, they were described as among the *pañcagauḍa* Brahmans who came into Konkan from Trihotrapura by the grace of Paraśurāma. He also referred to the *pañcagauḍa* -- *pañcadraviḍa* division of the principal Brahmans, all of whom were entitled to the *ṣatkarma,* and argued that no standard Sanskrit works included the Chitpavans or the Karhadas among either of these two classes. He further asserted that the Śeṇavīs were the original Brahmans of Konkan, for the account in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* could be validated:

> It appears from the Sahyadrikhand that ninety-six families first settled in several towns or the villages of the Concan therein named, and Goa was their principal place where their family gods were first established, and this statement is borne out by the fact of the principal Brahman hereditary officers or watandars in the Concan being Shenvi Brahmans and not Chitpavans, the Konkanasts of the present day. Some of these watans have, since the ascendancy of the Peshvas, gone out of their hands and have been in the enjoyment of the latter, but many are still held by Shenvi Brahmans (Kanvinde 1870: 121).

The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* was a standard scripture because its account of the Śeṇavīs could be verified through observable facts. There was a sustained continuity and consistency across the revelations of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, the history of the days of the Peshva, and present empirical facts. Kanvinde's attempt to establish the authenticity of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* in light of concrete and verifiable factors would have succeeded in

convincing Western audiences of the significance of the text. This may also explain why – unlike his attempt to analyze the *Latikā* – Kanvinde did not analyze the contents and features of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*: doing so would have undermined his arguments. His endeavor to bring the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* to the fore and present it as a standard Sanskrit source for the history of the Sarasvats eventually led to a culmination-point in its history. In 1877, eight years after the Sarasvat-Chitpavan controversy of 1869, a Western-educated Indo-Portuguese scholar named Garson Da Cunha brought out the first critical edition of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* with the help of three Sarasvat *śāstris* – Lakshman Shastri Keni, Yeshvant Fondoba Dannaita, and Ganesh Anant Shastri. Based on multiple versions of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, the critical edition created a "standard" narrative of the tales of Konkan, Paraśurāma, Sarasvats, Chitpavans, and Karhadas; these then formed the chief basis of further writings on these castes.

In addition to his strategic use of the colonial and Sanskrit accounts, Kanvinde also altered his language and tone to suit the audience. From the acerbic and condescending language used in his Marathi letters to Kalyāṇecchū, he resorted to a restrained and polite tone in his English correspondence in the *Mitrodaya*. Expressing his great respect for the editor of the *Bombay Guardian*, he politely accepted that the subject matter of his letter was of no interest to the readers of the newspaper. Yet, to justify his act he wrote, "I would not have troubled him with it had he not offered his supposition that Shenvi Brahmans were trikurmees." Notwithstanding his display of respect for the editor, Kanvinde also *politely* registered his protest against the editor. He maintained that despite the editor's claim of having no intention of disputing that the Śeṇavīs had the six

rights, “the learned writer” had committed a common error by saying “Brahmans and Śeṇavīs.” Kanvinde’s sense of disappointment was most apparent in his poignantly haunting question: “How would it look to say British and English?” Finally, he explained the relationship between a Brahman’s *varṇa* (class) and *jāti* (caste): “Brahman is a general term encompassing different classes and divisions, and if any distinction is to be made, the two conflicting castes and divisions should be stated, viz., Śeṇavīs and Deshusts, but it is wrong to say Brahmans and Śeṇavīs or Brahmans and Deshusts” (Kanvinde 1870: 124). For Kanvinde it was important to let the “learned” missionary know that the difference in his identity as a Brahman and as a member of the Śeṇavī caste was only a matter of generality versus specificity. Simply knowing the mutual inseparability of these identities was not enough; one had to demonstrate it in speech just as well.

Kanvinde’s letters in the Marathi/English newspapers became widely publicized among the Sarasvats of Bombay who were deeply influenced by Kanvinde’s arguments and learned to deploy similar arguments. Soon after Kanvinde’s letter was published in the *Mitrodaya*, another letter from a certain Shivshankar Maloji of the Shimpi (tailor) caste was published in the *Bombay Gazette*. The letter, written in the context of the ongoing widow-remarriage controversy, intended to explain the state of widows in Maharashtra, their customs, and the treatment they received. One of Maloji’s statements was that “the Śeṇavīs, the Purvoos (Prabhus), Sonars and others think it an honor in practicing most of the usages and customs of the Brahmins” (Kanvinde 1870: 132). The insinuation of this statement was obvious: the Sarasvats, well aware of the recent

Kanvinde/Kalyāṇecchū debate, were not going to be passive. A Sarasvat Brahman named Vishnu Yeshvanta Rege responded to Maloji and drew his attention to the ongoing controversy between the "notorious" Ganesh Malvankar and Kanvinde. He also mentioned how the latter had successfully dismissed the claim that Śeṇavīs were *trikarmīs*. Furthermore, he argued that any standard Sanskrit work would certify that the Śeṇavīs were Brahmans, even superior to some of the other divisions. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, asserted Rege, contained a "true account" of the Sarasvat Brahmans' history. He repeated Kanvinde's arguments regarding the prevalence of the Sarasvat *svāmis* and *maṭhas* in renowned places, how they received donations from various royal patrons in the country, and how the Sarasvat *sannyāsins* were allowed to descend the same flight of stairs as used by the holy priests of Nasik. Kanvinde's letters became a narrative in themselves: an authoritative discourse deemed to contain authentic facts regarding the history of the Sarasvats. He had successfully defended the community against the onslaught of the Chitpavans.

The correspondence that took place in English between the Sarasvats and the editors of the *Guardian*, the *Mitrodaya*, and the *Gazette* could mobilize English-knowing Sarasvats in Bombay like Rege. However, the majority of Sarasvats were located in the hinterland regions, away from Bombay – the center of the debate. A long list of "patrons" – Sarasvats who booked advance copies of Kanvinde's book – printed at the end of the book indicates the regional distribution of the book's primary readers. They came from urban centers as well as from far-flung towns and villages. Out of the total 784 supporters, 250 came from Bombay; the rest came from various regions in the Konkan

belt – Thana, Vasai, Ratnagiri, Goa, and Karvar. A large number came from towns located in the Desh region such as Poona, Ahmadnagar, Nasik, Solapur, Patan, Akkalkot, Kolhapur, and Belgaum. Support also came from regions in Karnataka such as Sirsi, Dharwad, Gokarna, Ankola; from Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh, Baroda and Kathiavad in Gujarat, and even Karachi. In the case of these lay Sarasvats – yet to be familiar with English – the primary language of communication was Marathi. The dissemination of the debate in English among this numerically significant but regionally isolated section of Sarasvats was extremely crucial in their mobilization. In order to reach these members, right next to every letter in English, Kanvinde published its faithful Marathi translation. Kanvinde's purpose thereby was not just to disseminate the subject matter of the debate, nor just to make his fellow caste-men at large aware of their noble status: his implicit aim was to present *himself* as a successful representative and community leader – one who could represent his community to the English-speaking audience, a task which lay Sarasvat Brahmans would have been unable to accomplish on their own. As such, Kanvinde's role is comparable to that of the indigenous editors of the bilngual newspapers who also used their skills in Marathi and English to reinforce their claim as being representatives of the indigenous. Kanvinde's book, then, was intended to be not only a "model of" but also a "model for" the Sarasvat identity; this, in turn, bolstered Kanvinde's own aspirations.

It is difficult to know precisely how Kanvinde was able to establish communications with his fellow caste-men (who were located in diverse regions) and seek their support for the publication of his book. However, there must have been a wide

network connecting the Sarasvats of Bombay with those in other regions, Sarasvat temples and *maṭhas* serving as the crucial nodes of this network. Sarasvat *maṭhas* located at Khanapur and Kavalem, trustees of the temple established by the Sarasvats at Walakeshwar in Mumbai, and the Sarasvat *svāmis* each bought ten to twenty-five copies of the book in order to exhibit institutional and financial support for their community. These institutions played a key role in publicizing the controversy (and Kanvinde's proposed endeavor to publish an account thereof) to the lay Sarasvats. By mobilizing the support of these significant socio-religious institutions, Kanvinde was able to forge links between urban Sarasvats and their hinterland brethren. The scope and aims of his book, then, were far wider than what he himself had said in print.

CONCLUSION

This chapter charted the ways in which Brahmanical disputes continued with a newfound vigor in the colonial era. They did so not despite of the onset of modernity but *because* of it. The colonial regime created both new ideological challenges embodied in the reformist and missionary movement as well as new modes of material production in the form of print media. Combined, their effect on the reformation and rearticulation of Brahmanical identity was profound. Along with the state's direct or indirect support, these new ideologies were instrumental in carving a distinctly identifiable sphere of conservatism that became synonymous with Brahmanhood. The antagonism between change and the status quo became the breeding ground for contentious claims over the representation of authentic Brahmanhood. I have argued that the concern for

conservatism was particularly acute for the Chitpavans, standing at a critical (dis)juncture with fresh memories of their social and political supremacy. While a section of the Chitpavans chose to exert their influence along new professional avenues, the larger orthodox section sensed that their own benefit lay in the maintainance of existing norms and institutions and in their claim over pan-Brahmanical orthodoxy. No other Brahman community was allowed to partake in this all-Chitpavan preserve: any such attempts were met with stiff rebuke. The discourse of orthodoxy was essentially the discourse of Chitpavan orthodoxy.

With their disputes located in not too distant a past, the Chitpavans and the Sarasvats hardly needed to look elsewhere for grounds and weapons to fight the battle. The new dispute saw a fixation over the same core ideals as those in the pre-colonial era: the right to *ṣaṭkarma*, *sannyāsa*, modes of livelihood, and a vegetarian diet; but there were new themes as well: patronage and inter-dining. Conflicting claims over the adherence (or the lack thereof) to these ideals were staked historically, invoking both the recent and antiquated past. Appeals were made to traditional Brahmanical authorities – Śāstras and the *ācāra* of noble men – with an eye to the orthodox readership. The debate also reaffirmed the position of the *paṇḍits* in Banaras as the chief adjudicators in matters of ritual status and privilege. Regional historical narratives (the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Latikā*) from the previous era continued to act as sources of antiquated history; so too did the Dharmaśāstras continue as a trans-spatio-temporal source of *dharma*.

The debate drew just as much from the contemporary world as it did from the previous era. In a distinct historicizing tendency shared by various groups, history and

historical narratives were a prime resource for staking claims over a higher social status: the Brahmans were no exception. Their debate multifariously reconstituted the meaning of the two narratives: for the first time, the narratives were interpreted through a meta-discourse underscoring criteria such as conformity to empirical evidence, chronological consistencies, and agreement with well-known scriptures. With the help of these criteria, they were compared against each other and their image as either authentic or apocryphal sources of the history of the respective Brahman groups was circulated among Brahman commoners (who had possibly been unaware of them earlier). In a radical departure from past models, this dissemination occurred through the writings of Brahman individuals in the public media; thus, the narratives were deinstitutionalized and reconstituted as part of a distinctly public sphere. Beyond their immediate audience, they became accessible to a far wider audience encompassing colonial ethnographers and missionaries who – in turn – became influential participants in the debate through their own discourse. Both narratives and the Dharmaśāstras found themselves to be part of a dynamic discourse that spoke at different levels to different audiences in different languages to achieve different results. The translation of Sanskrit and English into Marathi was aimed at mobilizing lay Sarasvats scattered across different regions; it also attempted to solidify the allegiance of followers of the caste-leadership. The English correspondence was aimed at presenting the colonial authorities with an alternative Brahmanical power-center that could challenge the Chitpavan hegemony in scholarly discourse and ritual hierarchy. It would not be far-fetched to argue that in the name of the orthodoxy, Chitpavans and Sarasvats came to define their identities in terms of the very changes they set out to oppose.

However, there was one Sarasvat *śāstrī* who defended Sarasvat honor and retained distinctly orthodox ways to a much greater degree than did his counterparts; we next examine his work.

Chapter 6: The *Daśaprakaraṇa*: a Śāstric Defense of the Sarasvats

The debate between the Chitpavans and the Sarasvats ended abruptly in 1870 without giving any indication of the Chitpavans conceding the Brahmanical status of the Sarasvats. Although Kanvinde believed that the Sarasvats had done everything in their capacity to successfully defend their community, one Sarasvat Brahman perhaps thought otherwise. His name was Lakshman Narayan Keni, an orthodox Sarasvat Brahman residing in Bombay. Not an unfamiliar figure in the intellectual circles of Bombay, Keni was known for his public debates with missionaries over the defense of Hinduism. For reasons yet unknown, he chose to remain silent when the standing of his own community came under attack in 1869. Not a single letter in any of the newspapers came from this reputed *śāstrī*.

As a staunch defender of orthodox Hinduism, did he see these debates weakening the solidarity of Hindus thus preventing him from participating in them initially? One can only speculate, but judging by Keni's response two years after the cessation of the debate, he seems to have been a Sarasvat too proud of his caste to remain silent for long. In 1872, he launched a formidable defense of his community against the Chitpavans' aspersions by writing a bi-lingual treatise called the *Daśaprakaraṇa* in Sanskrit and Marathi. A significant narrative of the Sarasvat identity, the *Daśaprakaraṇa* remains the lone independent work by Keni. Though his only work, it was a precursor to another significant work which was published five years later in 1877. An Indo-Portuguese scholar Gerson Da Cunha edited the first critical edition of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* published

in that year. It listed three Sanskrit scholars as the editor's assistants; Lakshman Shastri Keni was one of them, the other two being Yeshvant Fondoba Dannaita and Ganesh Anant Shastri – both Sarasvat Brahmans. The *Daśaprakaraṇa* affords us a glimpse into Keni's conceptualization of the Sarasvat identity and his deep commitment to his community, factors that undoubtedly motivated him to be involved in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* project.

As a well-versed *śāstrī* who had closely followed the debate and who was involved in the critical edition of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, Keni was acutely aware of the central role of scriptures in the debate. In his unique response, he did not simply cite scriptures but went an extra step and wrote a treatise that would appear to be a scripture in itself. A cursory glance of the text indicates that the erudite *śāstrī* cast the "Compendium of Ten Chapters" as a quintessential Śāstric text in its form and contents. He wrote it as a comprehensive scholarly exposition running to three-hundred and twenty five pages -- this length itself being an indication of his extensive effort. The success of a Śāstra also depends on how effectively it cites other established and influential treatises within the tradition. This was done to achieve two purposes: firstly, to betray the author's familiarity with these sources and confirm his own scholarship, and secondly, to present his work as building upon previous knowledge, rather than as divorced from the tradition. With a view to emulating the discursive modes of Śāstra, he inserted into his treatise hundreds of citations drawn from a wide range of scriptures such as historical narratives, Dharmaśāstras, and Purāṇas. Based on these citations he formed his own arguments through Śāstric modes of exegesis, method of argumentation, and technical terminology

explaining how the purport of those scriptures confirmed the Sarasvats' Brahmanical standing. He used Sanskrit for scriptural citations and his own key arguments based on those citations; for his commentary that explained the citations and his own arguments at length, he used Marathi. With the intent to present his text in a traditional Sanskritic format, Keni commenced all chapters with a customary benediction to gods and the announcement of the chapter's theme, and concluded with a customary colophon bearing the title of the chapter and his full name. In every respect the *Daśaprakaraṇa* appeared to be an authoritative *grantha*, unsurpassed in its scope, grandeur, and treatment, unlike any other response from the Sarasvats or non-Sarasvats.

