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Reappropriating Colonial Documents in Kolhapur (Maharashtra): Variations on a Nationalist Theme

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The district histories should not become [. . .] a series of unrelated facts without any narrative which can be linked with national history, [. . .] the facts that raised problems should invariably come in the gazetteers if they are to be taken as faithful registers of the country. (Chaudhuri, *History of the Gazetteers of India*, 1964: 163)

After India became free, it was felt that a new edition of the Gazetteers should be brought out. The life of a people never stands still. Any account of a country—and a gazetteer is no exception—must therefore be revised from time to time (*Gazetteer of India: Indian Union*, 1965: ii).

How does a nation 'imagine itself into existence' (Anderson 1983), particularly after it has been subjected to colonial rule? How does it (re-)appropriate its history, and what are the means at its disposal for creating and asserting an identity or specificity of its own? India has since independence achieved some political and ideological unity: from north to south and from east to west of the peninsula, although they have contested it in a number of cases, people have developed some consciousness of being Indians, 'sons of Mother India'. This consciousness, needless to say, is part and parcel of the nationalist programme of integration, which has gradually been shaped. To some extent, it also owes much to the encounter with the British (Chatterjee 1993) and has taken different forms according to the regions considered. In Maharashtra, as in Bengal, nationalism and regionalism

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emerged concomitantly and have been intricately associated ever since (Cohn 1988). With the aim of contributing to a better understanding of the relationship between nationalist and regional ideologies at a local level, I shall examine in this article how social actors locally articulate their relationship to the post-independence nationalist programme of history writing, or re-writing.

By way of an example, and on the basis that micro-events—particularly conflictual ones—reveal some of the tensions to be found in wider social issues, I shall take the case of a controversy which started in 1990 and lasted about two years in Kolhapur (Southern Maharashtra, Western India) over the first revised Marathi edition of the *Kolhapur District Gazetteer*.[1] Kolhapur was one of the 565 Princely States which coexisted with the Presidencies at the time of the British Raj before merging into the Indian Union.[2] Most of these states maintained close relations with the representatives of the British crown. Despite an obvious bias on the part of the new gazetteer's editor in his presentation of the contentious sixteen extra pages dealing with Kolhapur's social reformer and ruler Shahu Maharaj (1894–1922) in relation to the British at the time of the nationalist movement in Maharashtra, it is rather surprising that the present controversy happened at all: on the one hand, hardly anybody ever refers to the gazetteers nowadays, particularly the new ones; and on the other, the letters addressed by Shahu to the British and quoted by the editor of this revised Marathi edition, although appearing for the first time in a gazetteer, had already been published many times throughout this century. I shall therefore attempt to unravel the context which gave rise to the controversy, and discuss its political and symbolic implications.

Kolhapur, October 1990–January 1992: A Tentative Reconstruction[3]

The latest revised edition of the *Kolhapur District Gazetteer* was published in July 1989. Whereas its two predecessors had come out in

[1] The only Marathi edition so far available was the translation of the 1886 (English) edition which was prepared by B. P. Modak and published in 1889.

[2] I shall adopt the usual terminology of 'Princely' States despite our dealing with kings rather than princes in the Indian context (Haynes 1990).

[3] It is hoped that by using enquiries conducted in Kolhapur city in 1996 as well as newspaper accounts—mostly those which appeared in the local Marathi press at

English, in 1886 and 1960, this was the first Marathi version. More than one year elapsed before, on 1 October 1990, a letter titled 'gazetteer or scrap-book?'—co-signed by a journalist, a college principal and an advocate—appeared in the 'readers' letters section' of one of the local Marathi newspapers, *Pudhari* (literally *The Leader*), highlighting a number of mistakes appearing in the gazetteer. The co-writers demanded that the government freeze the sale of all copies, so as to prevent the 'spreading of misunderstanding and misguiding among the public', and publish a corrected volume. The letter ended with the following words: 'All those who agree with us, please contact us'.

