CHAPTER - I

Historical Background

The fall of the Peshwas in the battle of Kirki in 1818 brought Western Maharashtra under the colonial rule. Colonialism was not simply a matter of one set of people dominating others, it involved a move from one kind of Society to a profoundly different one.\(^1\) This transformation was slow due to two very contradictory reasons. Firstly, Mountstuant Elphinstone who was appointed as the Governor of Bombay soon after the downfall of the Peshwas, thought highly of the stable Peshwa administration\(^2\) and thereby tried to disturb it as little as possible.\(^3\) The other colonial rulers, who did not agree with Elphinstone,\(^4\) followed the same principles, as they did not want to invoke opposition from a very strong Chitpavan community, which was against the interest of colonial rule. What they wanted to accomplish was to superimpose or graft on the old feudal order and strengthen the mechanism for the colonial exploitation of the people.\(^5\) Colonialism became an instrument for re-imposing traditional hierarchy. The process of superimposing the new capitalist relations over a feudal order was bound to hurt and injure the old set of relations at different points\(^6\) Since the fundamental basis of human relations in the nineteenth century Hindu society was caste. This superimposing adversely affected the caste relations.

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The pre-colonial Maharashtrian Hindu society was a stratified caste hierarchy, which was divided into the categories of the dominant, the intermediate and the lower caste groups. The dominant caste group consisted of Konkanastha, Deshantha and Kharada Brahmins. They owned land, conducted the rituals and in the absence of a strong political force considered themselves the custodians of moral and social rules.

The intermediate caste group consisted of a cluster of castes called Maratha-Kunbi. The Marathi term Kunbi is the generic term for all those who work on land. However the Kunbi is not a subcaste in the normal endogamous sense, but are rather all those who till or otherwise work on land and those who are of no other caste. So it was not a socially endogamous group and it was possible for other caste-occupational groups to take up agriculture as a profession and subsequently become a Kunbi. It was a common practice of the Kolis or the fishermen to take up agriculture and to became accepted as Kunbis in the local community. Similarly the Maratha caste, though linked to the ownership of land was also not an endogamous Community. All those economically dominant Kunbi families who fought on the side of Shivaji came to be called Marathas. They claimed the Kshatriya status. However the dividing line between the ordinary peasants called Kunbis and more elite Maratha families was very ambiguous. The Marathas claimed a genealogical link with the old Rajput families of north India but continued to have matrimonial alliance with the Kunbis. So continuous and widespread upward social mobility within the

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7 Iravati Karve, Hindu Society - An Interpretation (Poona 1968), p. 122.
8 Sudha V. Desai, Social life in Maharashtra under the Peshwas, (Bombay, 1980), p.84.
intermediate caste groups was accepted so long as it was confined, to economic advancement and military adventures. However when similar tendencies were manifested in legitimizing political ambition, the dominant caste group refused to grant legitimacy. The refusal of Brahmins to perform coronation ceremony of Shivaji on the pretext that there were no kshatriyas left after their persecution by Parasuram demonstrated the hostility of the dominant caste group to admit the intermediate caste groups into its fold.  

The rise of Shivaji also facilitated the rise of a number of Mavali and Maratha families into prominence. Grant Duff's history mentions the names of twenty Brahmins, four Prabhus and twenty Mavali and Maratha leaders, where as Chitnis Bakhar gives a list of forty-five Brahmin and seventy-five Mavali and Maratha leaders. The resentment of the dominant caste group against the ever increasing power and position of the intermediate caste group continued right through the times of Shivaji, Sambhaji and Sahu and culminated in the triumph of Balaji Vishvanath in the power struggle that followed the death of Sambhaji. With the rise of the Peshwas, the centre of power shifted from Satara, a Maratha dominated place, to Poona which had a complete domination of Brahmins in general and the Chitpavans in particular. The establishment of the Peshwa rule elevated the Chitpavans to the status of the dominant of the dominant caste group. The Chitpavans regarded themselves as a governing

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14 ibid. pp.94-95.

