CHAPTER III

TRADITION OF THE OTHER; WOMEN; PEASANT POETS; FOLK-SAINTS

This chapter deals with the aspects of popular culture, which have been lost in the homogeneity of cultural hierarchy. Attempts will be to locate women within the socio-cultural tradition of Maharashtra, by focussing on Bahinabai. Another will be on Tukaram as peasant-poet. And the last section will be on Muslim saint-poets and their cultural interactions with the saint-poets from the Hindu religion.

The institutional site where the tradition as a collaborator for change included the categories of 'popular', has failed to see the various stratum of its existence. But behind the arena of Warkari poets, the real social relations of the 'folk' was never discussed as an ingredient of the tradition. The concept of 'the people' which is never subjected to sociological or historical analysis produces some interesting blindspots in the analysis of 'popular culture'. The first of these lies in the absence of women from accounts of 'popular culture', which will be analysed here in the context of Bahinabai, the saint-poetess in seventeenth century Maharashtra. This gender bias never becomes obvious to cultural theorists, as their representation of 'the popular' remains abstract, and unchallenged by the facts of cultural production and consumption.
Bahina Bāi:— The following is an exploration of a textual body of knowledge about Bahinabai in Justin Abbot’s translation of her autobiographical verse, first published by Dhondo V. Umarkhane in 1914. This is in particular reference to the problem of the unmediated association between representation and reality that surfaces with regard to Indian women’s position within the socio-cultural tradition, or say, Bhakti movement.

What is addressed in this context is the overlap between Indian and ‘Indian’ as is produced in the accounts of ‘popular culture’ framework. Representation of women are largely incorporated within the notion ‘bhakti’ and ‘devotion’.

Though Warkari tradition had its emphasis on the folk aspect of everyday life, it tended to marginalize the place of women within its fold. The role of women in general, and of those such as Bahinabai in particular did not always conform to the pleasing patterns of femininity. In fact, women capitalized more often on the mythical image of their sex as uncontrollably vociferous and over bearing. (1). As Bahinabai too observes, "(472)(1) "I have given way for shame and public sphere, and fixed my actions on God. (2) Now what can men desire of me and

what need I fear, Bai? (3) I have drawn the curtain of public shame and doubt, and will bestow my heart's love on God. (4) I have nothing to do with honour or dishonour from others. I shall enjoy the light of being alone with God. (5) Says Bahini, "I do not have to show my face to the public. God has made me so. What can I do?" (2)

What motivated such aggressive, outspoken behaviour, which surely exacted its price from the person in the form of social ostracism, and in some cases, economic and political harassment? The experiences of sainthood have suggested a few possible answers; but in order to comprehend the broader intentions behind popular preaching, it is necessary to uncover the long road to sainthood travelled by the people.

In the tradition of Warkari movement, the theoretical harmony between doing one's social duty and loving the Lord is called into question if not explicitly, then implicitly. This tension becomes apparent, when the placement of women within this tradition of 'popular', is marginal. And this is articulated in the tension between 'bhakti' and 'dharma', between one's inherited duty and one's inherent duty, which in these movements is same for all people, namely loving the God.

Bahinabai's name which means simply "sister", might best be translated "Every Woman". Niloba, a disciple of Tukaram gives a few details about Bahinabai, but her autobiographical account as suffices the criterion of a hagiographical tradition. Verses attributed to Bahinabai depict her as a thoughtful woman. She realised the limitations of being a woman. In her life's account Bahinabai's early initiation into the devotional mould was followed by a beating from her husband. Later, despite delineating the wifely duties (though with a guilt) Bahiña's critical attitude towards vedic traditions was simultaneously entwined with her silent non-confrontational resistance towards her husband. As she reflects: "(59) (1)" My husband for his livelihood was a Vaidik (reciter of the Vedas) by profession. What use had he for God! (2) He used to repeat parts of the Vedas, but had no love for bhakti (worship and love for God). I had no independence and my wishes had no effect. (3) I was young in years, but the popular ways seemed silly. Out of respect for the Vedas, I stood ready to serve. (4) Says Bahini, "I was very depressed in spirits. My daily life was full of troubles" (4).

3. Anne Feldaus' Forword in Justin Abbott (Tr) 'Bahinabai'
4. Justin Abbott, 'Bahinabai' pp. 37, no. 59
This was the invisible activation in the domestic arena where women of the medieval times invented and used covert categories of strategy, namely the bhakti, to resist and undermine the oppression and drudgery of the average patriarchal household. Though the Warkari tradition provided a critical stance on the issue of religion, and tried to encompass through its saint-poets' kirtans, a 'everydayness' of life, it failed to bring the women in its popular ideology. As always they remained on the periphery of the saint-poets' critique of tradition. Historians of ideology of medieval Maharashtra, with their articulation of 'ideology as social cement' based their arguments on conventionally written sources, which naturally reflected the prejudice against perceiving women as actors responsible for shaping the history of societies as much as men. In this infinitely regressive mode one comes back to the behaviour of the women 'actors' in a male dominated society. In the problematic of popular culture women like Bahinabai's activities and influence remained invisible and the effect of the cultural construction of gender had been mistaken for its cause. It is therefore hardly surprising that modes of protest invented and used by women of the medieval period against male oppression in the home, have been lost in the rhetorics of the egalitarianism of Warkari Sampradaya.

Bahinabai, is the representative of the medieval
woman who out of sheer drudgery of marital hierarchy, sought the path of bhakti. Bahinabai laments; (60) (1) "Possessing a woman's body and myself being subject to others, I was not able to carry out my desire to discard all worldly things (Vairagya) (2) And yet a change took place through the power of right thinking—what a wonderful thing God (Raghoa) worked!

