CHAPTER 2

SPREAD OF BRAHMINISM IN

SOUTHERN INDIA
The religion of the Rig-Veda was pre-eminently pragmatic. Much that is typical of what may be called classical Hinduism, the Hinduism of Upanishads and the later cults derives not from the invading Aryans, but, strangely enough, from the populations they conquered, the Dasyus. "Throughout this decisive period the descendents of the invaders comprised the upper group, while those of the indigenous people, often called 'Dravidian' constituted the lower group."¹ Rig-Veda itself introduced the idea of immutability of caste by laying stress upon the fact of birth. Purusa attributes the origin of each caste to a particular organ. Once the theory was formulated that caste was dependent upon birth, it gradually laid its hold upon the ideology and practice of India, and each succeeding period of History saw its influence spread over the society. Caste in ancient India was an institution, for almost all its ingredients are to be found in the Vedas. Race, tribe, class, occupation, creed, and ritual are the elements which have gone into its making. In the Aryan society, as reflected in the Rig-Veda, there appears to be contrast

¹ Talcott Parsons, Societies Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives, Harvard University, 1966, p.78.
between the Aryan who possessed a fair colour, and a fine nose; and the Non-Aryan, Dasa, or Dasyu who is dark, having a snub nose.

The later Samhitas which are chronologically separated from the period of Rig-Veda are influenced by the same spirit. The institutions and the ideas discussed in the Samhitas and the Brahmanas are of far reaching results in the traditional and social history of India. This period covers the chronological range of nearly 400 years (1000 B.C. - 600 B.C.). This literature represents the most vital period of the institutions of the Aryan society in India, which has left a heavy impact on the Hindu world. It is during these periods the Brahmans won all status, privileges for themselves and strengthened their position. It can be stated that it is in this period, Brahminism embodied in the Samhitas was led into a schism caused by Mahavira and Buddha.  

In the first chapter, the origin of the caste is examined and the fact is established that in Rig-Veda the Caste System was well-known, and there was a conflict between the Aryans and Dasa which was also a conflict

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2 See Chapter on Philosophy in the Samhitas.
between upper castes with that of the lower. In Samhitas
the situation that prevailed in the social and political
life has undergone a change. The Aryans had succeeded in
subduing the dasa-dasyus by the end of the Rig-Vedic
period and these formidable people were no longer a
resisting force. Hence as Aryans succeeded in occupying
the land that lies between Punjab and Bengal and between
the Himalayas, the fertile plain land of northern India,
the economic life of the Aryas changed when they passed
from the Rig-Veda to the Brahmanas in which they subdued
the dasa or dasyus. The problems which the Aryans faced in
these days were more internal problems, and there was no
external danger. And it is this process which has con-
tributed to the strength of Brahmans, because it was a
problem of the social relations within the various groups
of people, their position, privileges and disabilities.
These questions assumed great importance. The theory of
four castes viz., Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisy and Sudra,
seems to be very popular and hence they are repeatedly
mentioned in the passages of the Samhitas. In the
Samhitas, the theory of four castes which is found to be

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3 Tai.Sam. IV. 3.10; Mait. Sam. IV. 4.6; Tai.Br. III. 12.9.2; Sat. Br. XIII. 8.3.11.
popular and predominant, was not confined to the human beings alone but it was extended even to Gods, seasons, animals, time etc. For example:

"Agni and Brihaspati are the Brahmins; Indra, Varuna, Soma, Rudra, Parjanya and Yama are the Kshatriyas, 8 Vasus, 11 Rudra, 12 Adityas, Visvadevas and Maruts are the Vaishyas and Pusan is Sudra." 4

Brahmins were the most dominant class in the history of Hindu civilization. The role that Visvamitra, Vasistha, Bhrigu etc., played in the social and political life of the Aryas of Rig-Veda show that they were already a force to be reckoned with even at that early age. When we come to the later Vedic age we find that Brahmins, already covering a wide area, were expanding their sphere of influence more widely. The Samhitas and the Brahmanas declare in no uncertain terms, the aims, the objectives and the ambitions of the Brahmins. Brahmins were the religious leaders and hence had an advantage of influencing the psychology of the whole society. The whole Vedic

4 Tai. Sam. 11.5, 10.1; Mait. Sam. 1.10.13, 1.9.10; Tai. Br. 1.1.2.4; Tai. Br. 1.1.9; Ait. Br. VII. 23, VII. 4.6.8, 16.17; Tandya Maha. Br. III. 1.6.11; Kav. Br. III. 5. IV. 8, IX. 5, XVI. 4; Sat. Br. 11.1.3.5, V. 1.5. 2-3. Vs. 2.4.1, XIII. 2.2.15, XIV. 4.2.23-25.
literature is more or less a ritual literature composed by the Brahmins, for that literature shows that the position and prerogatives which the Brahmins claimed for themselves went almost without any limitation. They even went to the extent of exalting their position to that of gods.