In order to better understand the text it is important to first know why Keni wrote what he wrote and the way he wrote it. What made him choose the medium of a Sanskrit treatise over correspondence in newspapers to voice his views? The answer lies in the kind of audience he was targeting. While Kanvinde, Kalyāṇechhū, and others were reaching out to lay Sarasvats and Chitpavans in Bombay and other cities through newspapers, Keni aimed at a distinguished audience. This audience comprised *śāstrīs* and *paṇḍits* primarily from the Sarasvat community, but also those from other castes. He saw the question of Brahmanhood as belonging to a Śāstric domain, a question whose answer demanded not the opinion of lay Brahmans, but a careful deliberation of Śāstras from qualified authorities. With its Sanskritic framework and the Śāstric discourse that offered exactly such deliberation, the text aimed to be a premier narrative that would appeal to the Brahman intelligentsia in a way Marathi letters in the medium of newspapers could not. To get an idea of Keni's primary audience, one has to read the Marathi commentary

which frequently addresses the readers as "*vidvad jana ho*," "O scholarly men." However, a better indicator of the constitution of the readership comes from the list of patrons, *āśrayadāte* (support-givers in Marathi), appearing at the end of the book. Governed by a clear hierarchical order, the list first mentions the names of three monastery-chiefs from Kashi, Gokarna, and Kavalem with elaborate titles. For instance, the very first name is Shripad Bhuvanendratirtha Svami, the chief of the monastery at the Kashimaṭha whose title reads *śrimat paramahaṃsa parivrājakācāryavaryatvādy anekaguṇasaṃpanna* (the one endowed with various virtues such as being the preceptor of the *paramahaṃsa* ascetics). The second rung of readers are *śāstrīs* from Bombay whose names are preceded by the title *śrimad yajanādi ṣaṭkarmanirata vedaśāstrasaṃpanna* (the great one engaged in the six actions beginning with sacrifice, etc., and endowed with the knowledge of the Veda). Some of the prominent names such as Dr. Bhau Daji and Bhavani Vishvanath Kanvinde are accompanied by the title *gobrāhmaṇapratipālaka svadharmarakṣaka rājamānya rājarṣī* (the supporter of cows and Brahmans and protectors of one's *dharma*). The rest of the patrons from Bombay and other cities are addressed as *vedaśāstrasaṃpanna rājamānya rājarṣī* (the honorable one endowed with the knowledge of the Vedas), in addition to the titles *śāstrī* or *ācārya*. As such, the list of patrons differs sharply from that in Kanvinde where the names of only a few *maṭha*-chiefs were included, but the majority of the names appeared without any elaborate designations and titles, indicating that they were largely ordinary Sarasvat Brahmans. Although Keni's patrons came from the Sarasvat community, it would be

reasonable to believe that he intended this book also for scholars from other communities whom he hoped to convince of the Sarasvat's full Brahmanical status.

That the work is meant for a distinctly traditional audience is apparent from the introduction itself. The introduction, which carries out the customary task of saluting the gods and establishing the lofty lineage of the author, gives readers the first intimation of the text's Sanskritic constitution. The opening stanza pays obeisance to gods Gaṇeśa, Viṣṇu, and goddess Kāmākṣī. The same stanza also salutes the author's ancestors and spiritual preceptors, posing equivalence between the gods and them, as it were. In an ornate tribute, the author establishes himself as a follower of a *guruparaṃparā* and as a member of an illustrious family in order to insinuate an exalted spiritual and scholarly lineage. He first bows down to his spiritual master, Śrimat Ānandatīrtha Svāmi, who is praised as a *pāraga* (expert) in Veda, and sciences of grammar, literature, and logic.[107] He then introduces his grandfather, Ābayyā Bhaṭṭa as a Brahman born in the Keni family of the *vatsa gotra*. He is further extolled as the knower of the *Ṛgveda*, a foremost astrologer, and a Brahman engaged in rituals enjoined in the Śruti and Smṛti, "ever immersed in the bliss arising from the lotus feet of Śrimad Ānandatīrtha." Ābayyā's son, we further learn, was Nārāyaṇa, a Dharmaśātra-expert, and a great devotee of Kṛṣṇa. His son Lakṣmaṇa, the author himself is "a bee hovering around the feet of Ānandatīrtha (I.1-6)."

[107] It is not clear whether Keni refers here to Madhva (the promulgator of the Dvaita (dualist) school of Vedānta), who was also known as Ānandatīrtha, or to a different spiritual preceptor of this name.

The introduction proceeds by mentioning the preliminary details of the text regarding its time, place, and contents. Keni informs that he embarked upon the composition of a treatise named *Daśaprakaraṇa* on the sixth day of the dark fortnight in *śake* 1793 (1872 CE), in *Mohamayi* (the enchanting one) -- a Sanskritized name for Mumbai. An outline of the themes in the ten chapters, simultaneously hinting at the Śāstric treatment of the subject, follows. The first chapter titled *Brāhmaṇottpatti* is said to deal with the origin of the ten-fold Brahmans explained by Vyāsa and other great seers (This chapter focuses on the historical antecedents of the Sarasvats from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* account.) The second chapter titled *Anumāna* is said to use inference to prove the Brahmanhood of the Sarasvats from authoritative statements in Śāstras. (In this chapter, the author identifies sixteen essential characteristics of Brahmanhood and infers their presence among the Sarasvats as a proof of their Brahmanical status.)

The third chapter named *Sthāpana* further consolidates the arguments from the second chapter by framing them in a model of deductive syllogism called *pañcāvayava prayoga* from the Nyāya school of logic. The fourth chapter, *Vṛttibheda* enumerates distinct professions of the four *varṇas*. (This chapter refutes the allegation that the Sarasvats are *Vaiśya*s and asserts that they are Brahmans with the help of various scriptural passages.) The fifth chapter titled *Vyavahāra* demonstrates the usage of the word Brahman in case of the Sarasvats on the basis of various scriptures. (It contains an intricate philological discussion regarding primary and secondary meanings of words.) The sixth chapter titled *Mādhavoktikhaṇḍanam* repudiates Mādhava, the author of the *Latikā*, and the seventh chapter, *Citpāvanotpattivarṇanam*, is an exposé of the

Chitpavans' origins based on the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Latikā*. The eighth and ninth chapters titled *Kārāṣṭrotpatti* and *Devarukhotpatti* discuss the accounts of the Karhadas and the Devarukhas, respectively, from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and the *Latikā*. The concluding chapter titled *Gurūtvasidd hakṛtam* proves that Sarasvats are the Chitpavan's *gurus* (I. 8-14). This outline suggests that Keni is undertaking two characteristic functions of a Śāstric work: *khaṇdana* (the refutation) of the opposing views, and *maṇḍana* (the consolidation) of his own position.

In the introduction (and throughout the text) Keni underscores a key discursive feature of his enterprise. He repeatedly alludes to the use of *pramāṇa*, which is commonly understood as an epistemological term denoting a source of valid knowledge. Various schools of philosophy acknowledge various sources of valid knowledge such as *pratyakṣa* (direct sensory experience), *śabda* (scriptural testimony), *anumāna* (logical inference) and *upamāna* (analogy). The use of any one or more of these *pramāṇas* was imperative for any Śāstric work claiming authenticity and authority in the tradition, and Keni's work proves to be no exception to this. The two important *pramāṇas* deployed in the *Daśaprakaraṇa* are scriptural testimony and inference, as the outline of the chapters indicates. Of these two, while inference is less prominent, the prolific use of various scriptures is the hallmark of this treatise. Keni himself indirectly acknowledges the dominating presence of scriptures by often using the word *pramāṇa* in the sense of scriptural testimony or authoritative citations from scriptures (*śāstrokta pramāṇa*). He qualifies his treatise as the one that is full of *bahu* (many) and *sat* (good) *pramāṇas* in a

bid to present his argument for the defense of the Sarasvats not as an independent off-shoot but the one that is grounded in the tradition. As he promises his readers:

> From the consideration of this treatise *Daśaprakaraṇa*, there is no doubt that proper knowledge will dawn upon the readers (I.19).

In a humble disclaimer, a typical feature of Sanskrit treatises, Keni declares that with its limited scope, his work must not be treated as the final word on the topic and appeals to his wise readers to understand the rest through their own discretion and fairness:

> Here I have shown only a small portion of the doubts and their eradication. The rest should be understood by the wise with the help of their discretion. Having duly considered the subject, the scholars may give their decision. The judgment they demonstrate in one case, may be carried to other cases as well (I.17-18).

Through its prolific use of citations from a wide array of scriptures, a classical and scholarly diction, and the arguments cast in the discursive framework of disciplines such as Nyāya, the *Daśaprakaraṇa* aimed to present itself as a formidable defense of the Sarasvats. However, these features were also meant to testify to Keni's own scholarly acumen as a *śāstrī par excellence*. The treatise was symbolic of his mastery over Sanskrit and the Śāstra tradition, and in itself, this mastery was critical to consolidate Keni's status as a competent Brahman scholar. While its discourse identified ritual markers of Brahmanhood, the treatise itself functioned as a textual marker of authentic Brahmanhood, as the Brahman class was traditionally associated with Sanskrit language and learning. To be able to speak in the idiom of Śāstra in chaste Sanskrit was to demonstrate that one was a Brahman. By doing exactly so, the treatise distinguished itself

from other contemporary debates on Brahmanhood and the community for which it spoke from all other communities. As such, the *Daśaprakaraṇa* did not simply speak for the Sarasvat identity; it embodied that very identity.

Let us consider how Keni presents his arguments in the discursive and formal modes outlined above. The entire treatise is too exhaustive to be discussed within the scope of this chapter. Therefore, we will focus only on four topics that, besides offering a sample of this Śāstric representation of the Sarasvat identity, also illustrate how this narrative responds to earlier narratives – the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*, the *Śyenavijātidharmanirṇaya* (the *Nirṇaya*), and the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā* (the *Latikā*). Indeed as the only independent Sanskrit narrative written exclusively from the perspective of the Sarasvats, it seeks to reinforce the supporting narrative such as the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, and to subvert the denigrating discourse in the *Nirṇaya* and the *Latikā*. We will focus on three themes in the *Daśaprakaraṇa* -- origins and history, diet, and *sannyāsa* – that were also brought up repeatedly in these narratives. As such, although the immediate context of the treatise is set in the colonial period, its gaze reaches into an earlier period. In that respect, this final narrative offers a fitting closure to our inquiry.

THE CANONIZATION OF THE *SAHYĀDRIKHAṆḌA*

The first chapter titled *Vipratvadarśana* **(**the demonstration of Brahmanhood) relies primarily on historical premises to prove the Sarasvats' Brahmanhood. As expected, it draws upon the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* to claim exalted historical antecedents, and in that it offers nothing new. The highlight of the chapter, however, is the inclusion of

certain new aspects of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* that were untouched so far. These aspects relate to its authenticity and canonization. While the previous narratives and the Sarasvat debaters simply assumed its authenticity and accepted its word for the history of the Sarasvats and others, the *Daśaprakaraṇa* explains *why* it is to be considered a scripture of authority. In the following we see how, in an attempt to do so, it offers the first instance of the canonization of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* within a larger scriptural tradition. Another important theme in this chapter is the explanation of distinct groups within the Sarasvats and their designations. As the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* offers no testimony on the later history, we will see how Keni defends these differences and reconciles them with the Brahmanic identity. Additionally, this section also demonstrates Keni's curious response to the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*.

The chapter begins with a salutation to Paraśurāma, whom Keni terms as a protector of Brahmans in the Konkan. He then gives the first hint of the debate forming the backdrop of his work:

> Some people say to their heart's content that the Koṅkaṇa Brahmans are not entitled to the six actions and that they are not Brahmans. Therefore, with the help of the authoritative sentences in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, their status as *Gauḍa* Brahmans will be established (I. 21-22).

Before he cites the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, he mentions an objection from some people that the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* is not a part of the *Skandapurāṇa*, and by implication, that it is not an authentic text – an objection that he must refute. While such allegations against the text might have been raised, it is more likely that Keni himself imagines this allegation

and answers it to reconfirm the authority of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. It is a common strategy in Sanskrit texts to imagine an objection to a proposition and then answer it to strengthen that proposition. In order to dispel this doubt (*śaṅkānivṛttaye*), Keni proposes to cite a few statements from the *Skandapurāṇa*. What follows is an elaborate passage of eighteen verses from the *Bhairavakhaṇḍa* of the *Skandapurāṇa* appearing as a dialogue between the *sūta* (bard) and sage Śaunaka. It begins by explaining the origin of the eighteen Purāṇas from Vyāsa, described as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. The *sūta* enlists the names of the eighteen great Purāṇas that were entrusted to him by Vyāsa himself. He extols these Purāṇas being meritorious scriptures that bestow liberation by mere hearing and exhorts all to read them for the purification of the heart. He then proceeds to cite a dialogue between Skanda and Nārada glorifying the *Skandapurāṇa*, which is said to consist of several *ākhyānas* or stories, including the one on the Sahyadri mountains, that are full of liberation-bestowing merit. The *Skandapurāṇa* is said to be divided between fifty *khaṇḍas* and six *saṃhitās*, leading to the knowledge of *śivatattva* (the essence of Śiva). The six *saṃhitās* are enumerated as *Sanatkumārasaṃhitā*, *Sūtasaṃhitā*, *Brahmasaṃhitā*, *Viṣṇusaṃhitā*, *Śaṅkarasaṃhitā*, and *Sūryasaṃhitā*. The passage mentions the *Sanatkumārasaṃhitā* as the largest *saṃhitā* consisting of fifty-five thousand verses divided into fifteen *khaṇḍas*. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* is listed as the very first *khaṇḍa* followed by the *Vīrakhaṇḍa, Bhairavakhaṇḍa, Gauramukhakhaṇḍa, Haimavati, Gokarṇa, Varadā, Kāśa, Setu, Tuṅgabhadra, Khatvāṅgi, Muni, Paraśurāma, Tryambaka*, and *Kailāsa* (I. 25-42). Following this elaborate citation, Keni resumes his voice and hopes that the above *Skandapurāṇa* passage would bestow proper knowledge (*bodha*)

upon the skeptics who question the authenticity of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and allege it to be a recent work.