To corroborate Bahinabai's position, historically a certain document speaks of, for instance, how a Brahmin woman was heavily beaten by her husband for over-sleeping and was even threatened with her life. The wife then is reported to have curtly replied to her husband that since he had found a hoard of money there was no dearth of wives to him and there was no need to care for her. (5) In medieval Maharashtra women were visualised as a kind of personal property, rather than a companion. In one instance we find a certain Mali who kept his wife as a deposit with some person whom he owed some money. On his failure to return with the money for a long time, the wife was put to concubinage by the creditor. (6) Women were expected to show complete obedience to their husbands, so much so that they should not hesitate to obey the orders even if their masters made them to swallow poison or jump into a well. (7)

5. S.P.D. Vol. 43, No. 30
6. V.T. Gune; 'CItz- t of the Marathi appendi B on original marathi sources No.58 p. 354. It was issued by Peshwas as to maintain the status of normalcy.
7. Sardesai, G.S. Kulkarni and Kale (ed) 'Aitihasik Patravyvahara; No. 432.
In Bahinabai’s account too, a mournful utterance is elucidated to lament her own being as a woman; (63) "The Vedas cry aloud, and the Puranas shout that no good comes of a woman. (2) Now I in the natural way have a woman’s body. What means then have I to acquire the supreme spiritual riches (Parmartha)? (3) The characteristics (of a woman) are foolishness, selfishness, seductiveness and deception. All connection with a woman is disastrous. (such is their opinion). (4) Says Bahini, "If a woman’s body brings disaster, what chance is there for her to acquire in this life supreme spiritual riches?" (8)

Even a popular saint like Tukaram describes women as wretch, when it concerns his wife and domestic life, as is clear from his lamentation; Tuka says, "Miserable and thoughtless wretch; she loads her own head and grumbles at the burden." (9) He further goes on in the next recital: "I had a bag of grain sent me; he would not let the children eat it. He fills up baskets for other people. He is a gluttonous thief" she grew quite wild and seized his hand like a wolf. Tuka says, "it is idle of a harlot’s stored-up merit." (10)

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9. Fraser and Marathe, "Tukaram," no. 105, pp. 41
10. ibid. no. 107 pp. 41-42
These constructions are cause for reflection, for they are not totally arbitrary. They reflect the existing social order, as the hagiographies of the saints are interspersed with the influence of family sentiment. The overwhelming maleness of Warkari tradition had its roots in contemporary social and cultural order, as did its underlying caste-hierarchy despite its over egalitarian tone. As a marginal saint, Chokhamela because of this mahar caste status had problems in even articulating his devotion to Vithoba. In one abhang, a priest following Chokhamela overhears him address his companion as "Vithoba", and slaps his face. When he returns to the temple, the priest (Badve, the temple priest at Pandharpur) finds the image of Viththal with a swollen cheek and curd spilt on his garment. If we leave out the miracle part in the abhang, one can see the general attitude of a sect, which stood, or over a period of time came to be a critique of Brahminism. The Abhang says: "Run, Run, Vitha don't come slowly

I am beaten by the Badve for some transgression:

"How has the garland of Vithoba come to be around your neck"?

They abuse me and curse me, "why have you polluted God". (11)

So despite of the prevailing rhetorics of contemporaneity and marginality, the main stream of Warkari tradition did not go beyond the existing social order, in which, the religious dominance was represented by Brahministic influence and social, was largely patriarchal and hierarchical. Women and untouchables were more or less alike. Women had not right of inheritance to the property of their father, even in the absence of brothers. An unmarried daughter could, at the most claim from the patrimony, expenses required for her marriage. (12)

One may cite here from a 19th century widow Tarabai’s account of the comparison between male and female, in which she selected two passages which she felt represented in an authoritative way the real misogyny of Indian masculine culture, and to refute them point by point. She did not identify the passages in any way, but simply laid them out in course of her defence of womanhood. The first passage here is historically important, because it has been taken from a sixteenth century Marathi celebration, Ramvijaya, by the pandit of Pandharpur, Shridhar. It is in the ovi form. The stylistic form of ovi was more popular with sants and among women. The passage goes like this;

12. MIS, Vol. 24, No. 110
"Women is only the axe, who cuts down trees of virtue, 
Hindrance to creatures through thousand of births 
Know her to be the temptress, embodiments of pain in 
this world".\(^{(13)}\)

In Bahinabai's autobiographical verses, the 
conventions of popular genres, such as, bhakti tradition 
are not perceived as phenomena with content, but as responses to the "influence" of other saints in the genre of Warkari tradition. To some extent, the terms of this discussion recapitulate possibilities of debates within the Warkari movement. Within the limits of Warkari literature, which is replete with devotion to Vithoba, and critique of braministic religion, the exclusion of women is clearly shared by all saints, irrespective of their caste status. If the essential brahministic religion was male dominated, but not all men participated in it. In Bahinabai's account it will be clear how idealization serves oppression. Throughout much of the account, fanciful constructs of the ideal female, her character and psychology, have obscured the limitations suffered by the actual woman. As Bahinabai perceives.