Brahmins and Divinity

The Brahmanas and the Samhitas speak in very precise terms about the importance achieved by the Brahmins. Taittariya Brahmana declares that Brahman is all gods and Brahmanas (Brahmins) therefore belong to the group of gods. In Atharva Veda it is claimed that the Brahmana are the mouths of the Gods, therefore, the gods convey their thoughts to men through the Brahmanas, Brahmana's desire is the desire of the gods. Thus being their position, it is further said that the Brahmanas must be gratified to earn the religious merit and fulfil other purposes of life. Taittariya Samhita says that the Brahmanas are gods on earth whom people can see directly.

5 *Tai.Br. 1.4.4.* See also 1.2.6.
6 *AV. XIII. 4.20, 31.*
7 *Tai.Sam. 1.7.3.1.*
"Brahmanas are like gods, and therefore, they are invited to sit around Soma and eat the oblation." Brahmanas are the kith and kin of gods, and those who insult Brahmanas do not go to heaven to which their forefathers (Pitrs) have gone. Those who insult the Brahmanas live as the insulters of gods among mortal swallowing the poison.

Brahman's pre-eminence has been asserted throughout the Brahminical literature. The different types of rules were claimed by the Brahmanas to be applied to them both in court of law and outside.

Taittiriya Samhita (11.5.11.9) states:

"If a Brahman and non-Brahman have a litigation, one should support the Brahman, if one supports the Brahman one supports one self, if one opposes the Brahman, one opposes one self, therefore one should not oppose a Brahman."

In this passage, even the legal position of the Brahmin is made out in such a way that one should speak only in favour of a Brahmin in the court of law. "An arbitrator (or a witness) must decide (or speak) for a Brahmin

8 AV. XI. 1.26.
9 AV. V. 18.3.
10 AV. V. 18.3.
against a non-Brahmin even in legal disputes. There are again different passages which show the influence of the Brahmins. Thus Samhitas and Brahmanas have framed a claim for special treatment to the Brahmins both in the court of law and outside. Priesthood was the main profession of the Brahmins. During this period a number of branches of Brahminical families sprang up and among them sprang up divisions, based on their adherence to a particular school of Veda. As a result of this "the peculiar family constitution or the Gotra tradition, whereby exogamy as well as endogamy regulated marriage connections, and whereby a man should normally marry a woman of equal birth i.e. within his caste, but not of the same gens or within the Gotra, this was another factor in the development of complications and distinctions in the caste system."

A number of Vedic schools that imported the knowledge of sacrifice meticulously rose to prominence during the period. The details of the Yajna went on increasing, new rituals, or sacrifices were expanded accommodate more and more members of the priestly guild. "Rig-Veda mentions

11 Vedic Index, Vol. II. p.83.
12 Vedic Age, p.54.
only seven priests whereas Samhitas and Brahmanas speak about more than seventeen priests."13 All this was an attempt of the Brahmins to expand the field of employment opportunities and acquire handsome amount through Yajnas. In complicated affairs of Yajna perhaps people listened to all that the Brahmins said and agree to all that they demanded. "According to the passages of Atharva Veda Brahmins used to receive not only food but gold, grains of the field, cows, horses, goats, sheep etc."14

"Not only this but for the security of their property too Brahmins seem to have already waged a battle on other fronts like exemption from taxes or from other oppressions. For example according to Atharva Veda, the cow of the Brahmana is unfit for eating and the kings who eat the cow of the Brahmanas eat the poison and perish."15 The king who takes away the cow of the Brahmana loses his brightness (Tejas) and his kingdom. No lusty son will be born to him. The king has no right over the cow of the Brahmanas because his cow is created by penance and Brahmana acquires her by righteousness, truth, fortune and glory.16

13 Refer Chapters on Yajna.
14 AV. VI. 71.1, XI. 1.28.
15 V.18.1.
16 AV. V. 19.4, XII. 5. 1-2.
Brahmins alone had the right to act as priests. Priesthood was a profession solely confined to the caste of Brahmanas. Aitariya Brahmana lays down clearly that Brahmana alone can act as priest in the Yajna. It is declared that Brahmin and knowledge were inseparable. Brahmin means knowledge, and knowledge means Brahmin was a formula that was fixed. When a doubt was raised about the parenthood or the caste of man, an answer was provided that since the man has the knowledge of Vedas (sacrifice) he cannot be other than Brahman. This shows the monopoly of the Brahmanas in the learning of the Vedas.