caste with special privileges and exemptions.\textsuperscript{15} They had a lions share in the monopoly of all the secretarial posts and received handsome salaries. They had the privileges of exemption of their goods from custom duties and ferry charges which the other Brahmins and Prabhus did not enjoy.\textsuperscript{16} They had their land assessed at half of the lower rate of others.\textsuperscript{17} They also had the monopoly share in the \textit{Dakshina} charity, a charity that was instituted during the time of Shivaji to honour the learned Brahmins, who once a year assembled at Poona to show their talents, knowledge and the understanding of the \textit{Vedas} and other scriptures. However, during the \textit{Peshwas} this institution degenerated into a system of maintaining their caste fellows to consolidate their position. The state under the \textit{Peshwas} was an institution established to perpetuate the stratification of the society.\textsuperscript{18} The individuals as well as the caste-community as a whole could not deviate from the occupation and position assigned to them in the \textit{varna-ashrama dharma}.\textsuperscript{19} Though the \textit{Peshwas} themselves had violated the caste rules by becoming the rulers, they justified their actions on the ground that the state had failed to maintain the \textit{varnashrama dharma} in the preceding centuries. What it actually meant was that the upward social and ritual

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\item \textsuperscript{15} Gordon Johnson, "Chitpavan Brahmins and Politics in Western India in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries" in E. Leach & S.N. Mukherjee-Elites in South Asia, (Cambridge, 1970), p.101.
\item \textsuperscript{16} G.S. Ghure, "Features of the Caste System" in Dipankar Gupta (ed.) \textit{Social Stratification}, (Delhi, 1991), pp.43-44.
\item \textsuperscript{17} A. Gavali, \textit{Society and Social disabilities under the Peshwas} (New Delhi, 1988), p.108.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Rosalind O’Hanlan “Cultures of rule and communities identity consciousness resistance and the past” in H.L Seneviratne (ed) \textit{Identity, Consciousness and the Past: Forging of Caste and Community in India and Sri Lanka}, (Delhi, 1997), p.152.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Hiroshi Fukazawa, \textit{Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics}, vol. IX, no. 1, (June 1968-69), p.33. Fukazawa quotes numerous instances where the government enforced the rules to be followed by the castes and subcastes. Those who did not adhere to these rules were imposed fine often payable to the Brahmins, and they also had to undergo purification ceremony which was usually followed by a partial expulsion from the caste. There were also cases of permanent loss of caste. \textit{The Medieval Deccan}, (Delhi, 1991), pp.91-108.
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mobility of intermediate caste group had to be stopped. The numerous conflicts between the Chitpavans and the other caste groups recorded during this period, centered around the Vedokta controversy i.e., who had the right for rituals being conducted with the help of Vedic hymns. This tussle existed not just in Poona but had spread to Satara and Baroda. There were instances of conflict within the Brahmins who attributed to one another lower ritual status. Those who considered themselves superior refused to sit in the same row for dining in temples. Such issues were settled by Peshwas themselves. There were also instances of communities migrating from the Peshwas territory as a protest against Peshwas partiality to one caste. In Sawantwadi conflict over rituals arose between the Saraswat and Karhada Brahmins and Peshwa decided the case in favour of Karhade Brahmins which resulted in the migration of Saraswat Brahmins from Sawantwadi to Shahapur. In a conflict between the Brahmins and the Prabhus, which was settled during the time of Peshwas Narayanrao, states an order binding on the Prabhus. They could not perform any religious rites accompanied by a recital of Vedic hymns, could visit only the temples frequented by Shudra and could not employ Brahmins in their household.

The Prabhus being a small well knit economically strong with highest percentage of literacy after Brahmins threatened the possible consolidation of Chitpavans position in the state. Another regulation issued during the same period, stated that the Sonar or the gold smith community if performed the rituals, accompanied by Vedic hymns they were to be

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captured and put in chains and those belonging to this community, well versed in the *Vedic mantras* should be tied to an elephant's feet.\(^{23}\) Unlike the *Prabhus*, the *Sonars* were not new to the *Vedic* studies. They had always observed the purity-pollution concept as strictly as the Brahmins themselves. They retaliated by establishing their right of employing their caste-fellows as priests.\(^{24}\)

If the social disabilities imposed on the intermediate castes, were aimed to curb the possible challenge that the Brahmins would face, the *Mahars* and the *Mangs*, the lowest castes in fact outcastes in the Hindu hierarchy had to endure even harsher treatment at the hands of the *Peshwas*. Apart from the most inhuman disability that they suffered on an all-India basis, they were awarded mutilation of their limbs and capital punishments for even minor crimes.\(^{25}\) Anyone who failed to observe the social disability was also punished. In 1746, a *Chitpavan* by name Govind Hari Patwardhan was punished for having entertained in service a maidservant of *Mahar* caste.\(^{26}\)

So the state under the *Peshwas*, besides the normal functions of a state existed to protect the caste stratification and to interpret the *Dharmasartrahas* or scriptures to emphasize and maintain their spiritual superiority. The state played a decisive part in the restoration of caste status of individual persons who had deviated from traditional religious and

\(^{22}\) ibid. p.52.