(67) (1) "Thou art causing this irritation by the hand of my husband, but my soul has made its determination 
(2) I will not leave the worship of god, even if it should

mean the losing of my life. (3) ..... for through my husband my body is being destroyed. (4) What am I to do? I am in the midst of hardship. I have no desires for my body. (5) Let it fall in death, but O, may my longing remain to see the Infinite One with the eye of spiritual knowledge (6) I want to render Thee worship I want to fulfill all my special duties, and through the means of spiritual knowledge recognise Thee. (7) Will this body of mine endure for long these distressing experiences?"(14)

Here in Bahinabai's account, there is a kind of idealism to which one becomes susceptible when one explores the question of feminine consciousness. For we, too, have a tendency to ignore its material basis. Granted, this is a kind of play on words, but it is not intended to blur the distinction between "idealization" and "idealism." In Warkari tradition, to idealise means to ignore, perhaps to "transcend", reality. The philosophical tendency called "idealism" means to ignore material conditions, treating ideas as if they were causes or motivations in themselves, the "unmoved movers" of history. Whereas the former is more or less the opposite of realism, the latter is the opposite of materialism. It will be futile to see the context of "feminine consciousness" without having a firm grasp of what

14. Justin Abbott, (trs) 'Bahinabai' no. 67 pp. 40-41
anybody's consciousness is. From a Marxist perspective, "the production .......... of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life."(15)

For Bahinabai, association of saints are articulated in the manner of physician metaphor. "A saint is a great physician able to cure the disease of this worldly life"(16). "Says Bahini" when the saints look towards one who is poisoned, his poison loses its power. A wonder indeed"(17) Within the Warkari tradition, if there were truly reciprocal relations among levels of culture, that seem to have continued throughout the 16th century, they took place between segments of high and popular tradition of Warkaris. Here, moreover, dominant and high culture of Jnandeva and Namdeva, within the Warkaris cannot simply be equated. In one obvious sense, dominant, or hegemonic culture may be seen as a form of high culture. And aspects of high culture (in the sense of works of cultural elite) may reinforce hegemonic culture. But high culture may itself harbour forces of resistance and criticism, that are most effective socially when they connect aspects of popular culture. In the Warkari tradition also heterodox (in the sense of its

17. Ibid. p. 115 no. 231.
preaching) tendencies were at times quite prevalent, perhaps even "dominant" in saint-poets in the course of 17th century.

In the 15th century, Sena who was a barber at the court of the king of Bidar gave up his trade and became a Warkari saint. A little later Kanhopatra, a dancing woman, also renounced her position at the court and entered upon the holy life of a Warkari. She retired to Pandharpur but the king of Bidar, enthralled by her beauty ordered her to come back to the court. Rather than go back to her former life she killed herself on the spot.(18)

It is in this context that there were atleast convergences between various saint-poets's view and marginal figures like Bahinabai. At this point one may return to the complex figure of Bahinabai and the question of what that figure may tell us about the interaction of levels or aspects of Warkari sect at her time and over time. As her interactive articulation about general saint-poets is elaborated. (228)(1) "A saint performs all his duties while in the world, yet not of the world".(19) (229)(1) "The saints have shown their merciful favour. The building has arrived its completion (2) Dnyanadeva laid the foundation, and erected the temple. (3) His servant, Namdeva, built the wall surrounding it. (4)

19. Justin Abbott(trs) no. 228., p.114

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Eknath, the disciple of Janardan, erected its pillar in the form of his (commentary on the) Bhagvata Purana. (5) Tukaram became its pinnacle. Now then worship in this temple at your leisure."(20)

Even a limited case (and Bahinabai certainly is this) can be "representative." But in what precise sense is she the representative bearer or exemplar of oral, popular, peasant culture? In some sense - but how precise about it can one be? - Bahinabai is 'representative' of Warkari tradition - she is exceptional, not a 'typical' Warkari. She seems exceptional in the way she articulates common beliefs and exceptional in her resistance to pressures both in the patriarchal family and in her own tribulations with the panth: She is exceptional perhaps even in her own variant of metaphysical desire, in her uncontrollable yearning to seek exalted things - a yearning that tormented her. "As my sight fell upon a certain saint, (Tukaram) my emotions were completely overturned. Everything seemed changed. I was driven to silence."(21)

One would suggest that Bahinabai was "exceptional" and "representative" in the peculiar sense of being a liminal figure a position that suited her for the role of woman bhakti saint. It very well could have been an alternative way to survive, by imbibing the spirit of Bhakti.
SECTION - B PEASANT POETS: THE PERSON OF TUKARAM:

Elsewhere and scatteringly Tukaram has figured in this dissertation with his stylistic and unorthodox abhangs. In this section, focus will be on his, life-sketch and his depiction of society and polity in his creative abhangs. And how these descriptions too synchronised with the peasant world view or peasant sense of ideology. Before we go into the analytic details, let us hear Tuka himself saying:

"By caste I was a sudra, I became a trader; this God from the first had been worshipped by my family. I ought not to talk of this, but since you have asked the question, I respect your speech, O Saints! When my father and mother had finished their course, I was grievously harassed by the world. A famine used up my money, and took away my good name; one wife of mine died crying for food. I grew ashamed and was tormented by this grief; I saw that I was losing by my business. The temple of god which we had was in ruins; I resolved to do what occurred to me. I began by preaching and singing on the eleventh day; but at first my mind was not in practice. So I learned by heart some speeches of the saints, being full of resources and faith in them. When others sang first, I took up the refrain, purifying my mind by faith ....... I paid no heed to the voice of the crowd ............ After the impulse of poetry came upon me;
I embraced in my spirit the feet of Vithoba. A blow fell
upon me: I was forbidden to write; thus for a while my
spirit was grieved. My pages were sunk in the river; I
sat down like a creditor; Narayana comforted me. If I
told all the story, the tale would be long; it would grow
too late, so enough of it now ......