Brahmana alone is capable and has a right to become a teacher was firmly established. "When the Brahmana, Gargeya went to Ajatasatru, the king of Kas, for seeking instructions in the knowledge of Brahma, Ajatasatru said if it is contrary to the law that a Brahman should approach a Kshatriya, it is also said that Brahman is truth or he alone is capable of speaking truth."
These statement point to the influence which Brahmins as a caste enjoyed in the later Vedic period. It was India's traditional policy of those days which had divided society. The monopoly of power was completely vested with the monopoly of knowledge. Learned class, a learned individual the Brahmana was the custodian of law and religion and justice. He was the only authority competent to decide and give his verdicts, which required knowledge of rules of law, judicial procedures and the punishments which were suitable. Heavy responsibility, therefore, rested upon the Brahmins. The Brahmins were responsible for the spiritual and moral welfare of society and the very continuity and coherence of the social system depended upon the Brahmin. They were the upholders of the Vedic religion, and they looked upon themselves as an exclusive class as practitioners and professors of religion. They always considered it incumbent upon them to study the dogmas, doctrines and theology and to practice its rites and ceremonies. They did not feel concerned if the other caste failed to conform to it. Besides they were so conservative that they tolerated no deviation from social rules or details of worship. Brahmins as members of the dominant caste, not only pursued Brahminism but they always resisted popular pressures by adumbrating the doctrine of stages of spiritual evolution.
and formulating a variety of standards for different castes. The Vedic rites and sacrifices were reserved for the Brahmins, but for the other castes the religion of Puranas was good enough. It is to this aspect that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar refers when he states "the law of Chaturvarnya prohibited the Shudras from pursuing knowledge." \(^1\)

The Upanishads, more than a hundred in number, are closely related to the commentaries upon the Vedas. The term Upanishad means "a session". This points to the collective efforts made by the Brahmins to compose Upanishads. It was not an individual effort but a collective effort. Upanishads are believed to be spiritual writings. They are inspired writings of sages and seers (rishis) just as the Vedas. It is again these Upanishads which are called Vedanta (the ultimate of the Vedas). The term Vedanta is an extended meaning to include the great philosophical commentaries of the inspired Rishis on Upanishads. The two greatest among them are Sankara of 9th Century A.D. and Ramanuja of 11th Century A.D. During these periods the power and influence of Brahmins grew.

\(^{21}\) Keer, D., Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission, Popular, Bombay, p.269.
pace. The Sudras were excluded from society by the upper castes because, their habits and occupation were looked down as unclean. The Vaisyas were not permitted to offer sacrifices. The Brahmins got themselves exempted from paying taxes. They became a well-organised priestly class and realised that the immense social power they possessed entitled them to be the monopolists, custodians and preserver of social knowledge and sacrifice.

All along (the period of traditional politics) there was oppression of the Non-Brahmins and glorifying the position of Brahmanas. It is doubted as whether there existed any period in the social history of India in which this conflict was unknown to Indian Society.

Since the highest position in the society in the Upanishads was accorded to the intellectual aristocracy, learning and education were at a premium. In this field the Brahmins enjoyed virtual monopoly. Society was regarded as an organic whole made up of many parts. Each part for example was a distinct class or caste, and each individual in each part had the duties of Dharma connected with it. Thus "secular society was regarded as human arena for the operation of Karma and transmigration in such a way that it related to Karma, coincided with Dharma, the
Each class or caste has its own rights and privileges fixed by custom and tradition. The supreme duty of the king was to protect the caste and orders in accordance with justice. It was said that a king and a Brahman deeply versed in the Vedas upheld the moral order of the world. Strangely enough the killing of a Brahman was alone regarded as a murder and the penalty was death. But for killing a Kshatriya the fine was one thousand cows, for killing a Vaisya one hundred cows, and for killing a Sudra 10 cows only. Hence the Vedas, Upanishads, and Vedanta are full of religious and philosophical themes, with the great theme of salvation and union with Brahman. Further, Mahabharata and Ramayana are the great epics of India. India has its own great epics as other nations, which contain legends and sages of great men and heroes.

Originating in the upper classes with special reference to Brahmin, the cultural movement became highly complex. Hinduism led by the Brahmins, became the predominant element of the later cultural and organisational framework of Indian society. Brahmins not only pursued

Brahminism but it did confront many challenges from Buddhism, Jainism and Islam.