Since none of the previous narratives or the arguments of the Sarasvats canonized the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* with reference to the greater Purāṇic tradition that preceded it, Keni's attempt to do so stands out. The passage he cites is quite remarkable as it links the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* not only to its immediate parent, the *Skandapurāṇa*, but through it also to the prototype Purāṇas that are said to originate from Viṣṇu and given by him to Vyāsa. By claiming to cite an excerpt from the well-known *Skandapurāṇa*, Keni uses its prestige to testify for the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*'s authenticity and antiquity. In addition to delineating the scriptural ancestry of the text, the passage repeatedly refers to the spiritual merit of the great Purāṇas and all their off-shoots, helping Keni to suggest the similar efficacy of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. As a Purāṇa that the great sage Nārada himself indicates to be purifying the mind, bestowing liberation upon the reader, and containing the essence of Śiva, its accounts are never to be doubted – this indeed is the *bodha* Keni wishes his readers to have.

Having laid this foundation, Keni argues for the Sarasvats' antiquity by introducing the staple passages from the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* regarding the *pañcagauḍa-pañcadraviḍa* categories and the enumeration of the Sarasvats among the *pañcagauḍas*, the theory of the *deśadoṣas*, the account of Paraśurāma and the Sarasvats, and the Sarasvats' establishment in various villages of Konkan along with the establishment of the deities brought from Trihotra to Goa. However, with the aim of indicating that the origins of the Sarasvats go even beyond their history described in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* to

the origins of the Brahman class in hoary antiquity, he cites two other scriptures – the *Mahābhārata* and the *Ṛgveda*. In the epic, king Purūravas asks Yudhiṣṭhira about the origin of Brahmans and the reason of their superiority over other *varṇas*. The Pāṇḍava hero responds that Brahmans originated from the mouth of Brahman, just as *Kṣatriyas* from His arms, *Vaiśyas* from His thighs, and *Śūdras* from His feet. Keni urges his scholarly audience to consider a similar account from the famous *Puruṣasūkta* of the *Ṛgveda*, describing the origin of the four *varṇas* from the primeval man (I. 56-59).

Turning to the *Mokṣadharma* section of the epic, he then cites sage Bhṛgu's response to Bhāradvāja's question on the essential qualifications of a Brahman. Bhṛgu defines a true Brahman as one who undergoes the sixteen rites of passage, learns the Vedas, carries out the six actions, exhibits a blemish-free conduct, and maintains a regular vow, and one who is truthful and dear to his teachers because of his learning (I. 60-62). In the Marathi commentary, Keni associates these characteristics of a true Brahman with the Sarasvat Brahmans by claiming that all these qualities are evident among the Ten-fold Brahmans. Therefore, he concludes, there is hardly any doubt that the Sarasvats' Brahmanhood had been established since eternity (*anādisiddha*). In short, he aligns the regional taxonomy of the ten-fold Brahmans with the trans-regional discourse from the epic on the Brahmans' origins and ideal character and poses equivalence between both in order to further bolster the Sarasvat's ancient origins.

With the help of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and other scriptures, Keni attempts to prove the Sarasvats' Brahmanhood. Nevertheless, he must also account for an apparent contradiction: the community has various names such as Śeṇavī, Sāsaṣṭikara (residents of

Sāsaṣṭī, sixty-six villages), or Konkaṇe (residents of Konkan) that bear no resemblance to any Brahmanical designation. If the Sarasvats are Brahmans, why is it that their name does not reflect that status? Keni himself brings up the objection that was raised in the past, as it gives him the opportunity to answer it. In the past, the name Śeṇavī had persistently been targeted through suggestions of its denigrating etymologies. Judging by the detail and length of his response, Keni's deep concern to resolve this apparent contradiction is palpable. He begins his argument by attributing the origin of these various names to the Sarasvats' *deśa* (region), *vṛtti* (occupation), and *adhikāra* (privilege). However, he asserts, such *nāmabheda* (the differences in names) do not create any *bādhā* (obstacle) in the Sarasvats' Brahmanhood. In order to drive home his point, he gives a few *dṛṣṭāntas* (examples usually taken from the practical world):

> In this regard an established example can be given. Due to one's privilege as a writer, one is called Kulkarni. The name Chitanis (secretary) is also indicative of one's occupation. Similarly, due to the residence in the sixty-six (*ṣaṭṣaṣṭi*) villages and the privilege over these villages the surname Sāṣṭīkara arises. There is no doubt about it (I.101-102).

With regard to the name Śeṇavī, he explains:

> It is heard that previously a king called Śikhi gave Sarasvat Brahmans the right to preside over ninety-six (*ṣaṇṇavati*) villages. Through their privilege over these villages they acquired the name Śāṇavi. Therefore, it is not possible that their Brahmanhood disappears (with the occurrence of this name) (I.103-104).

The Marathi commentary explains that the king in question was the well-known Kadamba king of Karnataka, king Mayuravarma, who gifted to the Sarasvats the right to accountancy in ninety-six villages. As the time passed, people corrupted the name Śāṇavī

to Śeṇavī, and Christians further changed that name to Śānai. This *lokavyavahāra* (usage among people), Keni argues, does not take away the Brahmanhood of the Sarasvats (Keni 1872: 23).

If the Chitpavans are to question the Sarasvats' Brahmanhood, he argues further, by the same rule they must also answer whether those among the Draviḍa Brahmans bearing the names Deshpande (district accountant)[108] and Kulkarni (village-accountant) can be considered Brahmans:

> In case of the Brahmanhood of the Deshpandes and others in your community, consider the same standards that are applied in our case. The *bādhaka* (annulment) of Brahmanhood that is pronounced in our case, the same will apply to you as well (I.110).

Keni offers similar reasoning for the name Koṅkaṇe: just as Brahmans living in the Deśa (hinterland) region are termed Deshasthas, those from the Tulu country are known as Taulavas, those from Kerala are Keralas, those from Konkan are called Koṅkaṇe by the virtue of their region of residence. The Sarasvats are termed Koṅkaṇe also because the common language of the region is Konkani. In other words, profession, region, or language – these are superficial aspects of the Sarasvats and their names derived from these factors function as adjectives (*viśeṣaṇa*); their Brahmanhood is established since eternity (*anādisiddha*).

[108] Deshpande was (and still is) a common name among the Deshasthas and the Chitpavans, derived from the hereditary office of *deshpande*, a revenue officer presiding over a district. Similarly, Kulkarni (another common name among these groups) was also the hereditary office of a village official who acted as a clerk, accountant, and record-keeper.

To support his argument, Keni cites two more *dṛṣṭāntas* in accordance with the taste of his learned audience. These examples concern the *Brahmasūtras*, a compendium of aphorisms attributed to Bādarāyaṇa, considered to be the cornerstone of the Vedānta philosophy. The second is regarding sage Vyāsa, the revered compiler of the Vedas and Purāṇas. Both of these have alternative names: the *Brahmasūtras* are also known as *Nirviśeṣasūtras* as, according to one stream of thought, they speak of the *nirviśeṣa* (absolute) reality of the universe, and Vyāsa is also called Krṣṇadvaipāyana (the dark island-dweller) with reference to his complexion and birthplace. Taking into account the variety in their names, Keni asks his readers: if one qualifies the *Nirviśeṣasūtras* as the *Brahmasūtras*, using the adjective Brahman in place of the word *nirviśeṣa*, does that change the fact that it speaks of the *nirviśeṣa*? Alternatively, if one calls Vyāsa as Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana, does that name take away his vyāsa-ness? Similarly, he argues, Sarasvat is the chief noun, and the names Koṅkaṇe, Śeṇavī, Trihotra, Sāsaṣṭi are its adjectives. When one uses the latter, does it affect the Brahmanhood of the Sarasvats? The principal word Brahman is referred by several subordinate words. (The term Keni uses here is *upapada*, a secondary word governed by the general idea contained in the principal word to which it is attached). Secondary names Koṅkaṇe and Taulava that signify language and places of residence do not function as obstructers (*bādhaka*) to the chief meaning of the title Brahman. Furthermore, this usage (*vyavahāra*) of naming Brahmans after their regions has continued since ancient times, and as such is evident among most Brahman communities. Consider designations among Brahmans such as Kerali (from Kerala), Tailaṅga (from Andhra), Kāśikaras (from Banaras), Indurakaras

(from Indore), and so on (Keni 1872: 26-27). Besides the aptness of his examples, Keni explanation is remarkable for a distinctly Śāstric aura highlighted by the use of technical notions such as *bādhaka*, *upapada*, and *vyavahāra*. It suggests Keni's endeavor to bring the matter of the Sarasvats' designations within the purview of Śāstras and thereby enhance their prestige so as to counter the disparaging explanations of these words based on imaginative etymologies offered by their rivals. Later in the chapter, he warns Kalyaṇecchū and other Chitpavans to abandon their hatred for the Sarasvats as he has given them an impeccable proof of their Brahmanhood. He accuses them of entertaining hatred and accusing the Sarasvats of the faults they themselves seem to commit. Indeed, he rues, no one notices how dirty their own feet are! (Keni 1872: 30).

Curiously, however, while explaining the distinct designations of the Sarasvats, Keni seldom refers to the *Koṅkanākhyāna*. In its comprehensive account of the Sarasvats' history after their establishment by Paraśurāma, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* explains how various Sarasvat groups were named after their regions. Thus, the residents of Sāsaṣṭī province were named Sāsaṣṭikaras, those residing in Pednem were called Peḍnemkars and so on (see Chapter 4 on the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*). Similarly, it also explains that Śeṇavī was a title of those who pursued the scribal profession. Much of Keni's explanation resembles that in the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*. When it is just the sort of narrative that would have lent support to Keni's explanations, none of its accounts find a mention in Keni's exposition. It is highly unlikely that a *śāstrī* of Keni's stature was unaware of this significant historical account. How does one explain Keni's silence over the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*? A purely speculative, but plausible, explanation is that Keni's exclusion of the narrative was

not a matter of ignorance, but rather a perspicacious choice. As a very recent regional caste-history composed in Marathi, it failed to appear to him as authoritative as the Sanskrit scriptures he believed to be archaic and therefore more prestigious. In a treatise attempting to portray itself as a veritable Śāstric text ensconced in the discursive and formal tradition of the established Śāstras, the invocation of a regional work that bore no resemblance to a Śāstra could potentially undermine such a portrayal. While the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* as an ancient Purāṇa constituted a basis for "authentic" history, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*, also a historical work, did not. Keni's strategy to safeguard the image of his work seems to be successful, as a later work demonstrates. The *Brāhmaṇottpattimartaṇḍa* (1954), a comprehensive compendium in Sanskrit, contains historical accounts of various Brahman communities from different regions based on Purāṇas and similar texts. For the ancient history of the Gauda Sarasvat community, it draws upon the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. In an account of various sub-castes within the Gauda Sarasvat community, however, it cites the above portions from the *Daśaprakaraṇa*, and not the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*. This is a definitive indication of the fact that the *Daśaprakaraṇa* came to be considered a veritable scripture for the later history of the Sarasvats in the later discourse.

INFERRING BRAHMANHOOD AND REFUTING THE *NIRṆAYA*

As mentioned earlier, Keni promises his reader that he will incorporate many and varied *pramāṇas* to establish his arguments. While *śabda pramāṇa* dominates his treatise overall, as evident in the copious scriptural citations, the second and third chapters are

conspicuous by the use of another important *pramāṇa* namely, *anumāna* (inference). The main theme in these chapters is the argument that certain essential signifiers of Brahmanhood are evident among the Sarasvats, and therefore they are authentic Brahmans. These markers are identified on the basis of prescriptions in Smṛtis, but the argument itself is placed within the framework of a systematic syllogism. In the beginning of the second chapter titled *Anumāna*, Keni explains the reason that necessitates such definition of Brahmanhood and his *modus operandi*:

> Some people allege that the Sarasvats are ineligible to the six actions. Some even say that they are *Kṣatriyas*, while others willfully accuse them of being *Vaiśyas*. In this way, the minds of other Brahmans constantly waver. Therefore, with the help of injunctions in the Vedas and Śāstras I will infer (their Brahmanhood) and thereby stabilize their minds (II.1-3).

His reference is clearly to the Chitpavans in the debate who had compared the Sarasvats to *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas*. In the remainder of the second chapter, he identifies sixteen characteristics of Brahmans as *hetus*, a technical term from the Nyāya school denoting the reason for an inference, which, in this case, is the Brahmanhood of Sarasvats. However, in order to see the full-scale application of *anumāna* we must turn to the third chapter titled *Hetusthāpana* (the establishment of *hetus*) which further elaborates the discourse from the second chapter. While the second chapter enlisted the sixteen *hetus*, the third chapter explains those *hetus* in the framework of the *pañcāvayava vākya* (the five-member syllogism). A central model of deductive inference in the Nyāya school, this syllogism contains five members or statements. Here is a classic example of it. The first member is *pratijñā* (the proposition to be proven); for instance, there is fire

on the hill. The next step is *hetu,* which is the reason given to prove the *pratijñā* -- because there is smoke on the hill. The third step is *udāharaṇa* (an instance of universal concomitance): wherever there is a smoke there is fire, as in the kitchen. The fourth element is *upanaya* (the application of the universal concomitance to the present case): smoke, which is pervaded by fire, is seen on the hill. Finally, *nigamana* (the conclusion): therefore, there is fire on the hill. Here is how Keni enunciates the syllogism:

> *atra pañcāvayavāḥ*||
> *vimatāḥ ṣaṭkarmārhā iti pratijñāvākyam*||
> *brāhmaṇatvād iti hetuvākyam*||
> *ye brāhmaṇās te ṣaṭkarmārhāḥ yathā yājñavalkīyaśākhīyabrāhmaṇā iti dṛṣṭāntaghaṭitodāharaṇavākyam*||
> *ṣaṭkarmārhatvavyāpyabrāhmaṇatvavanta ime ity upanayavākyam*||
> *brāhmaṇatvajñānajñāpyaṣatkarmārhatvavanta ime iti nigamanam iti*||

> Here is the five-member syllogism. Those under dispute are entitled to the six actions – this is the proposition to be proven. Because they are Brahmans, etc. – this is the statement of reason. Those who are Brahmans are entitled to the six actions, just like the Brahmans of the *yājñavalkya* branch – this is the statement of example. Brahmanhood, which is pervaded by the state of being eligible for the six actions, is possessed by the Sarasvats – this is the application. These (Sarasvats) are endowed with the eligibility to perform the six actions. This is known by the knowledge that they are Brahmans – this is the conclusion (Keni 1872: 33-34).