If we locate the abhangs of Tukaram in the realm
of peasant life, it would be clear that, it is a
particular manifestation of the troubled and contradictory
discourses surrounding the development of the concept of
'popular culture' and 'ideology'. The period chosen
brings some methodological problems. The later years of
seventeenth century were a period of enormous
transformations in social and cultural relations. Rise of
Marathas under Shivaji also clearly demarcated a new
polity. As the Marathas position within the varna system
was ambivalent, they got impetus with Shivaji's agarian
policies, which largely favoured them. The Kolis and
other tribal elements belonging to the Maval area, who
were the first to rally to Shivaji's standard, were in a
similar position in relation to both the Kunbys and the
Marathas. A Koli taking to settled agriculture may become
a Maratha Kunbi.

22. J. Nelson Fraser and K.B. Marathe (trns.) 'The Poems of
Tukarama', Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1981, no. 101.,
p. 39

23. W. Crooke (J.R.Anth.Vol.XL, 1910); R.E Enthoven,
'Tribes and Castes', Vol. 2, pp. 18-19, op.cit.
The social mobility in the agrarian life compounded with the struggle for social status and political authority, and this largely depended on the control over watan (hereditary right, either one or land, or an office of profit). Though the Warkari tradition with its essence of questioning the Brahmaninistic ways of learning, stressed on egalitarianism, but even within its own fold, differences were starkly clear. As we see the various ‘saint-poets’ coming from different caste backgrounds, had differentiated vision of the cult of Vithoba we have seen the instances of Chokhamela and now, Tukaram. These saint-poets had their own differentiated world view. The degradation of social life following the splintering of the Bahamani kingdom produced, along with the famine of 1630, did matter in the life of Tukarama. He saw himself changing from a kunbi cultivator and dispenser of his community’s surplus and savings into a ruthless money lender.\(^{24}\)

Marathi cultural tradition was determined by the saint’s usage of vernacular languages in their preachings. Often voicing popular opposition to the impersonal and ritualistic aspect of what has been called "the haughty Vedant creed" monopolised by the priestly brahmin caste,\(^{25}\) bhakti devotional cult, fostered the growth of

\(^{24}\) P.M. Lad; 'Sri Tukaramoche Charita,' Bombay Govt. Central Press, 1957.

range of people indulging in poetic exercises, even writing, from social and cultural backgrounds outside the dominant culture were placed, and the norm to which they referred themselves. Chokhamela called himself mahar. Tukaram himself a Kunbi and later a petty trader after the famine of 1630. In Mahipati’s account it surfaces like this; (89) "Now soon after this a severe famine took place. The price of grain was now two payali measures (to the rupee). Rain absolutely ceased. Cattle died from lack of fodder. 90. Tuka then experienced great distress in his domestic life. If you will listen to his experiences in a kindly spirit, your own severe troubles will disappear." (28)

This is an indication of the extent to which the various saint-poets placed themselves within an economy of rural social relations. Even through the legends one can establish the immediate connection with historical fact. Because legends arise from the rich treasury of themes and motifs that history makes available to each particular society, but for each individual saint, the creative process is selective. While advocating the concept of peasant-poets, the discussion about the element of legend is important.

28. Justin Abbott (trs) ‘Mahipati’s Bhaktalilamrita’ No. 89, 90, P. 77
The usually unknown authors of the legends, whether individual or collective, construct the legends on the basis of their own and their listeners' or readers' needs, hopes and desires. Any episode, fact or fiction, that fails to serve their ends tends in time to be forgotten. Any episode that does serve them is preserved in popular memory like a favorite melody that new singers may reinterpret but not omit from their repertoire. What are the social and psychological needs, tastes, hopes, and desires that helped create and popularise the legend? And how these motivations, as they evolved and sometimes mutated in later historical environments, influence the evolution of the legends?

Unlike myths and fairy tales which often share similar motivations, legends claim to recount the deeds of historical persons in historical time. (29) In cases where some historical substratum to the legends about a particular saint seems to exist, scholars have often struggled to reconstruct his 'true' history. Since in most cases the legends provide virtually the only source material on which to base such historical reconstructions, the choice of criteria to determine what is history and what is not is by no means an easy one.

Whether these legends are based on historical fact or not, they claim to offer historical explanations of how these religious movements arose and how their traditions were preserved often in the face of adversity, in later years. The legends take the form of stories that the members of a community tell about and for themselves. They are reflexive commentaries that define the imagined shared past of the community, its historical identity as well as normalize its religious, social, moral and political values. (30)

In the case of the legends about Tukaram the audience of low class peasants, Kunbis, and various other people, for whom, and to some extent, by whom the legends were composed may have tended to absorb the ideological messages more subliminally than discursively. The main narrative theme of most of the Tuka legends is a direct test of Tuka by a powerful, braminical, economic or religious figure. Not surprisingly it is Kuni peasant, Tuka, who invariably prevails over all these figures, who attempt to discredit or to harm him by either trickery, magic, or brute force. What all these general narrative themes have in common is a fantasized revenge by the weak against the powerful, by the poor against the rich, by the scorned against the scorners.

Legends of Tuka, shows him as a protector of the weak and these legends are woven with village background. As in one legend Tuka helps out a brahmin, when the brahmin tells his story to Tuka, "I had the hereditary rights connected with the office of Patil. Relatives deprived me of my rights. They easily bribed the judge and I was being sent to prison. The committee of five heard of it and saved me from this shame. But the king is a thoughtless man"(31) Tuka finally gives him money at the expense of his family.