Buddha, 'the Enlightened one' born in 563 B.C., was the prince and heir of Sakya. He was brought up in a Kshatriya tradition but it is not known where he acquired Brahmanical learning. He was very much influenced by the intellectual and religious unrest of his age and was dissatisfied with the life of ease and pleasure. From the beginning he thought that he would devote his life and energy to the task of enlightenment of all those who came to him for guidance to the path of truth. He would make his disciples to teach and train others. Rich and poor, learned and the illiterate came to him. Thus a great religious order grew up without any gradations like the castes in Hinduism. The Buddhist movement and its teachings did not speak of any God or great scriptures like Hinduism nor any Brahminical sacrifices. The Buddha deliberately cut himself from traditionalism or orthodoxy which was practised by Brahminism. In his days these practices were conventional and meaningless rigmarole for the people. He could not tolerate the exploitation of the people by this priestly class in the name of God and religion. Further, Buddhism was more radical in devaluing life in
this world in favour of mystical withdrawal. Buddhism did not give its sanction to caste after the Brahmin manner, but treated all secular affairs as of little consequence. It is striking that no long term, stable, large-scale political organisation was established on the Brahminic base. Although India developed many principalities and kingdoms, only one primarily Hindu empire gained considerable size and duration during the Gupta dynasty of the 4th century A.D. Of course notable efforts were made by Ashoka of the Mauryan dynasty. But Ashoka's synthesis disintegrated very rapidly both politically and culturally after his death. After that the consolidation of Hinduism and the caste system proceeded apace under the strong leadership of the Brahmins who as a group wrongly reacted against Ashoka. The Buddhist movement gradually weakened and was eventually exterminated from India. Buddhism became a formidable rival of Brahminical Hinduism. There may be all the similarities in these two religions, but they are incompatible not only as religious doctrines, but also socially. Hinduism is rooted in caste; Buddhism repudiates castes. Hence in the latter developments it was a question of one or the other, and again, Hinduism prevailed.

Further, we find that Jainism was also preached in India. Jainism is intimately associated with Mahavira
himself. Jainism is a profoundly pessimistic philosophy and religion, which believes that earthly existence, from cradle to grave is an awful burden to all men without any exception. To live in this world is to act in this world, and to act in this world is to be influenced and impelled by desire. Hence desire is the root cause that misguides man's living on this earth. Hence axe must be laid at the root of desire. This desire should cut steadily -- by calm contemplation of and absorption in the supreme God of perfect enlightenment gives liberation, (Moksha) complete, final and irrevocable, from the round of births (Samsara) and confers Tirthankara-hood upon those who reach it.

In Buddhism and Jainism - "Dharma" was a notion or a category common to Hindu Brahminism, Buddhism and Jainism. It has at one and the same time a moral and a religious content. Indeed, Dharma is the whole of morality and religion and the bedrock of society. It is a religious and ethical concept related to the individual in the context of society, and again Dharma was something that was common to Hindu Brahminism. The monopoly in spiritual-leadership which the twice-born asserted could no longer be maintained. "Though the intellectual impulse came from the great minds of aristocracy in both cases, Buddhism and Jainism were
essentially democratic movements, and Ashoka in putting himself at the head of one and extending state patronage to the other made himself a great popular leader, while he disarmed the hostility of the Brahman priesthood by his tolerant attitude towards all religious sects. 23 Jainism and Buddhism in the latter period came under the influence of Hinduism. Hinduism had been subjected to endless forms of revivals and the important aspect of these revivals is whenever such efforts were made, it again had its own shape. Brahmins are the sacerdotal caste in India and at the same time the proudest and closet aristocracy that world has had ever seen. "In seventh century Buddhism at the height of its ascendancy in China had lost to a great extent its influence as a popular religion in India, both in the North and South. It was therefore to be expected that orthodox Brahmanism could seize the opportunity of Harsha's death to reassert its political supremacy in Aryavartha. 24 The organisation of Buddhism, which as a sectarian group, had lost its intellectual influence in India before Islam gained a footing in the Indus Valley, which was entirely broken up.

24 Ibid., p.249.
as the stream of the Muhammadan invasions spread over Hindustan. "Upto the middle of the 7th Century, India was almost exclusively Hindu India. The dominant religion was Hinduism, the dominant culture was Hindu, and society was a caste structure." But after the death of Harsha (648 A.D.) who tried to reconstruct the Gupta empire, the problem of Hindu-Muslim relations cropped up. The first effect of the Muhammadan invasions and the break up of many ancient seats of Brahminical learning was, therefore, "a great impetus to Aryan culture in Dekhan and Southern India, a rush of learned Brahmins and skilled Hindu craftsmen to the friendly shelter of the Chola and the Rashtrakuta court or those of their tributaries. This migration may have influenced, if it did originate, the religious movement of which Ramanuja, and Vaishnava reformers were the leaders." Brahminical influence, if it had any effect, had the same effect as that of Islamic invasions, by which they started moving from the North to the South and avoided the polluting touch of barbarians by emigration, or if