The crux of this syllogism lies in the instance of universal concomitance, where Keni establishes an inseparable unity between Brahmanhood and the six actions by citing the example of Brahmans of the *Yājñavalkya* branch. Brahmanhood and the six actions co-exist as much as smoke and fire do. Keni makes the association between the two a matter of universal truth beyond variation, doubt, and subjectivity. However, the strength

of this concomitance depends on the *hetu*, i.e., the Sarasvats are Brahmans, which itself is a disputed matter. The remainder of the chapter elaborates on the sixteen distinguishing signs of Brahmans as *hetus* and argues that they are evident among the Sarasvats, and therefore validate their Brahmanical status.

Keni enumerates following factors as indicators of authentic Brahmanhood, most of which are ritualistic : 1) eligibility to perform the six actions, 2) performance of the naming ceremony of a newborn on the twelfth day from birth, 3) usage of the benedictory appellation *śarman*, 4) initiation ceremony conducted in the eighth year from birth, 5) wearing of ochre clothes by celibate students, 6) use of the hide of the black buck for mediation by celibate students, 7) wearing the sacred thread made of cotton, 8) wearing a waist-band made of the *muñja* grass, 9) sporting a *daṇḍa* (stick) made of the *palāśa* wood, 10) the length of the *pālaśa* stick measuring up to the student's hair, 11) the privilege to impart instruction of the *gāyatrī* mantra, 12) begging for alms with the *mantra* "*bhavati bhikṣām dehi,*"13) greeting others by touching one's ears, 14) identifying oneself according to one's *gotra* and *pravara*, 15) the qualification to undertake *sannyāsa*, and 16) the privilege to dine in the *śrāddha* ritual.

Keni presents a host of injunctions from the Dharmaśāstras and other scriptures to validate each one of these criteria, asserts that the Sarasvats' conduct conforms to it, and concludes thereby they are Brahmans. His progression towards this conclusion involves an important step. The readers must be convinced that a particular criterion applies only to Brahmans and to no other class. Therefore, he must prove the difference between the criteria for Brahmans on the one hand and those for *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas* on the other.

Brahmans are defined by not just what they do, but also by what they *do not* and by what *non-Brahmans* do. There seems to be an implicit purpose of this strategy. As the Sarasvats were accused of being *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas* (for instance, the *Nirṇaya* accused them of acting like *Vaiśyas*), Keni must demonstrate their *difference* from these two classes, over and above emphasizing their conformity to things Brahmanical. In other words, he seeks to establish their Brahmanhood through both positive and negative affirmations. Again, the passage to proving these propositions is (or is made to be) fraught with various challenges given the complexity and ambivalence of the Dharmaśāstra scriptures. In the following we will see a few examples from the chapter that illustrate how Keni deploys Śāstric modes of exegesis and argumentation through strategies such as considering both positive and negative evidence, weighing the relative strength of two or more injunctions, determining the chief and subsidiary purport of sentences, and so on.

The first example focuses on Keni's argument concerning the second criterion that Brahman newborns must undergo the naming ceremony on the twelfth day after birth. His argument commences with a citation from the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* prescribing this rite to the twice-born classes, i.e., Brahmans, *Kṣatriyas*, and *Vaiśya*s and then proceeds to show that it is prescribed exclusively to Brahmans. In the following citation from the *Daśaprakaraṇa*, the root text appears in bold typeface and Keni's Marathi commentary in regular typeface.

"A woman must undergo the *garbhādhāna saṃskāra* sixteen days after menstruation.[109] She must undergo the *puṃsavana saṃskāra* before the fetus quickens.[110] In the sixth or eight month, the *sīmantonnaya saṃskāra* must be performed, and after she delivers a child the *jātakarma saṃskāra* must be performed.[111] On the eleventh day, *nāmakaraṇa* (naming) ceremony must be conducted, in the fourth month one may perform *niṣkrama*, in the sixth month one may conduct the *annaprāśana* ritual, and the *cūḍākarma* ceremony may be conducted as is customary to each family," so has Yājñavalkya proclaimed.[112] One must bear that in one's heart. However, this statement may appear to have a uniformity of purport (III.27-29).

From the above prescription it may appear that this special injunction suffers from the uniformity of purport in that it applies to all three *varṇas*, without being exclusive to Brahmans. If someone were to take the objection that the time prescribed for the naming ceremony of Brahmans is no different than that prescribed for the three *varṇas*, I will cite the following *pramāṇa* to prove its exclusivity for Brahmans so that this problem of uniformity of purport will be eradicated (Keni 1872: 41).

On the eleventh day for Brahmans, on the thirteenth day for *Kṣatriyas*, on the sixteenth day for *Vaiśyas*, and for *Śūdras* at the end of the month: this is when the naming ceremony should be conducted (III. 30).

Brahmans, *Kṣatriyas*, *Vaiśyas*, and *Śūdras* must carry out the naming ceremony according to this *Smṛti-* statement. That is, Brahmans should do it on the eleventh day from birth, *Kṣatriyas* on the thirteenth day, *Vaiśyas* on the sixteenth day, and *Śūdras* on the thirty-first. There is another *pramāṇa* for this (Keni 1872: 42).

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[109] The *garbhādhāna* signifies the coming together of the husband and wife for bringing about conception.

[110] The *saṃskāra* is performed when the first signs of conception are noticed; it is usually performed with the desire for a male child.

[111] In the *sīmantonnayana saṃskāra* the hair of the expectant mother is ceremoniously parted in the fourth or fifth month. The *jātakarma* involves giving a secret name to the child after birth and giving him a taste of honey and ghee.

[112] *Niṣkarma* is when a child is taken out of the house for the first time; *annaprāsana* is feeding food, primarily rice to the child for the first time; *cūḍakarma* is when the child's head is shaved, retaining a tuft of hair.

"On the twelfth or tenth day from birth; on the sixteenth day, and on the twentieth day and on the twenty second day – in that order for the three *varṇas*." This is the clear statement by Bṛhaspati in the *Prayogaratna* (III. 31).

Brahmans must do it on the twelfth or tenth day after birth. *Kṣatriyas* must do it on the sixteenth day, *Vaiśyas* on the twentieth day, and *Śūdras* on the twenty-second day. Thus should the naming ceremony be conducted. Such is the clear prescription by Bṛhaspati in the *Prayogaratna* treatise (Keni 1872: 42).

"The naming ritual of Brahmans must be conducted either on the twelfth or the tenth day. For the rest, it is at the end of the *śauca* (purification) period. On the twelfth, sixteenth, and twentieth day from birth – in this order the naming ceremony of the twice-born takes place. For *brāhmaṇas*, it may also be the tenth day." From the meaning of these injunctions from the *Mahābhārata* it is established that the naming ritual of only Brahmans must take on the twelfth day, not that of others (III. 32-35).

The *Bhārata* explains that the naming ceremony of Brahmans must be conducted on the twelfth or tenth day, that of *Kṣatriyas* on the sixteenth, that of *Vaiśyas* on the twentieth, in that order. From all these statements, it is proven that only Brahmans are entitled to doing their naming ceremony on the twelfth day; the other three *varṇas* are not. And these Sarasvat Konkanas certainly carry out the *saṃskāra* of naming only on the twelfth day. Based on this, their entitlement to the six actions according to their Brahmanhood is invariably proven (Keni 1872: 43).

The above example gives us a basic idea of Keni's pattern of argument. In the second example given below we will see a more complex explanation with regard to the fifth *hetu* that a Brahman celibate student must wear an ochre robe. The argument is framed in the *pūrvapakṣa-uttarapakṣa* format of argumentation commonly found in sastric discussions, where the prima facie view termed *pūrvapaksa* is presented first,

followed by its refutation and the establishment of the author's own view, termed *siddhāntapakṣa*. As Keni attempts to prove his point by weighing the relative strength of various scriptural injunctions, he resorts to a complex hermeneutic which is evident in his use of certain terms from the Nyāya school. Some of these include *anvayavyāpti*, a statement based on the concurrent presence of both the *sādhya* (the major term/thing to be proven) and *hetu* (the reason); for instance -- where there is smoke, there is fire; and *vyatirekavyāpti*, the statement based on the concurrent absence of *sādhya* and *hetu*, for instance -- no smoke, no fire. Another term used is *vyabhicāra*, which denotes the transgression of the *hetu* to that which is not the *sādhya*. In the following, we see how Keni frames his argument in these terms. In order to avoid redundancy, I will cite only the Marathi commentary, which includes the translation and explanation of the Sanskrit verses.

> Now I establish the fifth *hetu*, namely the acceptance of ochre-colored clothes. According to the *Gṛhyasūtras*, this is the order in which the celibate-students of the three *varṇas* must wear clothes upon initiation: Brahman students must wear red or ochre robes, *Kṣatriyas* must wear bright red robes, and *Vaiśyas* must wear turmeric-colored robes (Keni 1872: 56).

> One may also consider Gautama's prescription: a Brahman may wear an ochre robe, a *Kṣatriya* may wear a bright-red robe, and a *Vaiśya* may wear a turmeric-colored robe. There is another one from him: ochre- or white-colored robes are prescribed to Brahmans, red or white to *Kṣatriyas*, and yellow or white to *Vaiśyas* (Keni 1872: 56).
>
> You may also consult the *Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa,* which declares that the three *varṇas* must wear ochre, red, and yellow robes, respectively (Keni 1872: 57).

> Now, an objection (from the *pūrvapakṣa*) may be raised with regard to this fifth *hetu*: this *hetu* suffers the fallacy of *vyabhicāra* with regard to *Vaiśyas*. The regulation regarding ochre robes applies to *Vaiśyas* as well, through both *anvaya*-and *vyatireka*-*vyāpti*. Here is how – it has been specified that Brahmans, *Kṣatriyas*, and *Vaiśyas* wear ochre, red, and yellow robes, respectively. But from the formulation of *ṛsi* Paiṭhīnasi,“ the sacred thread, ochre-colored robe, and the water-pot – all these have been prescribed as being common to all,” even *Vaiśyas* will be eligible to wear ochre robes through *anvaya*-and *vyatirekavyāpti*.[113] The *hetu*, namely, the ochre robe, does not remain with the subject under dispute, namely, Brahmans, but extends over to the other subject, that is, *Vaiśyas*. In this way, this *hetu* suffers from the fault of transgression to that which is not to be proven (Keni 1872: 58). (Parentheses mine.)

> (The response of the *siddhāntapakṣa*:) If anyone were to take such an objection, I give this response to remove this allegation of transgression. The *Śruti* and *Smṛti* quoted earlier indicate the *principality* of the ochre robe in case of Brahmans. They have not stated the principality of the ochre robe in case of *Vaiśyas*. They have prescribed as principal the yellow robe for *Vaiśyas* alone. In Paiṭhinasī's statement, the ochre robe is prescribed to *Vaiśyas* only when the yellow robe is unavailable. Therefore, his prescription is secondary. Other regulations from the Śruti specify what types of cloths are to be *primarily* used by *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas*. Therefore, the blemish of *vyabhicāra* meets its eradication without any obstacle. The ochre robe is prescribed only to Brahmans. The Sarasvats have been wearing the ochre robe from ancient times to the present without any break. Therefore, the affirmative conclusion regarding their Brahmanhood can be reached with certainty, without any hindrance (Keni 1872: 58).

To recapitulate the above argument, first Keni lays out the affirmative prescriptions consonant with what he intends to prove, i.e., only Brahman celibate-students wear ochre robes. Then his opponent brings in a statement from Paiṭhīnasi that prescribes the external insignia related to water-pot, ochre robe, etc. to the first three *varṇas*. The prima facie interpretation makes this rule look like an exception to all other rules quoted earlier and launches an objection. According to this objection, the *hetu*, i.e.,

[113] *Anvayavyāpti* – if one wears ochre robes, he is a *Vaiśya* and *vyatirekavyāpti* – if he does not wear ochre robes, he is not a *Vaiśya*. Either way, the association between the two is established.

ochre robe, is not appropriate because it fails to apply exclusively to Brahmans; it applies also to *Vaiśyas*. Such *vyabhicāra* (transgression) of the *hetu* would indeed be a great logical flaw. In order to remove this apparent flaw, Keni uses the following strategy. He interprets all the rules cited thus far through the criteria of principality of meaning. Whom does the sentence principally refer to? In the formulations drawn from the Śruti and Smṛtis, he argues, the ochre robe is prescribed primarily – and principally – to Brahmans and the yellow robe is prescribed principally to *Vaiśyas*. Furthermore, Paiṭhīnasi's statement prescribes the ochre robe to *Vaiśyas* only under the circumstance of the yellow robe being unavailable. In other words, he establishes a counter-exception for the apparent exception in Paiṭhīnasi's prescription.

Keni's identification of key markers of Brahmanhood with the help of the Dharmaśātras and his style of exegesis is reminiscent of the *Nirṇaya*, which resorts to similar strategies, to the detriment of the Sarasvats. However, the similarities between the two works do not end here. There are thematic similarities as well, as one of Keni's sixteen *hetus* is the adherence to *sannyāsa*, one of the key criteria discussed at length in the *Nirṇaya*. While the *Nirṇaya* declares that the Sarasvats qualified for *sannyāsa* not as Brahmans but as *Vaiśyas*, who were formerly Brahmans, Keni strives to prove the unhindered fulfillment of this important criterion by his community. However, the notion of *sannyāsa* that he invokes here is not the generic fourth *āśrama*, but the highest order within *sannyāsa* called *paramahaṃsa āśrama*. (There are four distinctions within *sannyāsa* in the ascending order of superiority-- *kuṭīcaka*, *bahūdaka*, *haṃsa,* and *paramahaṃsa*).

Keni follows the usual pattern of his previous arguments here as well. He begins by specifying the *hetu* to be proven as *sannyāsa*. He cites scriptures highlighting *sannyāsa* as an exclusive privilege of Brahmans, and, not that of *Kṣatriyas* or *Vaiśyas* who are entitled to the first three and first two *āśramas*, respectively. Although initially he mentions *sannyāsa* as the *hetu*, later he specifies it to be *paramahaṃsa āśrama*. The *pūrvapakṣa* asks why the author qualifies the *hetu*. Keni replies that this special qualification is needed to prevent the *vyabhicāra* (transgression) of this *hetu* over to *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas*. But again, asks the *pūrvapakṣa*, if no other *varṇas* except Brahmans are allowed to undertake *sannyāsa*, what occasions the fallacy of *vyabhicāra*? Keni's reply to this objection is that there is a scripture granting *sannyāsa* to the three *varṇas*, not just to Brahmans. "Brahmans, *Kṣatriyas*, or *Vaiśyas* – these may wander from their houses" – this is the injunction in question from the *Kūrmapurāṇa*. Based on this, one may possibly argue that *sannyāsa* is acceptable for the three *varṇas*, and that Brahmans are not exclusively entitled to it. Therefore, it is crucial to add *paramahaṃsa* as the distinct feature of *sannyāsa*, reserved only for Brahmans. Keni extends his argument further: the qualification *paramahaṃsa* prevents the extension of this *hetu* to other *varṇas* also, because certain Smṛtis declare that only Brahmans can undertake *paramahaṃsa āśrama*. Smṛtis by Dattātreya and Baudhāyana describe the *paramahaṃsa āśrama* to be the sign of Viṣṇu (*viṣṇor liṅgadhāraṇam*), belonging to the mouth-born, that is Brahmans, but not to *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas*.