Three days later, on 4 October 1990, the editor of the same newspaper devoted his column to this issue, echoing the co-signed letter in his title 'gazetteer or gossip scrap-book?'. The editorial mainly consisted of a survey of all the errors committed by the gazetteer editor. These included omissions of famous works of art around Kolhapur, wrong dates and names about industrial premises and local public figures, and some reflections on what a gazetteer ought to be. The demand was made that errors be corrected, that the editor apologize for them and that the government follow it up. In addition, a call was made to the representatives of the people of Kolhapur District (e.g. Members of the Legislative Assembly and Members of the Legislative Council), to sort the matter out and 'help prepare a volume with appropriate information'. So far, no mention whatsoever had been made of the name of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj.

On the following day, the same journalist, in an article entitled 'Rajarshi Shahu a British Agent, says Maharashtra Government', accused the editor of the gazetteer of having defamed the said Maharaj. This sparked off the controversy: the journalist argued that the editor had expressed his opinion and should never have done so because he was not writing a biography but an official document. He wrote that he was 'ready to accept the truth' but denied the Gazetteer's editor 'any right to defame anyone'. In the present case, this meant that he had no right to say that there existed a close relationship between the British and Shahu, that the latter had once called for their help to stop nationalist agitation in Kolhapur, or that he had earlier suggested to the British government that they should keep the nationalist movement under close scrutiny. Eventually, the

the time of the controversy—as emblems, signs, and traces, we shall be able to recollect at least one version of the facts and piece them together.

main matter of contention was the editor's inference, from Shahu's control over the revolutionary movement opposing his rule (*darbar*), that he was a representative of the British. In fact, Shahu Maharaj, argued the journalist, had even helped the nationalist movement secretly, as well as the terrorists. Anyone reading the revised gazetteer might doubt this. On 6 October 1990, the same journalist also wrote an appeal to all Kolhapuris—individuals as well as institutions—to verify any information contained in the gazetteer which might be relevant to them.

Ten days after the catalytic letter appeared in the newspaper, the issue of publicly burning the government-published district gazetteer was taken up in a general meeting of the Kolhapur Corporation. An account of this meeting appeared in the statewide newspaper *Sakal*, thus quoting the words of the local newspaper's (*Pudhari*) editor: 'the gazetteer is presenting a distorted history to the new generations'. The public burning (holi) took place on the following day in front of the Corporation building. Immediately afterwards, the District Officer in charge called for an emergency meeting of political party workers and social activists. A decision was made to 'convey the sentiments of people hailing from different walks of life to the State government'. At this time, the government decided to stop all sales and distribution of the gazetteer.

Less than a fortnight elapsed before a 'bandh' followed in Kolhapur. This bandh 'in protest against the distorted gazetteer accounts of beloved Shahu Maharaj' (sub-title of the *Sakal* article, 24 Oct. 1990) was presented by the press as 'total, spontaneous and peaceful'. It was jointly called by the mayor of the city, the Shiv Sena, the Maratha Mahasangh, Hindu Ekta Andolan,[4] Shahu Sena, Bhartiya Janata Party, an engineering association, the Chamber of Commerce, a theatre organization, several unions of rickshaws, business institutions and shops, and Kolhapur Municipal Transportation buses. Transactions in banks came to a standstill. Shops and petrol pumps were closed, as well as cinemas and even tea stalls in many parts of Kolhapur. Once again, copies of the gazetteer were publicly burnt in some parts of the city on behalf of a number of 'mandals'

[4] Schematically, the Maratha Maha Sangh organization was led for a long time by Congress Annasaheb Patil, stands against Muslims, job reservations and for the development and advancement of the Maratha caste. The Hindu Ekta Andolan is established in South Maharashtra and north Karnataka, namely Satara, Kolhapur and Ichalkaranji, Karad, Belgaum. It used to be powerful in this area in the 1980s. Nowadays it is supporting the Shiv Sena. I owe this information to Dr Chausalkar.

(i.e. social organizations—the newspaper did not specify which ones). *Sakal* newspaper reported that the mayor had thanked the people for their 'spontaneous response' through a tract published on behalf of all the political parties and organizations which had initiated the bandh. A call was also made that the government should apologize, take note of the deep sentiment of the people and rectify what they considered to be its own mistake.