The persistence of the appellation 'peasant' is in direct contradiction to the decline in real terms of the peasantry. As we see in 17th century, the shifting balance of peasantry had its own dynamism. Tuka’s poetry is replete with mention of scores of pahis, as in the brahmin’s case where he is described as "A brahmin, with a wooden plough hanging from his neck and with the hair of his beard grown very long, came along begging."(32) As migratory cultivators, Pahis shifted enblock with their ploughs and bullocks.(33)

There are two basic sets of assumptions about culture and society which interact to produce an investment in, and valorization of, peasant poets like

32. ibid, p. 71, no. 58
33. Dilbagh Singh, State Landlord and Peasant, Delhi, 1990 p.25.
Tukaram. The first concerns question of his oral style and realism and their relationship to broader social transformations. The second involves representation of caste-differences, and the consequent strategies of social control. Both are essential ingredients in the rhetoric of peasant poetry, enshrined in the religious undertones of Warkaris. And indeed, arguments about the simplicity and naturalness of the peasant voice turn out to have a social dimension, while arguments about social relations turn on their relation to nature.

The Vithoba temple in Tukaram's native village, Dehu has a manuscript on display that is claimed to be in Tukaram's own handwriting. What is more important is the claim that this manuscript is part of the collection Tukaram was forced to sink in the river Indrayani, and which was miraculously restored after he undertook a fast-untoto-death. The ordeal-by-water and the restoration is the pivotal point in Tukaram's career as a poet and a saint. The famine of 1629-30, during which Tuka lost his wife, was a devastating experience for him. The horror of the human condition that Tuka speaks of comes from this experience. The story of Tuka's life as it emerges from his own poems. One can see from it that from absolutely ordinary origins and after having gone through experiences accessible to average human beings anywhere, Tukaram, went on an extraordinary voyage of self-discovery while continuing to record every stage of it in detail in his
poetry.

The standard edition of the collected poetry of Tukaram is still the one printed and published under Bombay government by Indu Prakash press in 1950. The first and by far the only complete translation of Tukaramachi Gatha or the collected Tukaram into English was done by J. Nelson Fraserand and K.B Marathe, published by the Christian Literature Society, Madras (1909-1915). The only other European language version of the selected poems of Tuka is G.A Deleury's Toukaram: Psalms du perler in (Gallimard; Paris, 1956). Fraser and Marathe's translation comprises 3721 poems in all. Justin Abbott's 11 volume series, Poet-saints of Maharashtra (Scottish Mission; Poona 1926) and Nicol MacNicol's Psalms of Maratha Saints (C.L Society, Calcutta, 1915) contain much fewer.

The translations of Tukaram fall into different categories. Fraser and Abbott have rendered Tukaram into prose, rather like representing a spontaneous choreography as a purposeful walk. MacNicol turns the walk into what seems like a military parade. Only Deleury approaches it as dance. Deleury dwells on the lyrical nuance and emotional intensity of the original.

Within the architecture of Warkari life, the tradition of saints, conceives the role of a poet in its own unique way. Its element of Bhakti is founded in a spirit of universal fellowship. Vithoba does not
represent any sectarian dogma to the bhakta but only a common object of universal love or a common spiritual focus. Poetry is another expression of the same fellowship. The poetess Bahinabai, a contemporary and devoted follower of Tukaram, has described how Tukaram in a state of trance, chanted his poems while an enraptured audience, were completely in unison with the rhyme.

"Where words fail to describe;
Where final absorption takes place
And where the good heart is freed from it's passionate desires."(34)

There is a linguistic overlap of the word 'saint' and its Marathi counterpart 'sant'. The Greek or Latin equivalents of the term 'saint' were initially applied in the early church to baptized church members and to the faithful departed, usages later revived among some Protestants35. Only gradually did the term come to be reserved for a special category of holy person: the martyr. This lends particular weight to the view that the Christian cult of saints, far from originating in paganism, arose rather from veneration for those who had died precisely because they refused any compromise with the established Roman religion. The saints were regarded as precious witnesses to the truth of the faith for which


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they had died, and they were commemorated and honoured accordingly at their burial places.

The Marathi word is derived from the Sanskrit "sat" which denotes being and awareness, purity and divine spirit, wisdom and sagacity, the quality of being emancipated; and of being true. The saint-poet fusion in Warkari tradition gives us a unique view of poetry itself. The famous "signature line" of each poem, "Says Tuka" opens the door to the deeper structure. Aphoristic, witty, satirical, ironic, wry, absurd, startling or mystical these endings of Tuka’s poems often set the entire poem into sudden reverse motion. They point to an invisible circular or spiral continuity between the apparent and the real, between everyday language and the intricate world image that it often innocently implies.

Now the problematic of placing Tukaram within the larger socio-cultural setting of the period, will show how Warkari tradition at that time was significant. Its significance lay, not only in over generalised conception of the rise of Marathas, as posed by some historians, but as a potential pointer for change in its rural society, as most of the saint’s imagery was generally taken from the daily experiences of life. As Tuka reflects "The man who reflects not is like an ass; he carries his knowledge like a log of wood. He loves disputation; he loves filth, and leaves the high roads for it. Possessed though he be of wealth, honor or age, he does but scatter the filth
that clings to his feet. Birth or family will not redeem a cut-throat. Tuka says, why do you vainly carry the marks of religion stamped upon you?"(36) Tukaram in his life, became the most vocal critique of brahmin orthodoxy. "To censure this world has come to my lot", was his full conviction, so he could fearlessly say: "A Brahman who believes in contaminations is not a Brahman suicide is the only expiation for such a Brahman".(37)

In terms of daily life, Warkari saints like Tukaram were hardly distinguishable from others. Rules and rituals of their saintly activities were tailored to facilitate full and active participation in whatever productive activity they were engaged in. So in a way emphasis was not on showing how different they were from the rest of the society, but how similar and yet how distinct they were. A saint-poet like Tukaram, criticized a number of other deviant tendencies of his times, such as secrecy, exclusivism, and dependence on magical beliefs. A careful study of the miracles associated with the saint-poets shows that a) nobody can afford the power of supreme Vithoba and b) these miracles also mostly carry a critical attitude towards repressive practices. The most common type of miracle is that of God performing menial and

37. "Sri Tukaram  Bavanchy Gatha," op.cit., p.8, etc.
polluting tasks associated with lower castes and enjoying them: in order not to lose the attention of sudra devotee.