After establishing the exclusivity of *paramahaṃsa āśrama* for Brahmans, the next step is to define the characteristics of a *paramahaṃsa*. Citing the *Skandapurāṇa*, Keni

describes his external paraphernalia: he must not carry the three-fold staff, wear neither the sacred thread, nor the top-knot; he must give up the performance of daily rituals. He may wear only a loin cloth, a covering cloth, a blanket for protection from the cold; he should carry a rosary, a staff made of bamboo, and a water-pot. In contrast to the *paramahaṃsa*, ascetics lower in hierarchy – *kuṭīcaka*, *bahūdaka*, and *haṃsa*-- wear different accoutrements.[114] Similarly, Keni further points out, as the *Smṛtyarthasaragrantha* prescribes, after death a *paramahaṃsa*'s corpse is to be buried, not cremated or released into the water, unlike those of other ascetics. He concludes the discussion by inferring Sarasvats' Brahmanhood from their conformity to the above criteria:

> I described the *dharma* of *sannyāsins* because the aforementioned characteristics of *sannyāsins* (ochre robe, bamboo staff, water-pot, etc.) derived from Śruti and Smṛti have been evident in the *ācāra* of the Sarasvat ascetics, strewn all over the country from Banaras to Rameshvaram, for thousands of years. Undertaking *sannyāsa* is the privilege of Brahmans only. Because this practice has been prevalent among the Sarasvats since time immemorial, by this fifteenth *hetu* the right to six actions is proven to belong to those under dispute. Please think about this, so that the prevailing illusion will be destroyed, and true knowledge will quickly dawn upon you. There is no doubt in this (Keni 1872: 86-87).

Compared to the discourse in the *Nirṇaya*, Keni's point of departure is significant. The *Nirṇaya* identifies *sannyāsa* as a criterion of Brahmanhood and argues that those *Vaiśyas* and *Kṣatriyas* who were *formerly* Brahmans could also undertake *sannyāsa*. It presents this argument to resolve the contradiction between the Sarasvats' *Vaiśya* status

[114] A *kuṭīcaka* begs for alms among his relatives, and wears a top-knot, a sacred thread, a three-fold staff, and a water-pot. A *bahūdaka* wears all these insignia, but abandons his family and begs for alms in seven houses. A *haṃsa* wears a top-knot, a sacred thread, a water-pot, and a single staff (III. 194-196).

(which it seeks to prove) and the existence of *sannyāsa* evident among them. On the other hand, Keni underscores the highest form of *sannyāsa* as an important marker of Brahmanhood and argues for the exclusion of *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas* from it. This is a deliberate strategy, because if he chooses the generic *sannyāsa*, it still leaves open the possibility of the Sarasvats qualifying for it as *Vaiśya*s, and not as Brahmans. Can we take this as a challenge to the verdict of the *Nirṇaya*? It certainly seems to be so, although this suggestion is based purely on the comparison between these two texts. Are there any tangible indicators outside the discourse of these two texts possibly explaining why Keni might have felt particularly anxious to argue the way he did? The following incident may offer us some tentative answers in this regard.

THE PROBLEM OF *SANNYĀSA* AMONG THE SARASVATS

A letter from *śake* 1687 (1631 CE) recounts a significant episode. The authors of this letter identify themselves as *pañcadraviḍa* Brahmans of the the *Draviḍa*, the *Āndhra*, the *Karṇāṭa*, the *Māhārāṣṭra*, and the *Gurjara* denominations living in Banaras. The letter is written in Sanskrit and signed by thirty-six authorities, designated by titles reflecting their erudition and authority such as *bhaṭṭas* and *dharmādhikārins*. The addressees are mentioned as all the *pañcagauḍa* and *pañcadraviḍa* Brahmans residing in the southern country, around the region of the Sahyadri mountains. The letter recounts the following incident: a Sarasvat Brahman named Vitthala, the son of Shyamaraj, hailing from the family of Kushasathalis came to Banaras on pilgrimage. He requested these authorities to grant him the permission to undertake *sannyāsa*. All these *pañcadraviḍa*

Brahmans summoned an assembly in the famous temple of Viśveśvara and conducted an inquiry into the matter as to who Vitthala was, what his origins were, which *varṇa* he belonged to, and which ritual-and *dharma*-tradition he followed. Having consulted all gross and subtle matters in the Śāstras, they verified that he belonged to an ancient community of Brahmans within the *pañcagauḍa* denomination, that the members of this community adhered to the *ācāras* and sixteen *saṃskāras* prescribed in Śrutis and Smṛtis, and that their rituals were compliant with those specified for the four *āśramas*. Similarly, the *paṇḍits* found their *ācāra* conforming to prescriptions from Śrutis and Smṛtis such as Brahmans must undergo the initiation ceremony at the age of eight, they should wear a girdle made of the *muñja* grass, wear a staff made of the *palāśa* wood and wear an ochre robe, and so on. Moreover, they were also seen engaged in the performance of the six actions.

Besides ascertaining the ritualistic credentials of Vitthala's community, the *paṇḍits* also considered its historical antecedents and the legend of Paraśurāma and the establishment of the Sarasvats in the Konkan in the letter. More importantly, they deemed the controversial custom of eating fish perfectly acceptable, as it was the *ācāra* of the Sarasvats' region of origin. Upon due consideration of all these factors, they declared that members of the Sarasvat community were entitled to the six actions and *sannyāsa.* They granted *sannyāsa* to Vitthala and rechristened him as Saccidananda Sarasvati. They also instructed him to go to his country, and preside over a monastery, while wearing external insignia such as umbrella, *cāmara*, and vehicle, etc. His fellow caste members, further decreed the *paṇḍits*, were to respect and follow him (Gunjikar 1884: appendix 2, 24).

The above letter is representative of a number of similar letters sent from Banaras from the *pañcadraviḍas* deciding upon the ritual status of the Sarasvats.[115] This particular letter perfectly illustrates the adjudicatory role of Banaras *paṇḍits* noted earlier in matters concerning rank and ritual entitlements of Brahmans from the southern Maratha region. It demonstrates how their decision over these matters was based on the consideration of Śāstras and historical narratives. It also reflects the predominance of the *pañcadraviḍa* Brahmans in Banaras who migrated there from the south, in particular from Maharashtra, and maintained ties with their colleagues back home. However, there are other even more significant factors emerging from the letter. The jurisdiction of the *pañcadraviḍa* authorities in Banaras was not limited to *pañcadraviḍa* Brahmans, but extended over to *pañcagauḍa* Brahmans as well. A Brahman from one of the communities among the *pañcagauḍas* travelled to this pan-Indian religious center to seek permission for *sannyāsa* from the presiding authorities who were *pañcadraviḍa* Brahmans. This suggests that, although the Sarasvats remained powerful in and around Goa and Southern Konkan, their entitlement to premier privileges such as *sannyāsa* still remained subject to scrutiny at this pan-Indian religious center, which, ironically, had a strong regional influence embodied in the *pañcadraviḍa* authorities. Similarly, the complete absence of *pañcagauḍa* Brahmans in the assembly convened to decide the fate of a Gauḍa Brahman is striking. Was this pan-Indian center dominated by *pañcadraviḍa* Brahmans to the exclusion of the *pañcagauḍa* Brahmans? Certainly, the presence of *pañcagauḍa*

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[115] Gunjikar published some similar letters written by *paṇḍits* of Banaras in various contexts. One such letter was regarding the conflict over the rights of Sarasvat priests in a temple at Bombay. Another letter was written in the context of the *pañcadraviḍas* questioning the ritual status of the Sarasvats in Vengurle, Goa (Gunjikar 1884: 26-27, 34-35).

Brahmans would have precluded the very need to have an elaborate discussion over Vitthala's eligibility for *sannyāsa* and the controversial diet of his community. Do these observations suggest that in the setting of Banaras the *pañcadraviḍa* Brahmans from the Maratha country were able to exercise hegemony over the *pañcagauḍa* Brahmans from the Maratha country? Was this power relation most visible in cases related to important privileges such as *sannyāsa* and *ṣaṭkarma* for which the Sarasvats had no recourse to any other equally powerful institution or to any representative cliques in Banaras?

Seen in this light, the political underpinnings of the discourse in the *Nirṇaya* emerge more clearly. The *Nirṇaya* is a textual representation of this very hegemony of the *pañcadraviḍa* Brahmans in Banaras, epitomized in the figure of Gāgābhaṭṭa, the expert from Banaras leading the *paṇḍit*-assembly. It is also unsurprising that the most elaborate discussion in the *Nirṇaya* centers on the key issue of *sannyāsa* rather than those concerning diet and modes of livelihood. It concedes the presence of *sannyāsa* among Sarasvats, but only after declaring them to be *Vaiśyas*. It is not difficult to see why several years later a proud Sarasvat *śāstrī* felt anxious to challenge this hegemony implied in the *Nirṇaya*, and to assert that his community was distinguished by the practice of the highest form of *sannyāsa*. In doing so, he appealed *not* to the institutional authority of Banaras *paṇḍits*, but to the discursive authority of *śāstra* and *ācāra*, acknowledged by authorities across castes.

In addition to these discursive authorities, Keni appealed also to specific institutional authorities later in his treatise. It is an appeal indicating his attempt to subvert the authority of Banaras *paṇḍits*. In the fifth chapter he attempts to prove that the

vyavahāra (practical usage) of the word Brahman exists in the case of the Sarasvats, which serves as a strong indicator of their Brahmanhood. In addition to various scriptures, Keni cites letters written by important institutional authorities to elite Sarasvat Brahmans residing in Goa. These letters come from the heads of the eight Vaiṣṇava *maṭhas*, established at Udupi in Karnataka in the thirteenth century by dualist philosopher Madhva. Their letters in Kannada are written for various purposes such as to solicit the Sarasvat individuals' patronage for the renovation of the monasteries, to inform them of the various religious events, or simply to maintain ties by wishing them welfare. An important letter of certificate, engraved on a copper plate, is sent by the chief of a prominent Vaiṣṇava *maṭha* situated in Savanur, Karnataka, to honor the head of a Sarasvat *maṭha* in Goa. Keni highlights the honorific address in the letters describing the Sarasvats as honorable and erudite Brahmans from various regions in Konkan, practitioners of the *ṣaṭkarma*, followers of the Vedic path, and so on (Keni 1872: 168-175). He argues that this *vyavahāra* is the undeniable proof of the Sarasvats' Brahmanhood. It is not his argument, however, but the institutional authority invoked here that must be highlighted. Although letters from Banaras seem to be making frequent rounds from the early modern period, not a single letter cited in this book comes from Banaras. While Keni's Sarasvat colleagues in the debate invoked the authority of Banaras, this absence in the *Daśaprakaraṇa* of even a remote reference to this authority is striking. It does not seem far-fetched to suggest that Keni was attempting to present an alternative power-center endorsing the status of his community. The authorities at the *maṭhas* of Udupi and other places in the South were not on par with those at Banaras. Yet

precisely for this reason, he celebrated their authority and ignored that of Banaras *paṇḍits* in his work claiming to be an authority in itself.

REFUTATION OF THE *ŚATAPRAŚNAKALPALATIKĀ*

In the newspaper debate, while the Sarasvats' claims for a noble past were premised on the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, those of the Chitpavans challenging these claims were based on the *Latikā* account of the Sarasvats' degenerate status as the *trikarmī* Brahmans. Kanvinde criticized the *Latikā* as an apocryphal work by an *arvācīna* (recent) author, which lacked credibility, coherence, and precision. Worse still, its author revealed his ignorance by showing no knowledge of Smṛtis allowing the consumption of meat under certain circumstances. In many respects, Keni reiterates Kanvinde's criticism, in a chapter titled *Mādhavoktikhaṇdanam* (the refutation of Mādhava's sayings). Similar to Kanvinde he indicates the inferiority of the *Latikā* in comparison to Dharmaśāstras and the *Mahābhārata*, but also introduces various new elements in his criticism.

As the Chitpavans embraced the *Latikā* as an authoritative treatise, Keni's first goal was to discourage his erudite audience from accepting it as such by dislodging the treatise from the ranks of traditionally accredited scriptures. He begins by distinguishing between Mādhava, "the author of the recent work cited by cited by Kalyāṇecchū in the Marathi newspaper *Jaganmitra,*" and "the celebrated theologian Vidyaraṇya Mādhava, who lived on the banks of the Tuṅgabhadra in the thirteenth century." The only commonality between these two, he argues, is their name. While the great Mādhava was endowed with a distinguished *vāṃśaparamparā* (lineage), the recent Mādhava stood as a

petty loner. The great Mādhava was a propagator of monism, the ordinary Mādhava refuted it and instead hailed dualism. The former wrote various well-known philosophical expositions such as the *Kālamādhava*, the *Nidānamādhava*, the *Mādhavavṛtti*, the *Śaṇkaravijaya*, the *Pañcadaśī,* and so on. Nowhere in this list could one find the name *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā*. The other Mādhava, concluded Keni, was, far from being a great scholar, only a *brahmadveṣṭā* (Brahman-hater) (Kanvinde 1872: 195-196).

Mādhava's account was marred by various flaws, he further argued. The greatest flaw was that the sages granting the *prāyaścitta* (expiation) to the Sarasvats were utterly ignorant of the great Smṛtis. Were they unaware of the fact, he asks, that the *Manusmṛti* and the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* allow the customs of different regions such as the consumption of meat? The *Manusmṛti*, for instance, acknowledges *deśabhedas* (differences in regions) by defining Āryāvarta, the region between the rivers Sarasvati and Dṛṣadvati and between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas, as the meritorious land. It acclaims the *ācāra* of this region as the good *ācāra* practiced by the noble residents therein. Similarly, it defines the land where the black buck roams as the land of sacrifice (*yajñiya deśa*) and the region beyond that as the land of *mlecchas* (foreigners) (Keni 1872: VI. 11-12). By acknowledging the difference in regions, he argues, the *Manusmṛti* also acknowledges the difference in customs of those respective regions. On this basis, he further asserts, the Sarasvats are taintless, because a particular Smṛti text declares one eating meat beyond the north of the Vindhyas to be sinless: *vindhyasyottarabhāge tu khādan māṃsam na doṣabhāk.* When such regulations were well established, how could the Brahmans from the region where eating fish is customary be sinful (Keni 1872: 13)?