These events occurred in the latter half of October, just before the Corporation elections took place. A new mayor was elected in November.[5] Just like his predecessor, he belonged to the Congress Party. One month later, in December, the matter of the gazetteer was brought up at the Maharashtra state level. In a stormy meeting of the Legislative Council, MLCs (Members of the Legislative Council) led by the only Kolhapuri Member put pressure on the then Minister of Culture, Arun Gujarati. Although sales of the Gazetteer had been stopped and copies already sold had been retrieved,[6] said *Sakal* in its issue of 14 December, MLCs demanded that action be taken against the editorial board. The government complied by dismissing the latter. Immediately afterwards, a well-known member of the Gazetteer Editorial Board wrote a letter in protest to the *Maharashtra Times* accusing the government of interfering beyond its jurisdiction and inviting scholars to react and settle the issue on their own terms.

It took more than six months for a scholarly debate to be held on the issue of the Gazetteer. This happened in Kolhapur on 4 August 1991 under the aegis of the 'Madhavrao Bagal Vidyapeeth',[7] whose President and Vice-President were respectively the former MLC Congress leader and a former Vice-Chancellor of Kolhapur University. A renowned historian whose work had been quoted twenty-three times in the controversial volume attended together with scholars from the local University, among them historians and political scientists. The lectures were reported by the press, state (*Sakal*) and local (*Kesari*, etc.), and focused on famous episodes of Shahu's life.

[5] Corporation members are elected every five years and appoint a new mayor every year.

[6] Out of the five-hundred-and-fifty copies published, thirty-five had been sold in Pune and eight in Kolhapur. Even today, nobody is supposed to possess a copy of the 1989 edition and none can officially be obtained from the government press.

[7] A vidyapeeth is deemed a university with no official recognition; in the present case, it is more like a cultural centre where lectures are given on the lives of various Maharashtrian/Kolhapuri social workers or/and leaders; Madhavrao Bagal was one of them (see further).

Out of nine lectures, one dealt with Shahu's conception of varna, one with his relationship to the Satya Shodhak Samaj, one with the vedokta controversy, two on his relations with the British and the independence movement and four on the concept of gazetteers in general and the Kolhapur one in particular. Although some of the lectures—such as those on his relations with the British—were controversial in nature, all of them upheld the local representations of the ruler as a hero. At the debate, the new mayor publicly expressed a request to the government, not only that the Kolhapur gazetteer be withdrawn, but also that the deficiencies be removed and a new volume published. A set of the papers was collected and taken to the District Collector for him to submit to the government of Maharashtra.

Until then, MLCs had been the ones to take up the matter at the State level. A few months later, MLAs (Members of the Legislative Assembly) in their turn made an issue out of it against the then ruling Congress Party,[8] or rather, they tried to do so. Before they could take the 'aggressive stand' they had intended to at the winter Legislative Assembly Session by demanding that the controversial material be scrapped from the gazetteer (*Sakal*, 2 Dec. 1991), the government[9] 'deflated' the issue. It announced at an opening press conference its 'decision of far-reaching consequence for history writing', namely the deleting of the 16 controversial pages (*The Sunday Times*, 12 Jan. 1992, p. 1). For fear of creating further controversy, it was decided to print maps and illustrations instead.

Although a new edition of this gazetteer was supposed to come out soon after (according to one Kolhapuri scholar), it was still unavailable at the government Press in October 1996.[10]

[8] The opposition leader at that time was Manohar Joshi, now Chief Minister of Maharashtra.

[9] Then led by Congress Sudhakarrao Naik and under the influence of Sharad Pawar who was the Central Defence Minister.

[10] The last public mention of the issue, to my knowledge, goes back to 29 June 1993, when the former Kolhapuri MLC who had voiced public discontent at the Legislative Council meeting flayed the government's decision to re-appoint the *Kolhapur District Gazetteer* editor as head of the state gazetteers' department.