\(^{24}\) G.S. Ghure, (1991), p.43


\(^{26}\) ibid., p.132. In 1800 it was discovered that a non-Brahmin Servant was employed in the *Peshwa's* Poona Palace, the servant was punished for contaminating it by false claims. N.H. Kulkarnee in S.P. Sen (Ed.) *Hindu religious reform movement in nineteenth and twentieth century Maharashtra*, (Calcutta, 1979), p.250.
social code of conduct. It was seen by all sections of the society as a protector of cows and Brahmins *Go-Brahmana Pratipalak*.

As the state existed to protect the cows and the Brahmins and to further the exploitation of the masses, the latter, had to find their cultural anchorage elsewhere. In fact, this had been so in Maharashtra ever since the decline of Buddhism and the rise of ritualistic Brahminism between eight to twelfth century A.D. During this period the dominant intellectual influence upon the Brahmins of Maharashtra came to be *advaita* philosophy of *Sankara*. The activities of *Sankara* actually divided the Hindu community into a small Brahmin elite whose values were firmly anchored in *advaita* and a host of lesser castes which were only marginally influenced by the high culture of Hinduism. The exclusive Brahmin *patashalas* and the reintroduction of Sanskrit further widened the gulf between those who had access to spiritual, thereby cultural knowledge and those who were denied of this knowledge. The failure of the newly created Brahmin community to provide leadership to the masses created a vacuum which was filled by the spiritual leaders from the lower castes like Chokha Mela-a-*mahar*, Gora Kumbhar a Potter, Savta Mali – a gardner, Rohidas Chamar – a shoe maker and Namdeo was a tailor and the only two exceptions were Dnyeshwara and Eknath who were Brahmins. They all had one thing in common that is persecution at the hands of the Brahmins. So the philosophy of *Bhakti* arose out of their own experience of life. Later in the colonial period when both the orthodox and the English educated began to review Brahmanism, *Bhakti* saint poets became the point of reference and inspiration as can be seen by the examples of Ananta Shastri, the


29 Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, (New Delhi, 1992), pp.3-33.
Chitpavan Pundit, completely ignorant of English gave up Shankara's Advaita and Shaivism and adopted Madhva and Vaishnava doctrines as a result educated his wife and daughters. His daughter Pandita Ramabai became a protagonist of female emancipation in the second half of the nineteenth century. Similarly when the Prarthana Samaj was started the main ritual consisted of singing the Bhakti hymns and M.G. Ranade constructed the history of Maratha nationalism exclusively in terms of the contribution of Bhakti Saint poets, who besides providing spiritual equality to the masses, also provided a common language and a number of region specific pilgrimage centers which helped in creating Maratha nationality at the time of Shivaji.

The parallel cultural centers the one centered around advaita, Brahmanism and Sanskrit and the other around Bhakti, masses and Marathi continued to grow independently interacting with each other only at the periphery. Though the dominant caste remained the Brahmins, the dominant culture remained the Bhakti tradition. In fact the Deshastha Brahmins, the most numerous of the Maratha Brahmins, enthusiastically adopted Bhakti tradition. The identification of Dvaita philosophy with Krishna - Bhagavatism and Bhakti tradition with Visnu - Krishna-Vittala

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30 Ram Bapat in Vasudha Dalmia and H.Von Stietencorn (ed.) *Representing Hinduism*, (New Delhi, 1995), p.227. Similarly the anti-Brahminical or anti upper caste movement accepted Vaishnavism as a Protestant ideology. In Bengal the Nam Sudras in a cultural revolt against the Bhadralok monopoly of wealth and power, developed the Matua cult, a form of Vaishnavism, and established Hari temples and Patashlas around 1880s and by 1905 they were a force to reckon with in Bengal political scenario. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay *Caste Politics and the Raj: Bengal 1872-1937*, (Calcutta, 1990), p-99.


facilitated a great amount of respect on the part of Deshastha Brahmins towards Bhakti tradition.  