Keni further sharpens his criticism: Mādhava says that the sages held the Gauḍa Brahmans guilty because during the famine they performed a sacrifice by offering fish. Again, this is another proof of his selfishness, hatred, and non-conformity with the Dharmaśāstras. For, both the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* and the *Manusmṛti* allow the consumption of meat under specific circumstances:

> Listen to this beautiful statement by Yājñavalkya. "One is not guilty of fault when one eats meat if his life is in danger; when one offers meat in the *śrāddha* ritual by consecrating it through the ritual of sprinkling; and when one eats the remainder of meat offered to feed Brahmans in rituals related to gods and ancestors." Readers may also reflect upon this clear statement from the *Manusmṛti*. "One may eat meat that is consecrated by sprinkling, when approved by the Brahmans, when duly appointed to do so, and when his life is in danger. Prajāpati created this universe as food for the soul; all mobile and immobile beings are food for the soul. He who eats meat after paying homage to gods and ancestors is not defiled." (IV. 15-18).

In the Marathi commentary, he offers his interpretation:

> If anyone suspects that only vegetarian food, and no meat, is recommended for human beings, it is an erroneous thought. For, *prāṇa*, the soul inside the body, feeds off both movable beings such as animals and immovable ones such as herbs and trees. The Brahma himself has made this arrangement. Therefore, all these things may be consumed. However, meat must be consumed only after proper rituals, i.e., after consecrating it and offering it to gods and forefathers, etc., so that its consumption does not amount to sin. Similarly, one cannot be held guilty if one consumes meat when his life is at risk. The Sarasvats cannot be held guilty, as their lives were in danger due to the famine, and they consumed meat only after offering it in the sacrifice. Even then this Mādhava accuses them. O readers, is this not Mādhava's utter selfishness (Keni 1872: 201)?

Despite his refutation of the *Latikā*, Keni is still left with the task of explaining the custom of consuming fish. He presents two texts as scriptures that offer a historical validation of the custom. The first is the *Mahābhārata*, the second is the *Sūtasaṃhitā*, a

section from the *Skandapurāṇa*. The excerpt that he cites from the *Mahābhārata* recounts how the famous seven sages (*saptaṛṣī*) came to consume meat, while the one from the *Sūtasaṃhitā* narrates how sage Sarasvat ate a piece of fish; as such the second account is more directly related to the Sarasvats. However, it is interesting how Keni associates the seemingly unrelated episode from the *Mahābhārata* with the history of his community.

In the *Bhīṣmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, Bhīṣma narrates a dialogue that took place between king Vṛṣādarvī and the great seven sages (*saptaṛṣī*) -- Kāśyapa, Atri, Bharadvāja, Viśvāmitra, Gautama, Vasiṣṭha, and Jamadagnī. The seven sages, having conquered the universe with their penance, were wandering on the earth. After a few years, a severe drought occurred resulting in the disappearance of food. In order to save their lives, the seven sages brought a corpse of a young boy and cooked it. King Vṛṣādarvī saw this and appealed to the sages not to consume human flesh. He offered them instead the donation of villages, rice, barley, gems, gold, land, cows, etc. The sages refused his request citing the reason that accepting donation from a king was as good as taking poison. This was so because his acts of violence rendered a king sinful. When the king asked the sages whether consumption of meat did not amount to sin, Vasiṣṭha reasoned that the one who consumes meat only once but abstains from it later, goes to heaven. After this, the sages consumed the meat (Keni 1872: 202-205).

If Mādhava's rule could be applied here, asks Keni, how many actions of the seven sages are to be curtailed? Were their names changed after the consumption of meat? For, if the deeds of the seven sages were not taken away, there is no reason to

believe that the Sarasvats' right to the three actions would also be taken away. His next statement is full of sarcasm even as it forges a relationship between the seven sages and the Sarasvats: "No Śāstra says that a father is *ṣaṭkarmī*, and his son *trikarmī*. Now, if the *dveṣaśāstra* (the Śāstra of hatred) written by the Chitpavans says so, I am unable to explain it. For, there is no remedy to hatred (Keni 1872: 206)."

While the *Mahābhārata* suggests how the remote forefathers of the Sarasvats validated the consumption of meat, Keni cites the *Sūtasaṃhitā* in order to explain how a direct ancestor of the Sarasvats, sage Sārasvata, was commanded by a godly figure to eat fish. The once bountiful Trihotra region suffered a major drought in the Kṛta age, forcing its residents who were used to drinking nectar to eat ordinary food instead. Soon there was a shortage of food, and they were eating raw roots and vegetables. The roots and vegetables also disappeared, and people ate grass and when grass disappeared, they ate leaves. All people started to flee the region, including sage Sārasvata, who thought of migrating to river Sarasvatī. However, a divine voice from the heaven stopped him from doing so and prompted him to eat a fish that lay dead in front of him. It was crucial that he ate that fish, the voice ordered, because only by being alive could one do right actions. It further urged the sage to chant the Vedas and perform sacrifices when he survived, so that Indra would be pleased and would send showers on the earth. The voice also warned the sage that not eating the fish would result in his death and the destruction of the Vedas and the country. The voice revealed itself to be the voice of Rāma (unclear whether the *Rāmayaṇa* hero Śrīrāma or Paraśurāma) and again urged the sage to consume the dead fish. Sārasvata then asked Rāma the proper *vidhi* (procedure) to eat fish. Rāma described

the elaborate ritual: A fish is to be consumed after every year, or after ten months, eight months, six months, or five months. Similarly, it must be consumed only on Wednesdays, Tuesdays, Mondays or Sundays. The fish must be dead before consumption. If it died in the sea, one should place it on the courtyard of the house, duly consecrate it by sprinkling water on it, touch it with fire, cut it into small pieces, and fry it in oil. Then, while chanting a *mantra* praising god Varuṇa, the pieces should be offered in the sacrificial fire, and the Brahman performer of the sacrifice should consume the remnant of this sacrificial offering. Furthermore, whichever member of the twice-born classes (Brahman, *Kṣatriya*, or *Vaiśya*) does not consume this remnant, should be considered inferior. Sarasvat ate the dead fish according to the rituals prescribed and successfully protected the Vedas and the earth (Keni 1872: 207-215).

Keni terms the above episode as a *vṛttānta* (a historical account) of the Sarasvat community. He argues that this account highlights a number of factors that make the consumption of meat acceptable: it describes the noble cause – the protection of the Vedas and the earth—which prompted the Sage Sarasvat to consume fish. His action was in accordance with Rāma's directive, an order of the Vedas as it were, and not an act of petty desire. Similarly, his consumption of fish was an act of a proper sacrifice. A more distinctive feature of this account, Keni notes, is the precision with which it describes the vital details concerning the time of the episode, the proper names of the characters, the days on which fish was supposed to be consumed, and the ritual according to which it was to be consumed. Compared to this, he alleges, the *Latikā* is imaginary at best and arbitrary at worst. It fails to mention vital details such as the names of the "fallen"

Brahmans, the names of sages who gave them the *prāyaścitta*, the exact nature of the *prāyaścitta*, and so on. The *Latikā* is nothing but a *svakapolakalpita kādambarī* (a fictional work born out of one's head) full of hatred and jealousy for the Sarasvats and the Vedas. By giving importance to such a book Kalyaṇecchū also revealed his hatred for the Vedas (Keni 1872: 216). Finally, he appeals to his readers:

> O learned readers, does it seem conceivable to you that Brahmans, who performed the sacrifice, consumed the remainder of the sacrificial offering as specified in the Vedic path (*vedavidhyuktamārga*) for the sake of saving their lives, fell from their status, lost their privileges, and acquired a separate caste? If you still think it is possible, do express your opinions based on the best of the standard and acknowledged Śāstras. I will be deeply obliged to you (Keni 1884: 217).

Keni considered the *Mahābhārata* and *Sūtasaṃhitā* accounts to offer authentic historical instances justifying meat-consumption, which contrasted sharply with the insinuation of the practice being sinful in the *Latikā*. By invoking the authority of these two texts, he was responding also to the previous narratives using the controversial custom as the chief marker of the Sarasvats' low status. The Sarasvats' custom of eating fish was considered a direct violation of the norm of vegetarianism. At the core of this insistence on vegetarianism was the notion of non-violence identified in the non-Sarasvat polemic as a quintessential Brahmanical virtue, the violation of which could erode Brahmanhood. As a corollary, the consumption of meat was believed to entail violence deemed to be synonymous with non-Brahmanism. Yet, the specifics of what precisely defined violence and whether it was permissible at all were subject to much deliberation and drew conflicting answers from the Sarasvats and the Maharashtrians. For the latter,

the answer was straightforward in that they directly linked the act of consuming animal meat as such with committing violence by presenting the Dharmaśāstra regulations condemning the act. The Sarasvats emphasized the complexity of the matter and highlighted the factors that allowed the consumption of meat and the implied act of killing. Considerations of *ācāra*, emergencies, and ritual killing in the Dharmaśāstras and historical incidents where the great sages killed to obtain meat formed the mainstay of their arguments. In the following, we see an interesting reversal of roles where Keni accuses members of the *pañcadraviḍa* community of committing violence by offering an intricate Śāstric discourse.

Keni's argument starts by alleging that the Deshasthas and other Draviḍa Brahmans performed a *hiṃsāyajña* (a sacrifice by killing) by killing an animal for a sacrifice a few years ago. Did the Deshasthas commit the forbidden act of violence? For Keni the question must be answered with reference to the scheme of the four *yugas* – Kṛta, Dvāpara, Tretā, and Kali. The key question he poses is whether violence for sacrificial purpose is acceptable in the present Kali age and his answer is that it is forbidden in this age. Proving this answer, however, is a challenge, and once again he must present a complex explanation. He turns to Parāśara, whom he describes to be an authority for the Kali age. Parāśara's statement specifies the appropriate practice for each *yuga*: in the Kṛta age it is *tapasyā* (penance), in the Tretā age it is acquisition of *jñāna* (knowledge), in the Dvāpara age it is performing *yajña* (sacrifice), and in the Kali age it is *dāna* (ritual donation; VI.76). The statement identifies sacrifice as the exclusive

practice for the Dvāpara age, not for the Kali age. Keni implies that a sacrifice performed in any age other than the Dvāpara is an act of violence. This would indicate the Deshasthas and others to be guilty of committing violence.

However, Keni anticipates an objection from the *pūrvapakṣa*: does the Śruti not approve of sacrificial killing in the sentence "In a sacrifice one may offer an animal desired by Agni and Soma (*agnīṣomīyam paśum ālabheta*)?" According to the *pūrvapakṣa*, this Vedic injunction must prevail over injunctions from all other scriptures because the general rule of thumb is that in case of contradiction between the Śruti and the Smṛti, the former must be accepted as superior, *śrutismṛtivirodhe tu śrutir eva garīyasī* (VI.77). Moreover, Manu himself declares that for those who wish to know about *dharma*, Śruti is the ultimate authority; and that Brahmā created animals for the sake of sacrifice (VI. 78). He also declares that *yajña* is the source of all life, therefore killing in sacrifice is no killing. If violence is committed for non-Vedic purposes, however, catastrophe is certain. How to then account for this difference of opinion in the Śruti and Smṛti, he questions (IV.77-79).

Keni counter-argues that the answer to this question lies in the injunctions underscoring the significance of the Smṛti. Manu says: *dharma* has four characteristics – Veda, Smṛti, conduct of the noble, and what is dear to oneself (VI. 82). Moreover, Nārada declares: what is unseen in the Śruti can be seen in the Smṛti; what is unseen in both is seen in the Purāṇas (VI. 84). Similarly, according to the *Karmasiddhānta*, both Śruti and Smṛti are the two eyes of the wise. In the absence of one, a person is to be considered one-eyed; in the absence of both he becomes completely blind. Similarly, it

describes *dharma* to be based on three pillars – the conduct of the wise, Smṛti and the Veda (VI. 85- 86). In other words, he insists, although the Śruti is supreme, it acts not in isolation but in conjunction with other sources of *dharma* such as the Smṛti. The latter constitutes an equally, if not more, important source of *dharma* as the Śrūti itself.

As an important source of *dharma*, what do Smṛtis declare with regard to sacrificial killing and violence? Keni cites injunction from various scriptures prohibiting sacrificial killing and violence as such. Thus we find various passages from the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* and the *Iśāvāsyopaniṣad,* condemning sacrificial killing and commending the appropriateness of non-violence. Similarly, there is an account from the *Matsyapurāṇa* narrating how great sages stopped Indra from performing a sacrifice by killing several animals, as it could result in the loss of *dharma*, and a warning from Manu of the ill-effects of violence (VI. 87-96, 97-102, 106). Interestingly, however, Keni gives his own twist and asserts that all these scriptures condemn killing in the Kali age, although none of the citations contain any direct or indirect reference to it. For instance, in his commentary on a citation by Manu he argues:

> See what the Smṛtis say about performing a sacrifice in the Kali age. "Without killing animals, their meat cannot be obtained. Killing animals does not lead one to the heaven. Therefore, meat must be avoided. He who kills non-violent animals for pleasure does not obtain happiness whether alive or dead." Manu thus condemns killing animals in the Kali age and this prohibition must be considered clearly (Keni 1872: 225).

In the end, Keni reiterates his argument by drawing readers' attention to the concept of *kalivarja* (practices to be avoided in the Kali age). He cites the *Nirṇayasindhu*,

which prohibits the following things in Kali: performing the Agnihotra sacrifice, sacrificing with a bull, undertaking *sannyāsa*, offering meat in the *śrāddha* ceremony, procuring progeny from a brother-in-law, and undertaking the third *āśrama*, the *vānaprastha.* The *Bṛhannaradīyapurāṇa*, the *Ādityapurāṇa*, and the *Brahmapurāṇa* enunciate similar prohibitions regarding the practice of widow remarriage, human sacrifice, sacrificing with cows, horse-sacrifice, and drinking liquor (VI.116-118, 120-121, 123). Regardless of minor variations, he argues, the common agreement in all these Smṛtis that sacrificial killing is unacceptable in the Kali age is irrefutable. Therefore, he concludes, the Deshasthas undoubtedly stand accused of violating this important norm (Keni 1872: 238).

Tying all ends together, he insists that his opponents must accept either a position based on the *Latikā* or the one based on the Śāstras discussed above. Either position, however, puts them in trouble. If they accept the Śāstras, they must admit that the Deshasthas committed violence. In that case, they will be guilty of not heeding the Smṛtis, which clearly prohibit killing in the Kali age. Again, if the opponents were to reject this position as well, they could be charged with disobeying the authority of the Smṛtis and revealing their own incompetence and arrogance. On the other hand, if they accept the rule in the *Latikā* that offering meat in the sacrifice takes away the three actions, the same rule applies to the Deshasthas as well because they carried out sacrificial killing a few years ago. In fact, they deserve a greater punishment of losing all of the six actions, as none of the circumstances necessitated their action; there was neither a life-threatening drought nor a command of gods. The Sarasvats' action on the

other had was governed by an exceptional circumstance of the drought. However, if the opponents were to still maintain that the Deshasthas' sacrifice was acceptable and they were not to suffer any loss of actions, they must abandon the *Latikā* and absolve the Sarasvats of the allegation of committing violence. This is because a rule applies to all uniformly: "a well-known saying in the science of logic states that if a common fault is found in two things, the eradication of that fault will apply uniformly to those two things. Either both Gauḍas and Draviḍas or are guilty of the same charge or neither of them is" (Keni 1872: 239).