Political Ideologies in Maharashtra and the Historical Writing of the Nation into Existence

Kolhapuri Background and Electoral Context

First, we need to enter into the representations the Kolhapuri social actors have of their own history in relation to their idea of nationhood. It is central to the whole controversy that the Kolhapuri population considered itself the first and foremost recipient of the *Kolhapur District Gazetteer*. The accusation made by the local Marathi press (i.e. that the representations of history written in the gazetteer would 'spread misunderstanding', or 'misguide the younger generations'[11]), as well as the general response of the Kolhapuri public to the issue (demonstrations in various places, 'bandh', and so on), not only as recounted by the press, but also as appearing from interviews and fieldwork conducted several years later, make this very obvious.[12]

Plainly, the history of Shahu Maharaj nowadays functions as a 'myth' in Kolhapur. Shahu happened to live at about the right time for serving the purpose of myth-making and local politics. Seventy years is more than enough time for tradition to (re-)invent itself, or rather for its guardians to erase what is unwanted and embellish what stands praiseworthy in their eyes and also for people from diverse backgrounds to make use of a princely hero for various ends and endow his life's story with different meanings. In order to understand this, we need to situate Shahu's history within the local context, as well as the wider one of Maratha identity, social reform and non-Brahmin movements in Western India.

In the local context, Shahu embodies Kolhapuri identity both in general, and more particularly for the Marathas, Other Backward Castes and Dalits. Marathas and allied castes,[13] as well as ex-Untouchables were the first beneficiaries of the Chhatrapati's social welfare policy. This policy, started as early as 1894 at the time of

[11] And echoing Sudipta Kaviraj's concern for the identity of the destinatories of history as somehow more important than the object of history itself (1992).

[12] I am quite aware that press material on the one hand and fieldwork material on the other need to be distinguished. The use of both raises methodological questions which I hope to address in another paper.

[13] Schematically, those termed as 'allied' castes rank slightly lower than the Marathas and are originally from Maharashtra; their ancestors fought under the banner of Shivaji. They consist of Carpenters (Sutars), Tailors (Shimpis), Oil-pressers (Telis), and so on.

his accession, laid the foundation for significant social reforms in favour of non-Brahmins in Kolhapur state, and it was instrumental in furthering their advancement in both educational and administrative institutions. Thus, in July 1902, an ordinance was passed by Shahu which aimed at reserving at least half the posts in the state service for non-Brahmins (Copland 1973). Among the most significant aspects of the Maharaja's policy were the various schemes he set up to provide education for students from rural areas and poorer sections of the population. Compared to the British policy, which at that time was based on Mountstuart Elphinstone's Minutes on Education of 1823 and aimed at promoting collegiate education for a few, the Maharaja's policy stood in stark contrast, laying great emphasis on primary education. Consequently, free and compulsory primary education was made available to all as early as 1917 in the princely state (Mudaliar 1978).[14] Although the Maharaja's initial move was not really aimed against Brahmins, but was meant to promote the cause of non-Brahmins, in the long run it implied overthrowing Brahmins' long-held privileges (Mudaliar 1978). Non-Brahmins were never a single homogeneous group, for they were divided into numerous communities which remained clearly distinct from one another; even educational boarding-houses, for instance, were set up for rural students on a caste basis at the beginning of the century (Khane 1978). Yet Shahu Maharaj, himself a Maratha, not only worked for his community members: besides supporting the Kolhapur Depressed Castes Movement (started 1895) throughout his reign, he abolished untouchability in August 1919 in all public places, including schools. Although these moves to raise the status of the Depressed Castes were not welcomed by Marathas, who saw in them a downgrading of their own status (Mudaliar *ibid.*), the single word 'Maratha' had come to subsume all non-Brahmin groups in Kolhapur (Rosenthal 1973) when referring to Shahu's educational and social reforms, and it still does to a certain extent. Thus all non-Brahmin Kolhapuri communities nowadays vie with each other to represent themselves as exclusively endowed with the Maharaja's social reformist heritage which they nevertheless share in a common bondage to his memory.