So when the Maharashtrian society came under the colonial rule it consisted of on the one hand, economically dominant landed Chitpavan community (along with them few Maratha landlords and rich Prabhus) and on the other economically weak, deeply rooted in the Bhakti tradition, Brahmin and non-Brahmin castes. These two categories interacted with each other for functional purposes only. Hence their reaction to the establishment of colonial rule was also different. The landed Chitpavans resented the colonial rule as it undermined their position and influence, as the latter had installed Pratap Sinh Bhosla a nominal descendent of Shivaji and not a descendent of Peshwa Baji Rao II on the throne of Satara. As the Chitpavans had taken over the responsibility of maintaining caste regulations i.e. Varnashrama Dharma, they could least expect the colonial administration to be sympathetic to their aspirations. This they came to realize in 1823 when a dispute arose between the Brahmins and Sonars regarding the Vedokta controversy. The Panchayat of Pune Brahmins passed a stricture. It refused permission for Sonar households to conduct ceremonies with the help Vedokta. The Panchayat also ordered that the Sonars should avoid Namaskar, instead use Ram Ram, the Pinda offering, should be made of wheat floor, not of rice and they should wear dhoti double fold and not single fold like Brahmins. The most interesting part of the stricture was that a Sonar widow should be allowed to re-marry and

33 Chandra Mudaliar (1972) has shown that at the center of power in Kolhapur the Marathas and Deshastha Brahmins had evolved a balance in which they divided the center up more or less evenly. During the 19th century, however, Chitpavan Brahmins came in and displaced the Marathas as a result, by the time Sahu became the Maharaja, the entire administration was in the hands of Brahmins. Mudaliar's unpublished paper at University of Philadelphia, quoted by Lelah Dushkin "Non-Brahmin Movement in Princely Mysore" unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, (1974).

to re-marry and any Sonar preventing it should be fined. The colonial government refused to implement the stricture, which left the Brahmins virtually helpless.

The non-involvement of colonial rulers in religious matters turned the Brahmins towards the Sankaracharya of Karvir math. They prepared letters of authority endorsed by the Sanskaracharya, sent them to religious centers all over India. The letters contained a campaign to limit the authority for Vedic rituals to Brahmins alone as nobody else including the royal family of Satara was entitled to it as there were no Kshatriyas left in kaliyuga. This challenged claims of Pratap Sinh Bhonsla as Chatrapati. A public debate was held at Satara in 1830 in which the Brahmins from all over Deccan and southern Matharashtra attended. The issue was decided in favour of the Marathas and Pratap Sinh Bhonsla. This left the Chitpavans devastated. From 1830 onwards, the Chitpavans began to organize themselves and a number of caste Panchayats and Sabhas came into being. This was further facilitated by the preferential treatment they received when the colonial administration introduced new land revenue system.

The Medieval Maharashtra consisted of a number of powerful landed chiefs called Deshmukhs, who exercised extensive power over the territories under their Control. Deshmukhs represented local autonomy and whenever it was threatened either by the Sultan of the Deccan or by Shivaji they sought the support of the opponent. The Ghorpades of Mudhol and the Mores of Jaoli lent their services readily to the kings of Bijapur in order to

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crush Shivaji. When Shivaji became the master of the Deccan, he installed in the administration, as a counterpoise to the Deshmukhs, Deshastha Brahmins trained in the art of government by his astute minister Dadaji Kondadev. The role of a subservient administration was equally apparent to the Peshwas. Consequently when Balaji Vishvanath assumed the control of the government, he displaced the Deshastha Brahmins in the administration by Chitpavans who were his caste fellows and therefore, served with unflinching loyalty.\textsuperscript{38}

The system of administration created by the Peshwas to control the Deshmukhs and to collect the tax on land rested on simple principles. The kingdom was divided into revenue divisions, each one of which was placed under an officer called Mamlatdars, who supervised the collection of land tax and attended to police and judicial duties.\textsuperscript{39} However, even under the oppressive Peshwa regime, their powers were not absolute. The power of collecting revenue within the village was in the hands of Patil. In times of distress, if the Patil who was always a Kunbi refused to collect the tax, the Mamlatdars referred the matter to the village Panchayat and the Deshmukh. Since the village Panchayat was numerically dominated by the Kunbis and the Deshmukh who always had rivalry with the Chitpavan Mamlatdars were in a position to secure a great measure of relief for the farmers.\textsuperscript{40}

With the introduction of new land revenue system, the Patil lost his overall responsibility for the collection and payment of taxes due from the