In essence, refuting the *Latikā* is critically important to Keni as it implies the refutation of the charge of committing violence and of transgressing the Brahmanical norm of vegetarianism. He critiques the *Latikā* in the hermeneutical framework of older historical narratives as well as theoretical discourse of the Dharmaśātras. In essence his criticism reiterates the arguments by Kanvinde. Yet it is much more comprehensive and brings to the fore new narrative elements from the older historical scriptures against which to weigh the *Latikā*. The most distinctive part of his argument is the countercharge of violence on the Draviḍa Brahmans. Comparing the Sarasvats' sacrificial killing and that by the Deshasthas, he declares the latter to be in disagreement with the Śāstras unlike the former.

THE COLONIAL AUDIENCE

This section considers the significance of the *Daśaprakaraṇa* outside of its immediate sphere of audience and context. Was the treatise intended only for an orthodox audience?

What was the significance of its Sanskritic and Sāstric constitution outside the realm of orthodoxy? What did the *Daśaprakaraṇa* represent in relation to the contemporary imagination of tradition? These are some of the questions that I will address here.

To begin with the question of audience, we must take into account the larger context within which the *Daśaprakaraṇa* was written. At least two other audiences were indirectly involved in the Sarasvat-Chitpavan debate over Brahmanhood. In the previous chapter I discussed how the reformists' criticism of older norms and practices was an implicit (or, often an explicit) criticism of orthodox Brahmanhood. Convincing the reformists of the legitimacy of orthodox Brahmanhood and of their respective claims to it was an utmost concern to both the debating sides. Similarly, we also looked at the involvement of colonial scholarship in the debate through state-sponsored works such as Steel's *Hindu Law* and Molesworth's Marathi dictionary. Notwithstanding the claims of these works to be standard and normative, they were fraught with the caste-biases of their Chitpavan informants. The definition of the words *anna* in terms of vegetarian food and Śeṇavī as *trikarmī* Brahmans are the most telling examples of this. Much discussion in the debate revolved around the validity of scriptures on which these definitions were based. The Sarasvats, for instance, accused the colonial officials of relying on apocryphal works such as the *Latikā*, while ignoring authentic works such as the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. While the Sarasvats drew upon the Dharmaśāstras, historical narratives, and other authorities in their defense, none of their arguments offered a nuanced Śāstric exegesis establishing the purport of these texts. More often than not, they simply translated the citations they were quoting, without offering any explanation of how or why those

citations were to be interpreted in a certain way. Given the ambiguity and intricacy of the Dharmaśātras especially, there was a possibility that their explanations would fail to entirely convince the colonial authorities and reformers.

The correct interpretation of the Dharmaśāstras was important to the colonial scholars and indigenous reformers. The previous chapter noted that the reformers often discussed the viability of a practice with reference to the Dharmaśātras, and the colonial officials and scholars viewed the Dharmaśātras as a standard discursive foundation for state policies on matters of caste and religion. There was a stronger drive in the colonial regime to incorporate the Dharmaśāstras in a centralized and standardized official discourse, reinforcing their normative value (Mani 1987:121-128). However, colonial ethnographers often hinted at the bewildering complexity of this corpus, rendering the Śāstric hermeneutical methods to establish the "correct" purport even more valuable. This is precisely the niche that Keni sought to occupy by citing a wide range of Śāstras and applying an in-depth Śāstric exegesis in order to convince this audience of the "authentic" theory of Brahmanhood and its practice by the Sarasvats. The predominance of Śāstras in the *Daśaprakaraṇa* over the historical narratives can also be construed as part of this very attempt. While colonial scholarship was divided over the validity of historical narratives, their view of the Śāstras remained consistent. Moreover, as the knowledge of Śāstras and the ability to discern their purport were in the eyes of colonial authorities signs of authentic and useful scholarship, there was no better illustration of Keni's scholarly credentials than the *Daśaprakaraṇa*. It is not surprising that a few years later in 1877 a western-educated Indo-Portuguese scholar, Gerson Da Cunha, sought his

assistance in the venture of compiling a critical edition of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. We do not know whether colonial scholarship actually changed its definitions of *anna* and Śeṇavī, but the publication of the critical edition of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* no doubt served to vindicate the Sarasvats' stance.

DAŚAPRAKARAṆA AND THE BRAHMANICAL IDENTITY

The *Daśaprakaraṇa* was written in the period when Sanskrit intellectualism came to be identified as a symbol of Hindu tradition and orthodoxy. Let us recall that the notions of tradition and orthodoxy were themselves engendered in response to colonial modernity, as is reflected in the debates over social reforms. Tradition itself became a contested notion with both reformists and the anti-reformist orthodox presenting their interpretation of what constituted "authentic" tradition. There was an authentic tradition that supported change and there was an authentic tradition that supported the status quo. Yet, inherent in the argument of both these intellectual groups was the assumption of the legitimacy of Śāstric discourse as the locus of authentic tradition. To be able to speak in the language of Sanskrit and the idiom of Śāstra was a sign of one's allegiance to true Hindu tradition. This language and discourse were also associated with Brahmans in general, whether they were orthodox or liberal. Indeed the term Brahmanical religion emerged in this period, signifying the interlinkage between the Sanskrit scriptural tradition and the Brahman class. This perception of Sanskrit scriptures as symbols of Brahmanic hegemony was largely due to the Brahman-centric view of this tradition, which granted exclusive social and religious privileges to Brahmans.

In a large part, this view was at the heart of anti-Brahman polemic of the lower-caste movement, which was fully in progress during the 1850s and 1860s. This is best understood in the writings of Jotirao Phule, the celebrated leader of the lower-caste movement in Maharashtra. Phule bitterly criticized the Brahmans for denying the *Śūdras* and the untouchables any access to learning or literacy and proclaiming themselves as the guardians of Hindu beliefs and practices. He saw a deliberate Brahmanical conspiracy in which "generations of Brahmans had been involved, to maintain the fiction of Brahmanic religious authority enshrined in the sacred books of the Hindus and given the additional force of custom" (O'Hanlon 1985: 124-125). His writings provide us a concrete indication of the extent to which he saw Brahmanical hegemony and Sanskrit Hindu scriptures as mutually inalienable. In a bid to construct a starkly anti-Brahman but nevertheless "true" interpretation of Maharashtrian history, his writings rejected the Hindu religious accounts of the origins of Indian society and Sanskritic textual models. Instead, he embraced popular symbols and the popular language of Marathi. Phule's revolt was not just against the discourse but also against the *language* of that discourse. Phule's criticism was itself a legacy of the missionary polemic against Hinduism that openly held Brahmans guilty of using Hindu sacred texts to legitimize caste hierarchies, to exploit the ignorance of the masses, and thereby ultimately to secure their own privileged position (O'Hanlon 1985: 78).

The *Daśaprakaraṇa* calls into question this monolithic understanding by demonstrating how the language and the discourse that were viewed as symbols of generic Brahmanhood from outside were concurrently implicated in the dispute over

Brahmanhood *as symbols of the identity of a distinct caste*. In the appropriation of these symbols by one Brahman caste to defend its claims to pure Brahmanhood and challenge those of others, we have an instance of a tradition at odds with itself. If mastery over traditional forms of language, texts, and hermeneutical skills were markers of a profound Brahmanism, the question of which caste of Brahmans could most effectively demonstrate such mastery was an intrinsic part of a successful bid to authentic Brahmanhood staked by that caste. Sanskrit and Śāstras could not remain divorced from the particular caste-identity of a Brahman group. To demonstrate this association was particularly important to the Sarasvats as they were repeatedly challenged to prove their Brahmanhood. That may explain why the Chitpavans did not produce a similar narrative, while a Sarasvat *śāstrī* went to great lengths to produce a comprehensive Śāstric monograph in Sanskrit. Keni saw great potential in his work not only in relation to his Chitpavan rivals, but also in relation to his own caste. It was important for him to inculcate in them a sense of pride and confidence that they could defend themselves in the language of the gods. In these aspects, it enriches our understanding of Sanskrit intellectualism and its embeddedness in individual caste identity.

CONCLUSION

The disputes and debates between the Sarasvats and the Maharashtrian Brahmans that started in the pre-colonial period reach their culmination in the *Daśaprakaraṇa*. After the *Daśaprakaraṇa* there was no independent narrative of identity from either group of Brahmans. There was no other text attempting what this magnum opus attempted. This comprehensive Sanskrit treatise written in a truly Śāstric style

underscores an important aspect that had been at the heart of these debates and disputes: appeals to an orthodox audience (*śāstrīs* and *paṇḍits* who adjudicated these disputes) and scriptures (the historical narratives and the Dharmaśāstras) were crucial. The *Daśaprakaraṇa* appeals to these two sites of authority not only through what it says but also through the way it says what it says. Indeed, its primary language (Sanskrit), its vast body of scriptural citations drawn from various scriptures, the Śāstric modes of exegesis and argumentation are the prime indicators of these two crucial nodes of authority – *śāstrīs* and Śāstras; contentious claims to authentic Brahmanhood proceeded along these two nodes in the pre-colonial and colonial times. The distinction of the *Daśaprakaraṇa* is that it is the only narrative in the meta-discourse (the discourse that deployed the scriptures) to deploy the language and discourse of Śāstras in such an explicit and comprehensive manner. The *Daśaprakaraṇa* a text that not only invokes Śāstras, but also claims to be a quintessential Śāstra. In that respect it departs from the newspaper debates that also invoked Śāstras, but on a mass-oriented, non-Śāstric platform of contemporary newspapers.

The *Daśaprakaraṇa* is significant for another important reason. It represents the Sarasvats' response to all other narratives -- the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna*, the *Nirṇaya*, and the *Latikā*. It offers the first instance of the canonization of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, by identifying it as part of the larger Purāṇa tradition. In a curious response, it circumvents the *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* in a bid to preserve its own Śāstric and Sanskritic nature, which otherwise would have been undermined with the invocation of this non-Śāstric and non-Sanskritic narrative. It counters the Dharmaśāstra-based

discourse in the *Nirṇaya* by identifying sixteen markers of Brahmanhood on the basis of the Dharmaśāstras and by arguing the Sarasvats' adherence to those markers. These arguments are cast in the technical format of the logical syllogism from the Nyāya School of logic, underscoring the Śāstric nature of the treatise. The key criterion in the list of sixteen markers of Brahmanhood is *sannyāsa*. In order to denigrate the Sarasvats' status the *Nirṇaya* declares them to be qualifying for *sannyāsa* as Vaiśyas who were former Brahmans. The *Daśaprakaraṇa* challenges this argument by claiming that the Sarasvats practice the highest form of *sannyāsa,* namely, the *paramahaṃsa-āśrama*. In order to refute the *Latikā*, the *Daśaprakaraṇa* first undermines the credentials of its author Mādhava by indicating his low standing compared to the great philosopher Mādhava. It portrays the account in the *Latikā* (which alleges that the Sarasvats lost their Brahmanical rights due to the consumption of fish) as inauthentic and imaginary, by comparing it to the stories in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Sūtasaṃhitā*; it portrays these narratives as authentic and ancient scriptures that explain and justify the custom of consuming fish among the Sarasvats. Based on the account of the sage Sārasvata in these texts, it argues that the sage's consumption of fish was necessitated by circumstances and that he was authorized to do so by the divine sanction of Rāma. In an interesting reversal of roles, it counter-charges the Deshasthas and Chitpavans of committing violence by offering meat in a sacrifice and alleges that such action was neither necessitated by circumstances nor sanctioned by scriptures.

Although written primarily for an orthodox audience, the *Daśaprakaraṇa* also sought to reach the colonial audience by giving priority to the Dharmaśāstras over

historical narratives. The colonial authorities -- who were important witnesses to the Sarasvat-Chitpavan debate-- believed that the Dharmaśāstras were the standard and normative scriptures that could be consulted for the “correct” assessment of a practice or a community. By appropriating the Dharmaśāstras to lend authenticity to its arguments, the *Daśaprakaraṇa* sought to influence the colonial audience’s view of the Sarasvats’ Brahmanhood. Last but not the least, in addition to its arguments for the Sarasvats’ Brahmanhood, the *Daśaprakaraṇa*’s Sanskritic and Śāstric appearance itself was meant to be a mark of authentic Brahmanhood in the era when Sanskrit and Śāstras were largely associated with the Brahman class.

Conclusion

Maharashtra in the early modern period witnessed social and political upheavals, the effects of which reverberated through established social orders. Societal flux was a direct consequence of the various regimes that successively replaced each other. The rise of the Marathas was preceded by the rule of the Bahmani Sultanates followed by the Deccan Sultanates, of which the most prominent were the states headed by the Adil Shah and the Nizam Shah. Brahman groups enjoyed upward social mobility in the pre-Maratha period in the form of royal patronage as priests and employment as administrators. The rise of the Maratha polity was the prime catalyst that accelerated the ascendancy of the regional Brahmans. To legitimize his status as the upholder of *dharma*, Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha kingdom, increased the state-sponsorship for temples and priests manifold. This era also saw Brahmans rise to prominence at the top levels of administration. Concurrently, the pro-Christian Portuguese regime in Goa triggered an exodus of Sarasvat Brahmans, who emigrated towards the Maratha country in search of employment and patronage. The mid-eighteenth century witnessed the decline of the line of Shivaji and the ascension of the Peshvas. The Peshvas, as Chitpavan Brahmans themselves, oversaw the meteoric rise of Brahmans in general, and of the Chitpavans, in particular, in important spheres of society. By now, various Brahman communities – most prominently, the Deshasthas, the Chitpavans, the Karhadas, and the Sarasvats – shared space and resources in the Maratha country. The rivalry among these groups that started as early as the pre-Maratha period reached a crescendo during the reign of the

Peshvas. Temple rights, employment in high-level administration, royal patronage, and higher social standing were some of the key incentives for the communities to vie with one another. In order to secure a larger share of each of these prospects, assertion of their own social, moral or ritual status as superior to that of the others became crucial to each of these groups. These contentious claims were centered on the question of who is a true Brahman.