This heritage also needs to be related to the larger one of the social reform movements which started in western India in the latter

[14] In comparison, the same was implemented for the whole of Maharashtra only in the 1970s.

half of the nineteenth century under the impulse of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule. Shahu readily acknowledged the inspiration he had derived from the works and achievements of Phule, and his educational policy largely took after the latter's. Ascribing social reform in western India to Jyotirao Phule alone would of course amount to oversimplification: many Brahmins were amongst the first social reformers (see, for instance, Tucker 1970; Apte 1973; Phadke 1975; O'Hanlon 1983; 1985) and some of them forcefully opposed Brahminical orthodoxy. Vishnu Shastri Pandit, for instance, was one of the most prominent leaders in the debate over the Widow-Remarriage Act which took place in the 1860s, as were B. G. Bhandarkar, the famous Sanskritist, and Gopal Hari Deshmukh, also known as 'Lokahitavadi' (literally 'protagonist for the good of the masses'). Yet, these reformers—in the 1860s as in the 1880s, when the debate over the Age of Consent Bill occurred—mostly confined their preoccupations to the Brahmin community (Tucker 1970). Moreover, they always acted within the legitimate limits of tradition: 'In 1870, to be a reformer meant advocating slow change along putatively Vedic lines' (Tucker *ibid.*: 336). Thus in the first six years of the existence of the National Social Conference, founded by M. G. Ranade in 1887, which coordinated social liberals on a national level, every attempt was made to reconcile 'stability with change, Brahmin orthodoxy with social liberalization' (Tucker 1970: 343). In opposition to the Brahmin reformist consensus which lasted well into the beginning of the next century, Jyotirao Phule, of Mali (gardener) caste, founded the first non-Brahmin organization, the Satya Shodhak Samaj—literally 'Truth-Seeking Society'—in Poona in 1873. This organization came to be seen as the 'earliest sign of the modern non-Brahmin movement' (Zelliot 1970: 402), providing 'a unity and form to the anti-Brahmin sentiment of the intermediate and backward castes' (Gore 1989: 26). The idea of the social unity of non-Brahmins as a group goes back to the same period, that is, the latter half of the nineteenth century (O'Hanlon 1983). Phule's movement defined itself from the start as being against Brahminical hegemony, in both the ritual and secular worlds, and culminated into strong protests at the turn of the century. Indeed, the Maharashtrian Brahmins had been able to take extraordinary advantage of the opportunities offered to them under the British Raj in both the educational and administrative realms. Sir W. W. Hunter, the famous administrator who was ordered to compile the first imperial gazetteer (of whom more later), even complained that by the end of the

nineteenth century 'Maratha Brahmans are at this moment the chief native administrators of the system which superseded their own' (Hunter 1892: 12).[15]

Around the same time, strong resentment against Brahminical hegemony crystallized in the figure of the kulkarni or village accountant, who profited by the changes introduced by the British in the system of land revenue collection which had reduced the power of the village headman or patil, usually a Maratha by caste. Anti-kulkarni protest was voiced at many a level: in non-Brahmin newspapers, petitions to administrators, poems and polemics; Mahatma Phule himself wrote resentfully about the 'usurption of the patil's power by the kulkarni' (Zelliot 1970: 407). A few decades later, in 1919, Shahu Maharaj, decreed the abolition of the kulkarni watan (accountancy office) in Kolhapur. Around that time, the princely state had become one of the strongholds of the 'non-' or 'anti-Brahmin' agitation which prevailed in many parts of South India (Kavlekar 1979) and 'Chhatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur was [seen as] the patron-sponsor of the second phase of the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra' (Gore 1989: 53).

There is also a personal element in the ruler's history which tied it even more closely to the anti-Brahmin protest movement: the episode known as the 'vedokta controversy', when his Brahmin family priests 'denied him the privilege of Vedic rites on the grounds that he was not a Kshatriya' (Lederle 1976).[16] One fine day in October 1900 on the banks of the Panchganga river, one of the family priests failed to bathe before attending the holy bath of Shahu Maharaj. When asked to explain, he simply responded that such purification was not needed for performing Puranic rites, that is, rites meant for Shudras. It was then discovered that the Rajopadhya (Royal Chaplain) as well as the palace priests, performed all ceremonies for the royal family in accordance with Puranic rites (Mudaliar 1978). One year later, Shahu Maharaj ordered all rituals to be performed according to Vedic rites, consistent with his Kshatriya status, warning that those who failed to carry out his order would be suspended from service.