Tukaram looked upon myth and ritual not as a conspiracy against the irrational masses but as their reason. A widely shared belief among Warkaris is that Tukaram was forced by orthodox brahmins to destroy the manuscript of his own translation of Gita. They were not only reacting to the crime of a sudra in translating a sacred Sanskrit text, many of them believed Gita itself was a heretical document because it had criticized mindless ritualism of the masses on which brahmins and their practices had thrived. (38)

The often mythologised stories of brahmin tortures and Tukaram's miraculous escape constitute a treasure as a virtualised critique of brahminism.

Now the question of the political articulation of saint-poets Warkari tradition comes to the fore. Was Shivaji the political outcome of bhakti tradition? Another question is whether Shivaji with Ramdas's militant Maharashtra dharma, incorporated the critical impulses of Warkari saints. But if we look at the Warkari tradition, having a span of five centuries, and if Shivaji was the political outcome of the Warkari tradition, after 400

years. The outcome should have logically lasted with its impressions on the structure of society. Why then was the Peshwa rule established within half a century? Peshwas, who were brahmins themselves and had patronized brahminism.

In the first instance, Shivaji recruited from the Kunbi peasantry a large number of those who had fought in the battles of their chieftains as occasional soldiers. He enhanced the legitimacy of his regime beyond his own drought prone and poor jagir area by consciously attempting to provide a just and caring administration and to show exemplary personal conduct. Shivaji made strenuous efforts to act the image of a caring patriarch. He warned the Desmukhs as well as his own appointed officers to end the harassment of the Kunbis. The first two actions gave Shivaji an unmatched advantage over his enemy from the north. The emperor became exasperated by the enthusiastic collaboration of the peasantry with the Maratha 'robber'!

In an apparently paradoxical way, Shivaji's efforts were both a challenge and response to the critique of Maratha - brahmin dominance. By exploiting the flexible boundaries of the Maratha-Kunbi caste-cluster he defused the increasing exclusiveness of the Maratha gentry.

and thus enhanced its legitimacy among the masses. His attempts to make himself an emperor were initially seen as a threat by the established local brahmin - Maratha elites. Those brahmins who had all along been the natural allies of the Deshmukhs, insisted that Shivaji was a Sudra and not a Ksatriya and hence could not be coronated through a proper ritual. In the administration of his forts, Shivaji tried to maintain caste balance between Marathas, Prabhus and Mahars. He kept these three surrounded by Ramoshis, Bhils, Mahars, Mangs etc.(40)

Now, if we look at the Warkari tradition, with its own marginal subjects from within, it will be clear that the presence of a discourse of the underprivileged, in Warkari tradition was quite in practice in its saint-poets' messages. One cannot fully grasp it by isolating it from the agrarian social relations of production or from the ideological discourse of the landed elements. The dihotomy results only out of the inability to connect the 'ideological' with the 'agrarian'. As Paul Ricoeur reveals the two faces of ideology - the true sense and the apparent sense, the symptom and the cause.(41) However, they do it only one sidly according to Ricoeur, because they only offer an external critique of ideology: they demystify without demythologizing.

41. Paul Ricoeur, (1973) _Conflicts of Interpretations_, Chicago. p. 231
The critique of Christianity, which Ricoeur offers in these terms, although relevant, must not detain us much more except to emphasize the insight, that an authentic revolutionary critique of ideology must practice the art of suspicion and the art of listening at the same time.

Warkari tradition, itself represented a movement of 'everydayness' by being an example of pleading non-orthodoxy. It combined the two artificially bisected strategies of suspecting a message (as here popular Hinduism) and listening to it on its own terms (as Jnanadeva’s Jnaneswari: treatise of Gita). Warkari tradition as a discourse of underprivileged, penetrated the falsehood of ideology through the eyes of suspicion. But it did so inorder to extract and expose the encrusted truth of that ideology through the sensitive ears of a believer. In Warkari tradition, the art of listening (Kirtan) to those who believe (peasants), while unmasking the hypocrisy and falsehood of the beliefs, was the most methodological lesson offered by this tradition. In a way, the articulations of Warkari saints like Tukaram was one of the manifestations of peasant discourse.

SECTION - C FOLK SAINTS: MUSLIM SAINT POETS

This section begins with a transgression - the command is the ideological symmetry where the problematic generates. In medieval Maharashtra the underlying theme does not seem to be the singular one. It was neither
peacefully co-existing, or, neither is the period characterised by constant clashes of totally disparate ideologies making their co-existence a historically painful experience.\(^{(42)}\) As has been discussed earlier, the ideological baggage of Marathas with Shivaji in the saddle, has been a matter of debate. The Warkari sect with its emphasis on egalitarianism had a kind of relation with muslims which was not complex. It clearly stated the peasant world view, as it was articulated by saint-poets with their vivid imagery replete with peasant metaphors.

In several terms, the portrayal of Marathas has always been colored with the causes of Hindus. And this touch has given a considerable dimension of a historiography which either rejects the claim of Muslims at peace with Hindus or vice-versa.