In Part I of this dissertation, I examine four narratives of identity composed during the dynamic socio-political context of the early modern period – the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā,* the *Śyenavijātidharmanirṇaya*, and the *Koṅkaṇākhyana*. These narratives were the chief implements for the Brahman groups under consideration to express their respective identities – the way they conceptualized themselves in relation to others – and more importantly, to claim a higher status for their own group or to contest similar claims from others. Applying the principle of intertextuality, I study how these narratives respond to one another and derive their meaning. These narratives are primarily historical; each narrative contains accounts about the origins and the past of each Brahman community. Thus, the narratives define a community's identity in terms of the community's history; they seek to equate the glorious history of a community with a higher status, whereas they make an ignoble history synonymous with a lower status. Within the scope of overarching historicity, the accounts in these narratives center on distinct themes. Certain themes such as etymology of the caste designation, regional affiliation, diet and association with an emblematic

figure are common to most of these narratives, and are used either to exalt the superior past of a community or to denigrate that of others.

Etymology of caste designations is the most recurring theme; it is also the most important, as it encapsulates the history of the community. In the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa,* the designation Chitpavan is derived from *citā* (funeral pyre) and *pāvana* (pure), insinuating the lowly status of the Chitpavans by their association with the inauspicious locus of a site of cremation. In contrast, the *Latikā* uses an account of the purification of the Chitpavans by the sage Paraśurāma after their defilement by *mleccha* barbarians, to derive the word Chitpavan from *citta* (mind) and *pūta* (purified) again suggesting a previously impure state. The designation Karhada is explained by the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* as having originated from *Kāraśṭra* (bad region), or *khara asthi* (donkey-bones); both seek to insult the community and portray it as inferior. The *Latikā* reiterates the association of the designation Karhada with donkeys, seeking to deride the community. However, another (possibly emended) manuscript of the *Latikā* associates Karhadas with the holy land of Karahāṭaka, thereby extolling their superior status. The *Nirṇaya* glorifies the noble origins of the Karhadas, as those who survived by eating a vegetable *karhāṭa* (root of a lotus) in the time of a drought, Śeṇavī*,* a term frequently used synonymously for the Sarasvat community, is another designation with disparate – and disparaging-- etymologies. The *Latikā* associates the name with *śaṇasūtra* (net made of hemp) and thereby with the "ignoble" practice of consuming fish. The *Nirṇaya,* which uses the story of a drought to praise the Karhadas, simultaneously denigrates the Śeṇavīs, by calling them those who consumed the meat of *śyena* (falcons) during the drought. In contrast, the

Koṅkaṇākhyana implies the nobleness of the word Śeṇavī by explaining it as a title of elite writers and scribes among the Sarasvats.

The sacredness of the region of affiliation or origin is another theme that is used to demonstrate supremacy of one Brahman group over the other. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* acknowledges the sacredness of the Trihotra region, the original home to the Sarasvats, and that of Gomāñcala where the Sarasvats were established. It also recognizes the piety of a region between the Narmada and the Krishna Rivers, which was largely populated by the Deshasthas. However, it denigrates the land of the Karhadas as Kāraṣtra or bad land. One of the two versions of the *Śatapraśnakalpalatikā* challenges the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* by identifying the Karhadas' region as the sacred Karahāṭaka. The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* draws upon the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* and extols Gomāñcala as the sacred home of the Sarasvats.

An emblematic figure is yet another theme through which the narratives indicate the noble or ignoble community history. This figure is either a patron deity, a king, or a group of sages that play a key role in determining a community's past. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* uses the figure of Paraśurāma in the accounts of the Chitpavans and the Sarasvats, but indicates contrasting histories: while Paraśurāma's curse led to the downfall of the Chitpavans, the Sarasvats prospered through Paraśurāma's grace as he established them in Gomāñcala along with auspicious deities. In its account of the Karhadas, the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* portrays the patron-goddess of the Karhadas, Māṭṛkā, as an evil deity that demands the heinous act of sacrificing a Brahman to her, and thereby seeks to establish the depraved status of the Karhadas. The *Latikā* omits any reference to Paraśurāma in its account of the Sarasvats, focusing instead on authoritative (and

anonymous) sages who adjudicate the status of the Sarasvats as inferior, *trikarmī* Brahmans. A version of the *Latikā* replaces the insulting reference to the evil Matṛkā with the pious goddess Durgā, who enhanced the status of the Karhadas by granting them wealth and riches in exchange of their worship of a Brahman. Thus, yet again it subverts the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. In the *Nirṇaya* Shivaji and his court *paṇḍits* embody emblematic figures (each respectively signifying royal and scholarly authority) that adjudicate the statuses of the Karhadas and the Sarasvats/Śeṇavis to the advantage of the former and to the detriment of the latter. The *Koṅkaṇākhyāna* on the other hand uses the very same figures to indicate the acceptance of the Sarasvats' Brahmanical status in the Maratha country.

Diet is another theme that the narratives use; the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* identifies the custom of eating meat with the Sarasvats as their *deśadoṣa.* Consumption of meat becomes a way to demonstrate the inferior status of the Sarasvats in the *Latikā*, while the *Nirṇaya* uses it to show the superiority of the Karhadas over the Sarasvats.

Apart from these common strands, certain other themes also emerge. In particular, the *Nirṇaya* places an emphasis on the non-secular, *Vaidika*, modes of livelihood and *sannyāsa*, arguing that the Sarasvats' occupation as *Vaiśyas* calls into question their Brahmanical status. I have demonstrated that besides the historical mode, the *Nirṇaya* embeds within itself the theoretical mode in the form of Dharmaśāstra formulations. An exhaustive range of prescriptions in the Dharmaśāstras specifying Brahmans' ritual and social privileges, their distinguishing markers (both material and ritual), and rightful conduct under varying circumstances constitute the hermeneutical framework within

which accounts of a community's history are interpreted. This framework also functions independently to determine a community's adherence to (or the lack of) selective criteria. The *Nirṇaya* illustrates the interplay between the historical and theoretical modes by interpreting the *Padmapurāṇa* account of the Sarasvats' consumption of meat in the hoary past as a deviation from the Dharmaśāstric rules on diet during emergency. Similarly, the *Nirṇaya* uses the notion of *ācāra* to accuse the Sarasvats of deviating from the ideal, non-secular modes of livelihood and to acknowledge that they qualify for *sannyāsa* not as Brahmans but as *Vaiśyas*. The *Latikā* and the *Nirṇaya* identify ineligibility to the *ṣatkarma* as yet another theme and use it to prove the inferiority of the "*trikarmī"* Sarasvats.

The themes highlighted above define a framework in which criteria such as vegetarian diet, affiliation to a noble region, glorious ancestry and favor by a figure (itself moral and just), non-secular modes of livelihood, and being qualified for *sannyāsa* as Brahmans serve as hallmarks of a superior status. By attempting to measure each community in terms of the metrics defined by this frame of reference, each narrative seeks a superior status for its favored community, and an inferior status for the community it wished to demean. From these themes, it is evident that at the heart of the conflict between the various Brahman groups, was the question, "Who is the most superior (or ideal) Brahman?" The Brahman groups used the above criteria to indicate their own superiority and/or indicate others' inferiority. It was not *gotra* and affiliation to a branch of Vedic learning, but the above criteria that they stressed in defining themselves and others.

The criteria embedded within this discourse of the Self and the Other, had a strong correlation with actual practices (diet, occupation) and associations (regions, deities) of the Brahman communities. As the different Brahman communities interacted in a common socio-political sphere, their tangible differences came into sharp focus. Each Brahman community had a distinct regional affiliation; hence, the glorification or vilification of a region in the narratives seems to have derived from the practical need to laud or disparage a community. The dietary practices of the Sarasvats, being radically discrepant from those of the other communities, became an eminent theme in the narratives to prove the Sarasvats' inferiority and to simultaneously approve of the ideal of vegetarianism. Though secular modes of livelihood prevailed in all communities, the geo-politically dominant Karhada and Chitpavan communities downplayed their own pursuit of secular vocations, while denouncing the Sarasvats' pursuit of the same.

I have examined strategies the narratives use to legitimize their accounts and lend them an aura of scriptural authenticity and authority. The common strategies in all the narratives – except the *Koṇkaṇākhyāna* – are their use of Sanskrit, Sanskritic idiom and textual models; additionally, each narrative emphasizes certain distinct strategies. The *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* draws upon the scriptural value of the Purāṇa-genre by incorporating essential narrative and thematic features of this genre, and by embedding itself into the *Skandapurāṇa*. The *Latikā* claims to have based itself on the most prestigious grounds of authority: scriptures (Śruti and Smṛti) and the knowledge of the *śiṣṭas* (learned). Similarly, the *Nirṇaya* uses the Dharmaśāstras to claim conformity with the canonical

authority that they embody. In contrast, the *Koṅkaṇākhyana*, a Marathi composition, failed to rise in popularity as much as the Sanskritic texts.

I further postulate that the authors of the narratives used the strategies for legitimization consciously, in order to get approval from their intended audience that consisted of the Brahman communities themselves and politically significant authorities such as Brahman *śāstris* and *paṇḍits* in royal courts, sacred places, and monasteries who adjudicated disputes over matters of status and rank. Both the authors and the audience were members of the class that was involved in the composition and preservation of the Sanskrit scriptural tradition; a class that especially recognized the key role of scriptures in the phenomena of legitimization and delegitimization. The composers of these narratives were keenly aware of the fact that the success of their narratives among these circles was contingent upon how well the narratives conformed to the textual and discursive modes of Brahmanical scriptural tradition.

In this regard, we must consider the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* as the most successful narrative. Both in the discursive tradition and the practical domain, the influence of this "scripture" resounded. The *Koṅkaṇākhyana* extols the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* as a venerable scripture for the history of the Sarasvats. The *Latikā* has an ambivalent relationship with the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*: it acknowledges the latter's authority in certain accounts, while in others (most notably in the accounts pertaining to the Karhadas) it appears to contradict the accounts in the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*. Nevertheless, both in its acceptance and defiance of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* the *Latikā* uses reiterates similar themes and tropes. Through its

silent exclusion of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*, and its use of the *Padmapurāṇa* in the disparaging accounts of the Sarasvats, the *Nirṇaya* indirectly acknowledges the importance of the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* in the history of the Sarasvats. The real indication of its authoritative status appears in its life beyond the discursive domain – the way it invited the Peshva's wrath, and in its deployment as a scriptural authority in a *brahmasabhā* convened in Shahu's Court at Satara.

In Part II of the dissertation, I chart the social changes under the colonial period, which led to further escalation of the intra-Brahmanical conflicts. The end of the Maratha rule in 1818 had significant repercussions for the local Brahman communities. The colonial rulers now controlled employment opportunities and patronage for Brahmanical learning, heretofore controlled by the Maratha polity. The colonial education policy saw the creation of two factions within the larger Brahman class. The Western-educated liberal/reformist Brahmans espoused the ideals of egalitarianism and social justice, and were thus eager to effect social change through reforms. On the other hand, the orthodox Brahmans insisted on Sanskritic learning and the maintenance of traditional institutions, norms and practices, and were thus opposed to social reforms. Members from different Brahman communities comprised the liberal Brahmans, and the shared ideology of secular and social progress caused them to set aside their caste prejudices. Within the orthodox faction, Chitpavan Brahmans portrayed themselves as the representatives of orthodoxy to maintain their dominant status within the larger part of the society, which was still traditional.

A specific incident involving a scuffle between a Chitpavan Brahman and a Sarasvat Brahman resulted in a court case, where the Chitpavan Brahman challenged the Brahmanhood of the Sarasvats. This triggered a series of debates between the Chitpavans and the Sarasvats in the print media. The debate essentially ignited the age-old rivalry, bringing to the fore the question of "Who is a true Brahman?" Yet again, the ancient past became a vital means for each of the two groups to stake claims to authentic Brahmanhood while simultaneously indicating the inferior Brahmanhood of the other. The debate over ancient history saw the reiteration of some of the older criteria – diet, *sannyāsa*, modes of livelihood, and right to the *ṣaṭkarma*. Each group cited a narrative that supported its claims: the Chitpavans cited the *Latikā* to defame the Sarasvats, while the Sarasvats cited the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa* in order to support their claims for a superior history and to malign the history of the Chitpavans. As these narratives became focal points of arguments, they were interpreted and compared for the first time through a meta-discourse based on criteria such as conformity to empirical evidence, chronological consistencies, and agreement with well-known scriptures. Through this meta-discourse the Sarasvats reiterated the *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa*'s status as a historical scripture, while discrediting the *Latikā* as an apocryphal work. As the narratives were disseminated in the print media, they became widely-known among the Brahman audience, triggering further debates. More importantly, through the meta-discourse, the debaters sought to influence the colonial ethnographers whose depictions of the Brahmans – themselves affected by the biases of their Brahman informants – fed into the debaters' arguments. Unlike the pre-colonial era, where the Dharmaśāstra discourse appeared as a part of the historical

narratives, the debaters cited the Dharmaśāstras directly and more frequently, and independent of the narratives, thereby attaching greater significance to the Dharmaśāstras. This was because, in the colonial and the indigenous view, the Dharmaśāstras came to be considered as the chief locus of authentic Hindu tradition.

The increased significance of the Dharmaśāstras is reflected in the *Daśaprakaraṇa*, which gives precedence to theoretical modes (of the Dharmaśāstras and other Śāstras) over historical modes in its defense of the Sarasvats. This precedence was perhaps with the intention to influence the colonial authorities' depictions of the Sarasvats that were largely affected by the biases of the Sarasvats' rivals. The primary audience of the *Daśaprakaraṇa*, however, remained the orthodox *śāstris* and *paṇḍits* across all castes. Sharing similar concerns with its pre-colonial counterparts, the *Daśaprakaraṇa* seeks to legitimize itself using Sanskritic and Śāstric modes of discourse and textuality in order to appeal to this audience. Within this framework it responds to all the previous narratives and defends the Sarasvats by attempting to prove their adherence to criteria related to diet, *sannyāsa*, and modes of livelihood. Thus, although the debate and the *Daśaprakaraṇa* largely reiterated most of the themes and criteria from the previous era, context, audience, format, the modalities through which these criteria were emphasized had major differences. In the narratives of the pre-colonial era, the emphasis was on the distinct historical accounts; in contrast, the debates and the narrative in the colonial era focused on the interpretation of these accounts. The events in the colonial era indicate how these narratives actually shaped the identities of the Brahman groups.

The use of narratives has been an important paradigm for examining the construction of community identities in historical and ethnographical studies. In the South Asian context, the identities of various ethnic groups have been brought under the purview of this line of enquiry. To my best knowledge, this dissertation is the first study that combines the textual (structural) and historical approaches for an extensive analysis of narratives to understand the conflicting identities of regional Brahman communities. Indological studies based on classical texts have largely projected a monolithic view of the Brahman class. In contrast, this dissertation studies internal power-hierarchies and multiple identities of communities within the Brahman class by exploring regional narratives and thus adds a much-needed nuance to our understanding of Brahmans.

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