25 E.D'cruz S.J., India, the Quest for Nationhood, Lalavani, Bombay, 1967, p.68.
circumstances compelled them to remain, began to seek a modus vivendi with the temporal power which supplanted their own. Mahmud Ghazni started his invasions of India in 1001 A.D. Wherever he went in Northern India, he destroyed temples and idols, ransacked treasuries, slaughtered the Hindus who refused to be converted to Islam and spread havoc and desolation, on such a vast scale that made contemporary writer Al-Biruni to state "the scattered remains of Hindus cherish the most inveterate hatred of Muslims." Because of the influence and hold of Muhammadan empire and their invasions in the North from 1030-1186 A.D. after Mahmud Ghazni, the South came under the influence of Brahminical teachers who, in the ninth century, found a new exponent in Sankaracharya who had defeated the Jains in Southern India and completed the process by popularising the ADVAITA philosophy of the Vedanta - the theory of 'One without a second' which was the Brahminical version of the Muslim faith - "There is no God but Allah." The Islamic movement which tried to convert the majority of Indians population to Islam spread. But India from ancient times have always been particularly vulnerable to foreign rule.

27 Edward D'Cruz, S.J., India the Quest for Nationhood, Bombay, 1967, p.59.
Hence even Islam had to accept the traditional politics, the politics of Brahminism based on Hinduism - a compromise between an Islamic minority and Hindu majority.

"For just as in the days of Ashoka the intellectual aristocracy of Aryavarta began to make the teaching the Buddha its own by formulating its metaphysical theories and giving them a Vedic interpretation, so the Brahman of the 13th Century and 14th Century began to shape the metaphysics of Islam. It was into this effort that finer spirits of Hinduism put their greatest strength and achieved the greatest results. In the service of Islam they healed the gaping wounds of their beloved motherland and won back by spiritual weapons what they had lost on the battle field." 28

Brahminism has from times immemorial dominated Hindu society, dominated (according to the Hindu Nationalists) for its salvation.

"If mother India", writes one of them, "though reduced to a mere skeleton by the oppression of alien rulers during hundreds of years, still preserves her vitality, it is because the Brahmins have never relaxed in their devotion to her. She has witnessed political and social revolutions, famines and pestilence have shorn her of her splendour. But the Brahmins have stood by her all the vicissitudes of fortune." 29

This makes it amply clear as to how Brahmans have played a role, and ultimately it remained a dominant factor throughout ages, and points as to how they have migrated to various places either in the North or in the South. In this context, it may also be considered as to how they came to be influential in Maharashtra. There are various theories in this regard. As stated already, the migration was due to the rise of Muslim empire. Besides this, it is also stated

"In the epics, Maharashtra is known by the name Dandakaranya or Dandaka forest. It is clear from the mention of the Godavari, one of the most important rivers in Maharashtra. Indeed, even today, Marathi speaking Brahmans in the course of their rituals, refer to their country as Dandakaranya, and not as Maharashtra. Strangely enough, it was one of the last parts of India conquered by the Aryan invaders. It was long protected by the peaks and forests of the Vindhyas and Satpuras. The Aryans overran the Ganges valley from the west to the east, and it was not until they reached the eastern shores of India that they were able to turn to the Vindhya mountains. They then conquered Southern India from East to West. In the extreme South the Aryans were unable to impose their language on the already highly civilized Cholas, Pandyas and Keralas. But although the Dandakaranya was one of the last of their conquests, the triumph of the Aryans was as complete as in Northern India. The Rakshasas or aboriginal tribes were soon absorbed or driven from valleys to the hills. A race sprung from the union of Aryan invaders and captive women took their place; and Marathi, the tongue which the descendants of that race speak today is as closely
allied to the ancient Sanskrit as any of her elder sisters in the northern plains.”

Hence these two references which show that Brahmins migrated from North to South, has greater importance when we find that the Brahmin migration has taken place due to the Muslim invasions, and they came in search of shelter to the Chola and the Rashtrakuta Court, or those of their subordinates. During the same period the Brahmins also came in touch with the Maratha dynasties,

"and the 'three families that were ruling in Northern Konkan (Thana House) Southern Konkan and the South Maratha country, comprising the modern districts of Kolhapur, Sangli, and Satara. They were independent rulers. The first two dynasties were founded in the middle of the 9th Century A.D., in the days of the later Chalukyas of Kalyan. The Northern Konkan rose in about 800 A.D., and remained in existence for four centuries and a half. The South Konkan rose a little earlier in C.770 A.D., and continued to exist till C. 1020 A.D. The third dynasty was founded by Ialiga in 10th Century A.D., and had a distinguished career for over two centuries. The rulers of these families recognised as their overlords the Rashtra-Kutas, the Chalukyas, the Kadambas and Yadavas in that order."