It is appropriate to ask whether it is indeed true that rural, agrarian populations are more likely to fight their social struggles under the religious flags than others of a more secular, material kind. The argument has often been advanced that peasants (or cultivators in general) are by their way of life and productive processes so closely bound to the natural annual cycle and so dependent on natural forces beyond their control that they

\(42. \) N.K. Wagle, "Hindu-Muslim Interactions in Medieval Maharashtra" (ed.). "Hinduism Reconsidered," Manohar, Delhi 1989, pp. 52-61.
tend to be 'religious' by definition. In the 'ideological' context of Marathas, one has to see Warkaris not as a monolith, but recognise its internal differences with all the possibilities of variant interpretations of its teachings from within itself. Besides, Warkari sampradaya was always changing during the course of its long centuries of existence, as is clear from the diverse background of the saints and their usage of various kinds of metaphors. Namdeva son of a sudra tailor, his ideas even obliterated the borders between Hinduism and Islam by pointing out the bigoted character of both these religions, in effect developing a strategy to criticize the two major enemies - Muslim administration and brahmins. He visualised Muslim attacks in a very maverick style; such Hindu Gods! when broken and sunk in water by the Muslims,

They would not even cry.\(^{(43)}\)

The objective is to question the virtuosity of certain historians, who glorify Shivaji as the protector of all Hindus and fighte & for the cause of religion. And this self-contained virtuosity sets in only in the context of the ideological role of religion. Ramdas, another figure with a saintly image was also taken into this account of history, though he was very different from the

\(^{43}\) 'Sri Sant Namdeva Maharajyanchi Abhanganchi Gatha' (Pune: Chitrasala) 1937, p.69.
Warkaris, in terms of the perception of society. This will be discussed separately. The difference between various religious movements lay rather in the way they represented social concerns. The Warkaris being followers of Vithoba, yet articulated their anguish for rural interests as part of their just and true order implicit in their bhakti discourse. This had two consequences. First the appeal to religion transformed the model which rural landscape of Maharashtra had of their internal relations into a divine order which had become manifest by the true conception of tradition.

The point being highlighted here is the notion of mechanism which provided the conceptual clarities about Maharashtra and its social subject - Hindus and Muslims. In the sphere of bhakti tradition one has to locate Muslims, as they too have been integral part of it. The treatment of Hindu-Muslim relations in historical works has been telelogically influenced by the changing phases of Indian nationalism. There have been two major positions on the subject in modern Indian historiography. One is that the "advent of Islam constituted the first great rift in the solidarity of the "Indian community" and that "hence forth there were two communities in India-Hindu and Muslim."(44)

If we look at Maratha history extremes of syncretic and divisive arguments about the two communities do not seem to hold together. Here one has to delineate, the argument as religion was not the binding factor in the sphere of Maratha politics. If we see the English factory records, one finds factors speaking of Shivaji's secret understandings with the Mughals and Bijapuri generals and of his dealings with the Portuguese and the king of Golkonda. They comment upon the religious policy of home authorities the Portuguese and Aurangzeb, but nothing about Shivaji's religiosity.

But if seen from the writings of Bakhars (historical biographies), it started in the late 17th century. Most of these Bakhars became the focal point of historian's archives. What is more important here is the question of perception of Muslims vis-a-vis Hindus. In political sphere, it has been clearly stated. In everyday life, where the saint-poets could reflect the general attitude of peasant life, it is quite evident in their perceptions.

**Law and Society**: In the day to day life, despite the religious metaphors, peasants could not rely on religion for their existence. Religion served essentially three


46. ibid., pp. 120-121 and 136-137.
functions: namely to legitimate, to integrate and to aid in the formulation of a programme. Peasant complaints and demands were legitimated from religious point of view, but the mediational process was not at all religious. The two cases are now more known as it has been used by historians. These are property tried law cases before a formal court. There were tried by Hindu administrators about two muslim parties making ordeal in the mosque. (47)

In these documents, ordeals in the mosque are referred to as Masjid ci Kriya. The mosque is referred to in the two Marathi documents as Sridevul (temple), Sri devacheghar (abode of God). The honorific 'Sri' is indicative of the sanctity of the place. The use of language here is indicative of the willingness of each community to accept a common sacral denominator.

In the peasant's view of life, notion of the ideological role of religion did not matter. In one document, a Maratha and a Muslim were contending over the 'naikvadi' watan of Parner (Ahmednagar). (48) The Muslim claimed that he was the rightful successor to the watan which was granted to his ancestors first by Malik Amber, and then was confirmed by the Mughals. The case was argued in 1644 in a council of 41 members, all of them were 


Hindus, but the decision was given in favour of the Muslim contender.

In Chaul, during the 17th century, after the death of Malik Amber, people requested the government to follow the policy of tolerance initiated by Malik Amber. It was stated in the petition that the Hindus had settled down at several places in that region and were working for the prosperity of the region. It was therefore requested that neither their religious practices nor their temples be disturbed. (49)

Even during Shivaji’s period, as Sabhasad mentions "there is no dispute that the illumination and food offerings to the shrines of Muslim saints (pir) and the mosques were properly maintained by state allowance, just as the gods and shrines. (50) In Chitnis Bakhar it is mentioned, that "five to six hundred Pathans from the Bijapur service came for employment to Shivaji, and they were enlisted. (51) Khafi Khan also remarks about his making it a rule that whenever his followers went plundering they should do no harm to the mosques, or the women and children of anyone. (52)

In one document, published in BISM quarterly C.V. Vaid, tried to argue that Shivaji never destroyed any

49. Shiva Charita Sahitya; No.9, p.34; A.R.Kulkarni, op.cit, p.247
50. Sabhasad Bakhar, p.33; op.cit.
51. Chitnis Bakhar p.38. op.cit.
52. Khafi Khan; Manta Khabul-Lubab, 2nd Ed Calcutta 1869.
He quotes from Shivabharat's 8th chapter and says that Shivaji never touched any women, Fakirs and mosque. (53)

Even Broughton pointing to the remarkable spirit of religious tolerance says: "It is among the Hindus of the Deccan alone that a profound veneration for Mohammedan ceremonies and relics is observable and I am not sure that they do not carry this veneration even to greater lengths than a large portion of the faithful themselves. (54)

Even during the Peshwas period, there were instances of bestowing land grants and other kinds of allowances as well as granting various concessions to the votaries of Christian and Muslim faiths. (55) At Shivaji's instance, as it is mentioned in Shivacharita Pradip, one Netaji Palkar who was converted to Islam was readmitted to Hinduism after the performance of atonement. (56)

Against this politico-social landscape, discussion about Muslim saint poets will be relevant.