[15] This complaint also has to be seen in the light of British resentment against nationalist agitation which was held to be mostly coming from the Brahmins (see note 17).

[16] On that matter, see Sangave and Khane (1985) for both the original correspondence papers of Shahu and the British administrators, and a detailed presentation of the sequence of events.

The Rajopadhya not only refused but challenged Shahu's claim to Kshatriya status and was thus deprived of his tax-free inam lands (formerly granted to him as payment for his religious services). The controversy went on for more than five years, during which time the Kolhapuri Brahmins, backed by some Pune Brahmins—including nationalist leaders such as B. G. Tilak—vigorously opposed Shahu. At this time, Shahu often confided in the British representatives (Sangave and Khane 1985), who supported him by rejecting the Rajopadhya's appeal to the government of Bombay—and later the government of India—and by confirming the Maharaja's right to act.[17]

That a Maharaja's status should be contested was by no means exceptional in the light of past South Indian history: there had been precedents, wherein Brahmins, arguing that their own varna and the Shudras' were the only two left in the present age, had denied Kshatriya status to martial and kingly families. One famous instance involved Shivaji Bhonsle himself, leader of the Marathas and founder in the seventeenth century of what is nowadays often referred to as 'the Maratha nation'. This case lasted for several years and involved numerous procedures whereby written documents had to be produced in order to establish the Bhonsle family hereditary connection to the Rajputs of Sisodia in Gujarat (see O'Hanlon 1985 for a more detailed treatment of this episode). Rather than treating these cases in isolation, as is often done with the Maharaja of Kolhapur, we can gain insight into these status controversies by looking at them in the wider perspective of Brahmin response to their privileges being threatened. Indeed, the Brahmins' role was crucial in that an important 'function' of theirs 'had always been to legitimate status claims' (Rosenthal 1973: 905).[18] That the Brahmins employed this responsibility as

[17] As a rule, and following Lord Reay's principles, British administrators adopted a position of minimum interference when dealing with the Native States (Hunter 1892), or rather, with contentious matters pertaining to them. However, in the present case, both Governments' decisions are to be explained in the light of nationalist agitation and the growing 'Brahmanophobia' it generated amongst the British: a few years later, a report insisted on the role played by Brahmins in 'Indian unrest' and the tremendous influence of Brahminism in the main 'centres of active disaffection', i.e. Lower Bengal and the 'Maratha country' (Chirol 1910).

[18] This status dependence of the Maratha kings on Brahmins stands in stark contrast with the autonomy enjoyed by the Rajput kings of Rajasthan, whose crucial rite of legitimation (the 'enthronement') did not involve Brahmin participation and for whom ' "genuine" Kshatriya status depended more on putative Kshatriya birth'

a political resource is especially obvious in cases where, despite prior Brahminical recognition of Kshatriya status, actual Brahmin practice would seek to thwart the powers of royal families, in order to assert Brahminical authority and 'effective influence over the legitimation of claimants to political authority' (*ibid.*). Brahmins, it seems, particularly made use of this political resource whenever they felt especially threatened about their powers and privileges. This at least seems to be so all throughout nineteenth-century Western India, where it assumed a particular form under the British, partly because of their support of the social reform policies carried out by many native states. Thus, around 1820, the Raja of Satara, who also was a staunch advocate of social reform in favour of non-Brahmin groups, was deprived of his Vedokta rights by the Chitpawan Brahmin Nilkantha Shastri Thatte; the latter happened to be employed by the British 'for his knowledge of the shastras' at Rs 1200 a year (Wagle 1980: 144). Later, he was to be the chief instigator of the controversy which opposed the Pancal Devajna Sonars to the Pune Brahmins regarding social rank and ritual privileges. These Sonars were by no means the only group of relatively high status in the area who were doing away with their ritual dependency on the Brahmins and subsequently claiming equal ritual status. The Kayastha Prabhus of Pune, Satara and Baroda were soon to follow suit. In each case, the Brahmins (led by the same N. S. Thatte) reacted very strongly and eventually brought the matter to British courts. What furthered discontent among them and in turn caused them to harden their positions was the support given by colonial administrators to their opponents. This is also what happened in the case opposing Gaikwad, the ruler of Baroda, himself one of the most ardent supporters of the non-Brahmin cause (Diver 1942; Keer 1976), who also had been deprived of his Kshatriya status by Brahmins (Gore 1989).