\textsuperscript{38} Ravindra Kumar, (1967), pp.12-14.
\textsuperscript{39} ibid.
\textsuperscript{40}
village. Each individual cultivator was to be liable for the payment of his own tax. The Brahmin Kulkarni, or village accountant, became the main channel of communication between the village and the local revenue office. In this strategic mediatory position the Kulkarni was able to influence such vital issues as the level of new assessment, remissions of rent in case of crop failure and the fate of cultivators unable to pay taxes. As the land became a transferable and heritable property it paved the way for the transfer of land from the farmers to the professional classes and moneylenders who, happened to be Chitpavans in many cases. Kunbis were changing into hired labourers working on their own fields. The miseries were compounded by the fact that the condition of agricultural labourers was far from satisfactory. The daily wage of an agriculture labourer in Poona district as late as 1900 was two anna and three paisa, the wages received by women were about 50 -60 percent of male wages and the children were paid only half of the adult male labourers wage. They could not obtain loans and having no reserves of money of grain, a day without labour to them meant a day of starvation.

If the economic policies of colonial rule continued and empowered the pre-colonial social structure, the educational policies, though aimed towards the same end created a different situation. Since the colonial rule was indifferent to the caste regulations, the educational institutions opened by the government were open to all. With this new value premises, in a

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43 Brahmanand "Agricultural labour in Western India" *Studies in History*, 1,2 NS 1985, p.232, - 235.
formal sense, opportunities were available to all. However, the fact remained that the traditionally literate castes benefited by it. The educational institutions established by the missionaries had a different track record. During 1818-1890, if education reached the small town areas and the backward and untouchable castes, it was primarily through the work of Protestant missionaries. These missionaries aiming at the non-Brahmins for possible conversions encouraged them to take up education with the view that western learning would naturally create the desire for the Christian truth on which it was built. They also felt that the best means of proselytisation lay not in an emphasis on the specific doctrines of Christianity as a revealed religion but upon the normative and cognitive framework in which they were located. O'Hanlan points out that it was not the teaching of the Christian missionaries so much as the access to the religious radicalism of 19th century Europe that seems to have helped and influenced educated Indians in their efforts to formulate their conception of Hindu religious ideology. The missionaries in their attack on the superstitious practices of the 19th century Hindu society also made use of the arguments of the European radicalism. The attack on caste hierarchy, the questioning of idolatry and emphasizing the inconsistencies in the early Vedic and later Puranic texts and the hand of the Brahmins in maintaining the confusion by denying the non-Brahmins the access to the literature, created few converts but numerous reformers and radicals. These issues formed the basis of the intellectual debate that took place in Maharashtra between 1830-1880.

45 Rosalind O Hanlan, (1985), p.64.
In the debate that followed the missionary attack, the reformers and the orthodox intellectuals had to address two fundamental aspects of the missionary attack. Firstly, though the missionaries attacked Brahmins in general and the priesthood in particular the attack was on the limitation or irrelevance of Brahmins and Brahmanism in providing a scientific rational and humane religious ethos. However, the debate linked up the Brahmanism with the larger Hinduism by making the Brahmanism wholly responsible for the condition of 19th century Hinduism. This forced both the orthodox and the reformers to define and defend Hinduism. In the beginning the term Hindu was not accepted unconditionally by the orthodoxy. Vishnu Bava Brahmachari (1828-51) refused to use the term in his Marathi writings on account of its mleccha origin. He spoke of Vedokta dharma rather than the Hindu dharma. However, it was difficult to define Vedokta dharma which was in fact Brahmanism but vaguely applied to the whole society in which the non-Brahmins had no say and little role to play. This created a serious problem in countering the missionary attacks. This difficulty was overcome by the western educated, orthodoxy assisted by the Orientalist scholars who referred the entire classical literature as Hindu literature and the ancient period of Indian History as the Hindu period. But in the actual usage the term Hindu as used by the orthodoxy denoted the Brahmanical religion.

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48 Though Sympathetic to the Christian missionaries, the reformers were also its severe critics. The Hindu of Madras continuously exposed the activities of the Christian missionaries R. Parthasarathi A Hundred Years of the Hindu (1978) In western India, Balshastri Jambhekar, the reformer took an active part in the re-admission of Sripat Sesadri who lived with his brother Narayan Sesadri after the latter’s conversion to Christianity in 1843 as a result he had to undergo personal humiliation at the hands of Brahmins N.K. Wagle, “The Readmission of Sripat Seshadri” in A.R. Kulkarni and N K. Wagle (ed) Region, Nationality and Religion, (Mumbai, 1999) pp.137-154.