This difference helps to show that Brahmins when they migrated in search of shelter, to the Chola and Rashtrakuta courts, and were resisted by the Cholas and Rashtrakutas, they came under the shelter of the Silaharas in Konkan. Besides, there are other theories regarding their migration. The fear of Muslim invasion has a great deal of relevance for the migration of Aryans (Brahmins) into the South.

Marathas and the Influence of Brahmins in Southern India

Brief History

Of all the contestants for the succession to the empire, the Marathas were in an advantageous position. Maharashtra was endowed with a very natural and compact territory. The low range of Western Ghats which runs spine like between the plateau and the sea coast, the table lands of Western Deccan and Konkan form the homeland of the Marathas. The valley contains rich soil. Marathas under the mild rule of the Ahmednagar and Bijapur Sultans, had abundant chances to prosper and rise to a great influence, but instead they entered the service of the Sultans, and some Marathas even obtained offices of trust and responsibility. In the seventeenth century the
dynastic rivalries for succession among the Sultanates of the Deccan gave an impetus to the ambitions of the Maratha Chiefs. Marathas were fortunate enough to find a great leader at the right moment, who possessed the highest qualities of a statesman and a soldier. It was Shivaji who could bind together the scattered elements which had remained subjected to the rulers hailing from the North for more than three to five hundred years.

Shivaji could achieve something which was impossible for any other empire. He could throw out the Deccan Sultans and could unify the Marathas under one state, and could establish a stable and sound state. Shivaji's religious outlook was secular, and he was a follower of Hinduism. In fact Ramdas and other Maratha saints wanted to bring the followers of Hinduism and Islam together. In Hinduism they disapproved idol worship, superstition, caste, etc. similarly, they were opposed to the spirit of Muslim intolerance. "In a secular state every citizen is free to follow his own religion and the state has no religion of its own nor is it against any religion as such. There are two letters, both important in themselves, that throw good light on Shivaji's views on religion. The first in the famous letter imposed the poll tax on the
Hindus. The other is the letter written by Shivaji to Jaisingh, when the Rajput prince advanced against him under Auranzeb's orders. 'In this letter to Auranzeb, Shivaji refers to the enlightened policy of Akbar, on account of which he was called 'The spiritual guide of the world.' "God created the whole world" - wrote Shivaji, "and inhabitants thereof, both small and great, they (Akbar and Jahangir) did not place any consideration upon the religion or sect of any one and they did not persecute any one for his religious opinions... It is written in Koran that 'the whole world belongs to God and that He created all mankind." He is not only the God of the Mussulmans. Before him Hindus and Mussalman are all equal as mixed colours, and God is one. Where is a mosque, there is the voice of the Manzzin calling the Mussalman to prayers, and where is an idol temple of the Hindus they are striking the bell. To persecute any one for his religion is to turn your face from the Koran - ... Expunge, therefore, the founders of religions persecution from your heart and show favour to the poor people who are in your service. ...

32 Sen, Foreign Biographies of Shivaji, pp. 107-108. quoted by Dr. A. G. Pawar (Shivaji's was a secular state. Paper submitted for the Maratha History Seminar. University of Bombay, Nov. 1971)
... Shiva;ji was a champion of Hindu religious freedom. He warned Auranzeb against JAZIA, and he fought Auranzeb because he could not accept the superiority of Islam or the status of inferiority which Auranzeb wanted to impose upon Hindus. Toleration, Justice and Equality were the maxims of his policy in his own kingdom, and he deserted their adoption in the Mughal Empire." As regards Brahmins, it does not appear that Shiva;ji showed them any special favours. Indeed, there are two instances from which it would appear that the Brahmins were as liable to punishment, as any one else, for offences committed by them. Dr. Fryer visiting Karwar under Shiva;ji's control writes: They have now in Limbo several Brahmins whose flesh they tear with pincers heated red-hot, dump them on the shoulders to extreme anguish (though according to their law, it is forbidden to strike a Brahman). The other instance brings out directly what Shiva;ji had to say of an offending Brahmin. The person concerned was Jiwaji Vinayak, a Brahmin officer, that had egregiously failed to carry out the orders given to him. In the letter written to him by Shiva;ji, the king said "Such a servant must be