The vedokta controversy in Kolhapur in 1900 also acquired particular resonance in view of the Raja's family connections with Shivaji Bhonsale (Keer 1976). As the only Maratha chief directly descended from Shivaji, the royal dynasty earned a 'conspicuous position among the Native States of Bombay' (Chirol 1910) and by the close of the nineteenth century, the 'great Maráthá houses

than on Kshatriya deeds (e.g. 'a Kshatriya is as a Kshatriya does' (see C. J. Fuller, A. C. Mayer and N. Peabody 1992 on this).

of the Gáekwar, Sindhia, and Holkar, esteem[ed] an alliance with the Kolhápur dynasty as an honour' (Hunter 1892: 89). At the beginning of the next century, Kolhapur was still considered to occupy a 'unique position in the hierarchy of Indian states' and was held to be the 'premier state in Western India' (Copland 1973: 213–14). Since the figure of Shivaji had great symbolic power,[19] any attempt to question Shahu Maharaja's kshatriya status amounted to sacrilege, reminiscent moreover of the controversy which Shivaji himself had had to face. It also added fuel to the Brahmin versus non-Brahmin conflict and indirectly served the purpose of social reformism because, in retaliation, Shahu decreed that all worship in his palaces and ancestral temples would be performed by Marathas, thereby tolling the bell for Brahmin ritual hegemony and paving the way for Maratha emancipation in ritual matters too. This change was made in several phases. Although at the time of dispute, Shahu had already started considering the creation of a new Maratha priesthood (Mudaliar 1978: 12), it was not until 1911 that a unit of the Satya Shodhak Samaj was established in Kolhapur. Vedic ceremonies began to be performed by non-Brahmins in the following year, and in 1913 'the Maharaja gave a grant to the Satyashodhak Samaj to teach non-Brahmins to perform priestly duties' (Rosenthal 1973: 906). The Maratha priesthood was officially created by a private (khasgi) order issued by Shahu in 1920 (Mudaliar 1978). Nowadays, worship at the temple of Bhavani (royal family's tutelary deity) is still taken care of by priests of Maratha and allied castes who have received their religious education in one of the two schools created for this purpose.[20]

[19] On the recuperation of this powerful symbol in the mid-nineteenth century for mass mobilization by Brahmins and the Mahatma Phule respectively, see, for instance, O'Hanlon (1983) and for a treatment of Bal Gangadhar Tilak's attempts twenty-five years later, see Cashman (1975). The employment of Shivaji's history by various political groups and factions throughout the twentieth century has been amply documented. An idea of the popularity of the Maratha hero in the 1950s in Maharashtra is given by one anthropologist who found that a far greater percentage of villagers was able to 'correctly identify Shivaji than Nehru' (W. A. Morrison, 'Knowledge of Political Personages Held by the Male Villagers of Badlapur', *Sociological Bulletin*, X (2): 1–26 and XII (1): 1–17, cited by Zelliot [1970]).

[20] Interestingly enough, the Maratha priests—the eldest of them having been serving for more than forty-six years—whom I met in Bhavani temple in 1996 told me that Shahu Maharaj had had a Brahmin from Kashi come and start the teaching. As if legitimacy needed to come from a 'source locus of Hinduism'. The oldest school is located wtihin the city close to Bhavani temple, in Bindu Chowk, and had

There is therefore a special *attachment*[21] which binds Kolhapuris to the persona of the king, cutting across caste and time boundaries and serving as a unifying force even today. This attachment is further strengthened annually at the celebration of Shahu's birth anniversary (Shahu Jayanti, in July) and, to a lesser extent, at Dasera (September–October), when the heir to the royal family performs the martial ritual after visiting Bhavani temple.