50 ibid.
The reformers had twin tasks on their hands as they had to defend their position as Hindu, both from the missionaries and the orthodoxy. The orthodoxy regarded the reformers who "objected to caste are on the high road to Christianity". Balashastri Jambhekar, Gangadhar Shastri Phadke Bhau Mahajan, and Gopal Hari Deshmukh did not give up rituals in their daily life but opposed the caste system in most unequivocal terms. Vishnu Bhikaji Gokhale popularly known as Vishnu Bhava Brahmachari held fifty meetings in 1856-57 to propagate rational Vedic religion. Since the organisers of these meetings did not allow the Christians and the lower castes to attend them, he agreed to hold them on the beach in the open and in these meetings he defended the Vedic religion and opposed caste system. The meetings came to an end on the government's instructions due to outbreak of the 1857 revolt. He violated himself the ban on foreign travel and asked the people to give up superstitious Puranic religion and return to pristine Vedic religion. He opposed Purda and untouchability and as a way of removing these disabilities and poverty, he suggested an Utopian state which would be universal employer and the sole producer and people would be mere workers working for a living not for profit.

The western educated reformers attempted to define and defend Hinduism with a broad vision and even broader horizon. They accepted the western Christian definition of Hindu, consisting of all castes and a religion belonging to all, though no such thing actually existed. The establishment of Paramahamsa Mandal in 1850 is a stage in the development of such a

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52 ibid., pp.256-260.
thought among the western educated intellectuals. The members of this Sabha believed in the abolition of caste, introduction of widow remarriage, inter dining and the renunciation of idolatry, but conducted meetings and discussed social problems in closed gatherings.\textsuperscript{55} The members were to take a pledge not to observe the distinction of caste. They were to eat bread prepared by a Christian baker and drink water from the hands of Muslims. They also had to sign in the society record of membership.\textsuperscript{56} The \textit{Mandali} had a short life but influenced middle class religious thought in mid 19\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{57} The \textit{Prarthana Samaj} which was establish in 1867 continued this line of thought by addressing the social problems of the community at large in their journal \textit{Subod Patrika}. Lokhitwadi wrote that the Hindu religion, like all religions was man-made and claimed that the Brahmins were no longer scholars as they did not understand the scriptures, but only memorized them.\textsuperscript{58} Ranade who was the most clear sighted social radical made a conscious effort to underline the importance of the \textit{Vaishnav Bhakti} movement in formation of regional identity. He was attracted to the ideals and values of the poet-Saints to their asceticism, pietism, mysticism and religious syncretism together with an emphasis on religious equality and a tradition of literary writing.\textsuperscript{59} So to Ranade and other like minded reformers, the cultural anchorage of the Hindu society was equally distributed in Vedanta and \textit{Bhakti} tradition. They personally believed in one personal and transcendent god and condemned any other form of

\textsuperscript{55} S.P. Sen, (1979), p.268.
\textsuperscript{58} Mahdev L. Apte, \textit{Lokhiwadi and V.K. Chiplunkar}. \textit{Modern Asian Studies} 7(2) 1973, p.196.
pantheism and polytheism but didn’t find Vedanta and Bhakti tradition contradictory, but considered Bhakti, a simplified vedantic philosophy for the masses.\textsuperscript{60} This was the first conscious intellectual attempt to break the intellectual barriers and unify the society since the days of Tukaram.

The Second fundamental question that the orthodoxy as well as the reformers had to address was the basis for the customs and the rituals, thereby the basis for the very existence of 19th century Hinduism. The missionaries had already made a beginning by quoting the ancient scriptures that the superstitious practices of the 19th Century Hinduism were inconsistent with the scriptures. The reformers stated that the practices like widow remarriage and restrictions on female education were not in conformity with the ancient, scriptures. The orthodoxy too quoted the scriptures to defend their line of argument. So the Hindu tradition as it articulated itself in the 19th century formed itself in the very process of negotiating the relationship to past idioms and classical texts in the light of present needs and claims in order to project itself as a ‘coherent’ and even homogeneous entity. In doing so the 19th century Hindu tradition attempted to bypass the long stretch of Muslim rule, which had possessed its own sophisticated judicature, administrative terminology and which had remained in operation until it was replaced by the colonial structure.\textsuperscript{61} As the Dharmasastras the became reference point for all debates and discussions, the Brahanical tradition consolidated itself in the name of Hinduism.