deaths with severely. Who would show him any regard simply because he is a Brahmin?" 34 Shivaji's empire, extended from Broach to Quilon in extreme South. (See map, page No.75) and though he died young at the age of 53 years he was more successful than any other empor who reigned in India. But soon after his death there was a complete disunity among the Marathas. "The cabinet was disunited; the two powerful ministers (The Peshwa and Sachiv) were openly at loggerheads with each other." 35 Sambhaji, the eldest son - wreaked a vengeance upon the ministers and officials suspected of hostility towards him. His cruelty, violence, and debauchery made some of his leading Brahmanas conceive the design of destroying him. 36 Unhealthy political tendencies which had been kept in check by Shivaji - his Maharashtra Dharma, its secularism as such was to be evaporised by the Peshwas. The position enjoyed by the Brahmins was better under the Maratha administration. This is better illustrated by Valentine Chirol:

34 Quoted: Rajawade, 8.31. Ibid. A.G. Pawar, "Shivaji's was a secular State"
35 Sarkar Jadunath, Shivaji and His Times, pp.372-73.
"It is however about two centuries ago that the Chitpavan Brahmins began to play a conspicuous part in Indian history; ... Balaji Vishwanath Rao, worked his way up at the court of the Maratha king Shahu to the position of Peshwa, or the (Prime Minister) he succeeded even in bequeathing to his son, the great Bajirao Balaji, who led the Maratha armies right up to the walls of Delhi; Bajirao's son not only succeeded as Balaji II, but on the death of king Shahu disposed off his Royal master's family by a bold palace conspiracy and openly assumed sovereign powers. The crushing defeat at Panipat brought him to grave, and though the dynasty was still continued and regained some of its lustre under Madhav Rao I, the Peshwas subsequently became little more than (vois faineants) in the hands of their Ministers, and especially in those of the great Regent Nana Phadnavis. He too was a Chitpavan Brahman, and it is under his reign that his fellow caste-men acquired so complete a monopoly of all the chief officers of state that the Maratha empire became essentially a Chitpavan Empire."37

Hence my interest in this brief history, which helps one to look at the continuity of Brahminism and the Brahminization. Edward Shils was right in stating: "No country can quite match this picture of a continuing intellectual tradition carried so long by a single section of the population."38 From certain decisions noted by the Peshwas in their diaries one can form some idea about the disabilities of some of the castes in the Maratha country.

"In Maratha a 'Mahar' - one of the untouchable - might

37 Valentine Chirol, Indian Unrest, Macmillan, 190, Ch.IV, p.38.
not spit on the road lest a pure caste Hindu should be polluted by touching it with his foot, but had to carry an earthen pot, hung from his neck, in which to spit. Further he had to drag a thorny branch with him to wipe out his foot-prints and to lie at a distance prostrate on the ground if a Brahmin passed by, so that his foul shadow might not defile the holy Brahmin." 39

At the beginning of the 17th Century, the great preacher Ramdas tried to inculcate in the minds of the people the idea of unity based on the bond of common locality. During the latest period of Peshwa rule (later half of the eighteenth century) however, this ideal dwindled into the orthodox one wherein Brahmins figure prominently, the state having no higher function than that of pampering them. Under the Hindu ruler the Brahmins must have secured to themselves many pecuniary privileges, denied to others, on the strength of this orthodox theory of the proper function of the state, and perhaps more because they happened to occupy posts of importance. Thus the Maratha region during the period under reference, the "Konkanasth Brahmin caste obtained the privilege of their

goods being exempted from certain duties and their imported corn being carried to them without any ferry charges. Brahmin land-holders a part of the country had their lands assessed at distinctly lower rates than those levied from other castes. Brahmins were exempted from capital punishment, and were confined in forts, they were more liberally treated than the lower classes. It ultimately points as to how in history Brahmin has passed through the ages, and coming under the Maratha empire under Shivaji's time - it would not be wrong to state that Shivaji's empire from Broach to Quilon, also contributed for the expansion of Brahminism in Southern India. This brief history shows how the Maratha empire failed largely due to the Brahminical influences, and the social status which they enjoyed. With the death of Shivaji, the priestly profession was entirely monopolized by the Brahmins, leaving aside the ministrants of the aboriginal deities, while they were seen plying with any type of trade, commerce which suited their tastes and pleasures. Maratha empire in the second half of the eighteenth century reduced Chatrapathis to the position of titular heads, and the

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real power was in the hands of Peshwas (Brahmins). The Brahmins' influence increased to such an extent that they even tried to look upon Marathas as Sudras. In brief, the Brahmins looked down the people of other castes, and treated themselves as Heaven-Born ones.