Shaikh Muhammad: A Muslim saint-poet Shaikh Muhammad is best known for his 'Yoga Samgrama', a philosophical work dealing with the theme of the soul's struggle to realize and experience god. The 'Yoga Samgrama' is an unusually frank critique of Hindu ritualist brahminism and the

54. Broughton, p. 257.
the one hand. On the other hand, it is an attack on the popular folk-gods. (57) Sheikh Muhammad says, "If the deities were all that powerful, how come the dogs urinate on them? (58)

If one goes through Eknath's Hindu-Turuk debate, it will be clear that the perception about Muslims and vice-versa were quite articulated in those days. And in the entire samvad (debate), despite of Eknath's position on vithoba bhakti, end is in cordiality.

Shaikh Mohammad in his treatise Yoga Samgrama does confirm the respectability to Hindu figures like Rama, Krishna, Shiva and Vishnu. His entire 18 chapters of Yoga Samgrama begins with an invocation to Lord Ganesha. But his writings reveal him as a monotheist. He describes his god as formless (nirakari) indistinct without attributes (nirguna) and invisible (alaksa). This is to say that the structure of Islamic belief in one god is still with him. "Cleavages arise because of harangues in different tongues". (59) "I salute the sacred Om by which the God creator (Narayana) is known, Muslims salute him a ya Allah. (60)

59. ibid., Chapt. 17, no. 4
60. ibid., Chapt 1, No. 52.
Shaikh Muhammad was caught in a peculiar dilemma, His co-religionists castigated him as a Kafir where as the Hindus said that his condemnation of the prevailing religious practices originated of from the fact of being a Muslim. Shaikh Muhammad’s Muslim identity surfaces in a candid statement he makes to smooth the anxiety felt by Hindus of his time. "People say of me, he is of a mleccha jati. That is why he reviles our gods. We cannot trust him. We see Musalmans smashing the images and destroying our temples.61.

It is important now to examine the integral connections between a certain 'religiosity' and the mentality of the peasantry in Maharashtra. Natural conditions, the economy of property, labour and land use, the social and political organisation of the village community provided Warkaris and other sects with an essential role, both as world view and as the local religious centres. People like Shaikh Muhammad despite of being on the margin played a vital, primary and irreplaceable role in the countryside. His 18 abhangas are included among the works of the saint-poets of Maharashtra. He speaks of Gopala and Hari, expresses ideas so familiar in Warkari literature, such as 'you are my sugar and I am its sweetness' "You are the oil, I am the wick". His abhangas are also addressed to the saints, 61. ibid, Yoga Samgram: 16, 62-67.
nature, guru, kirtana (devotional singing) and atmajnyana (knowledge of the self.)(62)

In effect, the popular culture, infused with popular religion always provided space for marginality. And with the increasing use of vernacular medium, aided by the rhythmic similarity, these traditions existed in Maharashtra. Peasants thought that without religion they could have no social life since the rites of passage within family and clan regarded as basic to them, could not be carried out. The agrarian order was seen to rest upon family and the small holding with the institution of watan, which was supposed to transcend the opposition of classes. What really seemed to count with the peasants was a feeling for continuity of groups founded in the seventeenth century on an interdependence of interests in lineages, family ties, etc.

In this context the so-called 'ideological control' exercised by religion with the aid of political articulation is not an appropriate formulation. Certainly the influence of the religious figure was often decisive, and the role of religion primordial. However, the religious figure was as much embedded in this society as he was controlling it. In the context of Warkari tradition one experiences this.

The technique of syncretising elements as developed by historians is alien to the indigenous ways of thinking. It relates to a mode of thinking that accepts only as a single, hierarchically defined system of ideas. But if we look at Warkari tradition, indigenous thought is capable of entertaining co-existent and apparently contradictory world views.

As it will be clear, within the Warkari tradition people were not entirely segmented. And outside the Warkaris also we have figures like Shaikh Muhammad, who despite of being Muslim, sings in praise of Vitthal. Owing to these characteristics, religion can be, and indeed has been, used for legitimising the maintenance of, as well as for revolting against, an established social order. Though this seems to amount simultaneously to recognition and misrecognition. Places of worship also had a sense of marginality. As in the case of Davalmalk. According to Sufi hagiographical literature, Abu Masud better known as Davalmalak, was pir of the Chisti order and a murid of Shah Alam of Gujarat. In this context, as R.C Dhere argues that the tradition of Davalmalak is followed by such castes as Dhangars, Tilok, Kunbi, Teli, Mahar and Mang and of course Muslims.(63)

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This shrine is the symbol of the tradition of the 'other'. As Eknath observes:-

"The people worship the begging bowl of Daval - malak
They become Fakirs once a year
Having cured their eyes of their disease, they eat malida (a milk-based sweet offered at the shrine of the pir) from the hands of a Turk."(64)

64. ibid. 1967, 162-63