\textsuperscript{60} M. Lederle, (1976), p.93,94.  
\textsuperscript{61} Vasuda Dalmia, (1997) p.15.
If the western education had cumulative effect on the *Brahmanical* tradition, the same western education had a scintillating effect on the non-Brahmins of Maharashtra.\(^{62}\) The education affected them, not only for its content, the western rationality but also the awareness that for the first time in the history, the education was open to them. They realised that they too could become graduates, participate in public debates that were taking place throughout Maharashtra and above all could compete with the Brahmins for government posts, thereby an access to power and influence however superficial that was under the colonial rule. If the Brahmins had used the education to consolidate the *Brahmanical* thereby Hindu tradition against external contradiction i.e., colonialism, the non-Brahmins used the education to consolidate their identity against the internal contradiction i.e. caste hierarchy. This contradiction got crystallized in the philosophy of Jotirao Phule.

Jotirao Phule was the first non-Brahmin intellectual to realize that *Brahmanical* religion would further enslave the vast majority of non-Brahmins and education alone would free them and elevate them to the level of Brahmins. Phule was also a pioneer in women education. He attempted to counter *Brahmanism* by completely rejecting the *Brahmanical* tradition.\(^{63}\) Jotirao Phule's own spiritual vision was broad. He was looking for a religion in which all human beings were equal, in which god was accessible to all without the introduction of priesthood. His philosophic grounding was in western religious radicalism and western liberalism and in ideas contained in the composition of the 14th century saint poet Kabir.

who put forth a philosophy of human equality and the fallacy of communal
ie. Hindu-Muslim or caste differences between the high caste and the low-
caste. Phule established the Satya Shodak Samaj (Society for the Search
of Truth) in 1873. Phule judged the Hindu culture ruthlessly by applying
two values - rationality and equality. The application of these two
principles called for a total rejection of the unequal aspects of culture like
the caste system, authoritarian family structure, subordination of women,
ban on their education forcing life long widowhood and child marriage.
He condemned the texts which sanctioned and sustained these institutions.
He severely criticised Bhagwadgita as it upheld caste distinction and
accepted the theory of rebirth. The medieval saints of Bhakti and Bhagwata
cult were also subjected to ruthless criticism by Phule, as he considered
that no religious scripture in the world contained uniform truth throughout
it, but only reflected the contemporary events and the dogmatic biased
attitude of the writers about them. For him the chain of Saint poets was a
reaction to Muslim invasion of the country and an effort to stop the people
from accepting Islam. Phule began as a reformer and established schools
and orphanages for poor, outcastes and to girls of all castes. But he found
that his educational and reformist activity as also his writings only earned
him the ridicule of the dominant conservative Brahmins who found fault
with his grammar and mocked at his lack of urbanity.

66 The sects, which sought to transcend caste and differentiated social observance, insisting
that every worshipper was equal in the eyes of the deity, often ended up as castes. Romila
Phule had little faith in social reform movement of the 19th century. He firmly believed that the Brahmins would ultimately sabotage any reform movement. It was for this reason he did not become a member of Prarthana Samaj though he was on friendly terms with Ranade and other members of Prarthana Samaj. What he believed was a revolutionary change in the society and therefore established Satya Shodak Samaj, and tried to give new cultural anchorage to the non Brahmins. The Samaj began to perform marriages according to their own simplified rites, which resulted in the Brahmins seeking legal redress against the members of the Samaj.  

In 1880 the priests of Otur filed a case against one B.K. Patil who performed his daughters marriage without a Brahmin. They claimed that they were entitled to a marriage fee, whether or not they had actually conducted the ceremony. Phule and Patil fought the case all the way to the High court in Bombay and the High Court decided in 1888 the case in favour of Phule. Later marriages on a large scale began to be performed by the non-Brahmins without the Brahmin priests. This caused not only an occupational threat but also loss of money and prestige to the Brahmins.

Though Phule criticised the contemporary reform movements like Brahmo Samaj and Prarthana Samaj, he showed a considerable understanding towards Arya Samaj. Though he attacked the Aryan concept in his writings, he recognised Dayananda's emphasis on Aryan Society as a means to an end with much in common with his own. In September 1875 when Dayananda Saraswati visited Poona he and other Satya Shodak Samaj members took a prominent part in defending him against the

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70 ibid., p.173.