The very root of the 'Caste-System as we find through ages' is Brahminism and the process which they practised is Brahminisation. As history reveals, since the Vedic period to the advent of the East India Company (British rule) in India we find that 'Caste' and 'Caste System' had become more and more vigorous both in theory and practice. It starts from the Vedas, where we first find the mention and later in the Samhitas, Upanishads and Vedantas. The different forces such as Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, which tried to fight or reform Brahminism, themselves became castes. Under the Maratha dynasty which tried to defend Hinduism on the one hand, and on the other tried to evolve a secular outlook by itself, was thrown out by the traditional politics and could again gain ascendancy.

The other point which can be made in connection with the Brahmin influence in Southern India is, under the British rule, there arose a Non-Brahmin Movement especially in Southern India, from which springs the Non-Brahmin
Movement of the twentieth century i.e. the Justice, the D.K., and D.M.K. Brahmin-Non-Brahmin conflict has its roots in Vedas themselves; and right since the Vedic period the religious literature is the product of this problem. Perhaps religious literature is the outcome of the consciousness of the Upper castes; and the Non-Brahmin suffering is the result of the unconsciousness of the majority community other than the Brahmins. The Brahmin always prevailed over the other Varnas. Two specific reasons which can be attributed to the rise of non-Brahmin to his consciousness can be, (a) the sufferings under the so called religious philosophy; (b) the introduction of liberal ideas under the impact of Christian missionaries and English education. But before going into the details, it may be stated that the areas which were under the Maratha rule, were the areas in which Brahmin domination was felt most. It would not be wrong to say that 'Brahmins were the core of the Maratha administration. Shivaji's campaigns extended from Broach to Quilon (See map on page 73). This helped Brahmins to spread themselves along with his campaigns, and soon after Shivaji's death they captured political power, and once again they had an opportunity to establish their supremacy on the basis of the Varna theory. There are various theories regarding
the migration of the Brahmin, which have made the Dravidians to develop an anti-Sanskrit, anti-Hindu, anti-Aryan, anti-North slogans, but the fact is that the spread of Brahmins, might have occurred mostly and largely because of Shivaji's campaigns in the extreme South, which were cut off from the Muslim (Mughal) rule, right from the beginning. It does not mean that his purpose was to help spread of Brahminism, but his purpose was to defend a nation from alien rule, which indirectly resulted in the spread of Brahmins. The Maratha empire, after its downfall, resulted in Brahmin monopoly, and the British rule covered those areas ruled by the Marathas, which were already under Brahmin influence when the East-India Company arrived. Further, in addition to this point, Eugene F.Irschick has pointed out in his Ph.D. dissertation Politics and Social Conflict in South that, "Above and beyond all these points of difference between South India and North India was a peculiarity social one: the extraordinarily high position of the Brahmins in the social hierarchy in the Tamil and Malayalam areas. This was not a new phenomenon. For nearly one hundred and fifty years, from the early 1700's to the mid-nineteenth century, the Madras bureaucracy, especially in the districts, was
dominated by Desastha Brahmins originally from Maharashtra in Western India."41 "Before the British conquest, the Marathas had dominated all parts of presidency, except Sindh and had rooted out Muslim influence whenever they could."42 "Desastha Brahmins marooned after the Maratha invasions in Tamilnadu, where they still enjoyed something of their old reputation for administrative skill and intellectual superiority. They dominated the lower grades of the administration when it passed to the British, and as late as 1855 they supplied most of the sherestidars, niab sherestidars and tahsildars throughout Madras."43

This study leads to the conclusion that besides other theories of Brahmin migration, the Maratha dynasty, which had the chief and single purpose of fighting Islamic impact in order to defend Hinduism as such, relied on Brahmins.


Quoted by Eugene Ischick in Politics and Social Conflict in South India, Oxford, 1969, p.5.


43 Ibid., pp.97-98.
It is because of this that Brahminism with the downfall of the Marathas created problems even under the British rule. As a result of the Brahmin domination in the South and the British rule, the structure of the society in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra had similar problems. "After the final destruction of Maratha power in 1818, the rulers of the old confederacy became either clients or exiles, and the Marathi regions were thereafter organised into 'British districts' or 'Native states' in the two Presidencies of Bombay and Madras. The map (on page No.73) illustrates the areas of Shivaji's campaigns, which also shows the areas of the spread of Brahmins, and the area covered by British rule. The territories of Maratha rule, the British rule and the area of Brahmin influence coincided. Brahmins again had opportunities to influence British politics, because of which the Non-Brahmin Movement originated.

44 Anil Seal, The Emergence of Indian Nationalism, p.70.
SOUTH INDIA

MAP SHOWING POLITICAL DIVISIONS DURING
BRITISH PERIOD & PLACES OF SHIVAJIS CAMPAIGNS

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MILES