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physical attacks of the orthodox Brahmins. Phule though considered the colonial rule necessary till such time when the non-Brahmins would be educated in large number and could participate in governing the country, he did not spare the shortcomings of the colonial administration. He was the only one of the thirty-six members of the Poona municipality to vote against a proposition to spend money on decorating the city for the visit of Viceroy in 1880, arguing that the money would be better spent on the education of poor citizens. Phule also wrote a series of articles between 1882 and 1883 and collected these articles and tried to publish it under the title "the cultivators whip-cord". The first two chapters were published serially in *Din Bandhu* newspaper under the editorship of N.M. Lokhande. Lokhande refused to publish the rest on the grounds that they were severely critical of British government policy towards the cultivators and might land the paper in trouble. Phule spoke fearlessly of the oppressed conditions of the Indian peasantry before the Duke and Dutchess of Connaught in 1888. Phule proposed the abolition of *Kulkarni* and *Patil Watans*. Phule’s primary concern was the social and economic upliftment of the masses. No one before Phule had conceived of the Brahmin non-Brahmin conflict of interests in terms of such a basic racial or cultural divide.

The efforts of Phule created a new equation in the Maharashtrian society. The parallel cultural centers, the one centered around *Advaita*, Brahmanism and Sanskrit and the other centered around *Bhakti*, masses and *Marathi* no longer remained independent. Infact *Marathi* became a strong weapon at the hands of orthodoxy as the vernacular newspaper

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71 ibid., p.259.
73 Gail Omvdt, (1976), p.120.
became a new source of power. In fact one of the important criticisms of Phule was by Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar who in his *Nibhandmala* wrote that Jotiba who does not possess the knowledge of even grammar should not indulge in theosophy, history and etymology. He further said that the Brahmins, alone have the keys of the treasury of knowledge in their waistband. Without the help of the Brahmins nobody can approach the treasure of knowledge. Chiplunkar in his criticism of Phule justified the supremacy of the Brahmins especially *Chitpavans* and maintained that no matter what members of other castes might do, the *Chitpavans* would always be superior. 75 It was not that Phule did not know *Marathi* but what had happened in the 19th century was the transformation of the language from the earlier one which was based on *Prakrit* and *Kannada* into completely Sanskritised one in words and script. 76 This new language was used in the newspapers, periodicals and literary writings by the writers who invariably had Sanskrit background.

By 1880, the demarcation between the two parallel cultural traditions began to disappear slowly as the *Maharashtarian* society had passed through three fundamentally different, intellectually unconnected yet socially interwoven experiences. Firstly, English education and Phule's ideology gave new anchorage to the intermediate and lower caste groups which in turn consolidated their identity, threatened the dominant caste group of its ritual and administrative dominance. The period preceding Tilak's entry into public field witnessed a violent attack by Phule on Brahmanism. The attack focussed directly upon the basic principles of

religious merit and hierarchy that were at the heart of caste as a cultural system. The non-Brahmin cleavage was well developed and any attempt to construct monolithic Hinduism was to be based on incorporating the pluralistic traditions and acknowledge the rising power of non-Brahmins and not through opposing these tendencies. Secondly the total disregard of caste distinctions by Phadke, his attacks on Sahukars and moneylenders who were the backbone of the landed groups intensified the necessity to consolidate itself more strongly than ever before. Thirdly, the greatest threat to the dominant caste group came from within from a group of English educated intellectuals who too questioned the basic tenants of Hinduism and decided that Hinduism had to undergo major transformation on account of its rigid caste restrictions, inferior status of women and such other tenants of orthodoxy, in order to make it palatable to the nineteenth century enlightened English educated. This shook the orthodoxy as the reformers like Lokhitwadi, Ranade, Agarkar and others brought revolt into very courtyard of orthodoxy, which couldn’t be wished away as they had done in the case of Phule and Phadke. So in a competitive, argumentative atmosphere in Poona the landed-business class not only had to defend itself but to strive hard to regain its former glory of political, economic and social leadership by consolidating the dominant tradition against the reformers and non-Brahmin attack. Tilak entered this emotionally surcharged atmosphere in Poona in 1881 as the founder of Kesari and

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77 A.R. Kulkarni insists that this dichotomy continues through the 20th Century in the form of Moropant and Waman Pandit on the one hand and the Pandharapur Saints on the other, between the Sanskrit based drama and the folk theatre of tamasha, lavani and gondhal AR Kulkarni and N.K. Wagle (ed), 1999, p.3.
Maharatta, to defend the landed orthodoxy and provide it with logical arguments\(^{78}\) to bring back to its former glory.

\(^{78}\) Ram Gopal states that the orthodox Brahminical group was irrational in its attack on the reformers, but Tilak reduced their case to the fine logic. *Lok Tilak - A Biography*, (Bombay, 1956), p.62.