Shahu Jayanti is the occasion for the greatness of the local hero to be legitimized anew by the authoritative word of local scholars, who for one week give well-attended lectures in various places. Aside from the ritualized lecture which is held at Bhavani temple—in the presence of the royal family[22] and the mayor—colleges are particularly appropriate places for transmitting the legitimizing word, just as is the Shahu Smarak Trust where most of the rejoicing takes place for seven days. There, the 'erudite and learned' compete with one another in eloquence and rhetoric for bringing alive to the public meaningful episodes of the Chhatrapati's life. However rivalrous they may be at other times, local scholars share in the overall consensus: there is no doubting the past ruler's greatness and this is certainly no place for debating possibly divergent interpretations of particular events, least of all Shahu's relationship with the British.[23] To the outsider, the apparent heterogeneity of the public also is very striking. In Kolhapur, one often feels that either the countryside 'has come into the city' or the city was always more of a provincial rural town. Thus in the composite audience attending the lectures given at the Smarak Mandir, one can spot Maratha peasants neatly dressed in white kurta pyjamas and sturdy chappals wearing Gandhi caps or colourful turbans, sitting next to typical urbanites of a bygone era—non-Brahmins as well as Brahmins—clad in Nehru jackets, shoes and pants, or in dhotis, some wearing thick black square-rimmed

ten pupils. The new one—now the main of the two—is situated in Jyotiba Dhongar, twenty kilometres away from Kolhapur and had a roll of forty pupils at the same period. Teaching is done on the basis of an hour a day during three years, usually to pupils from standards V to VII (from ten to twelve years old).

[21] I do not consider here the principle of incorporation enacted in the central ritual performed in the Mughal's durbar as described by Cohn (1996), but rather, an emotional bond—and its potential—of the same sort which bound Dordogne peasants to Napoleon Bonaparte in the nineteenth century (see Corbin 1990).

[22] Whose political role, on local as well as regional planes, is extremely limited nowadays. According to some local scholars, this has partly to do with the Kolhapuris resenting his having been chosen as successor. On this, see Rosenthal (1973).

[23] And although some of them privately admit that it is much more complex than what is publicly claimed and needs to be more researched.

spectacles or carrying walking sticks. Younger men attend too, either from the nearby countryside or the city, mostly dressed in western-style shirts and trousers. Although fewer women come to the Shahu Smarak lectures, differences can be spotted which also give some indication of their social and spatial origins. From the ones wrapped up in their nawari cotton saris tied in the former Maharashtrian fashion to those uniformly dressed in nylon saris and wearing gold bangles, there is a continuum which highlights the diversity of horizons from which these listeners have come. Nonetheless, all members of the audience seem to have the same air of seriousness about them: just as their forefathers would listen to the Maharashtrian *bakhars* (chronicles celebrating Maratha military victories) relating the great actions of their warrior heroes, they have come to hear once more about the good deeds of their local benefactor, who gave them access to education and enabled them to free themselves from their past condition. The same ruler, so the story goes, was so devoted to education for the non-Brahmins that he even promulgated a decree that a school should be erected next to each temple in all villages of the state.[24] Thus the young must also be taught to be grateful for the Chhatrapati's devotion to their emancipation. In primary schools, Shahu Jayanti has been assiduously prepared for many weeks: under the guidance of their teachers, children have dutifully decorated their classrooms with their own drawings and posters depicting episodes of Shahu's life, including the famous vedokta controversy. On the morning of the auspicious day, puja for the august king's bust is performed in each and every educational institution of the former state.

Through these various events, the Kolhapuri population as a whole—local scholars included—re-enact their relationship to their early history (through the embodiment of 'the Maratha nation' in Shahu's royal lineage) and their more recent past (through Shahu's 'myth'). In the process, and notwithstanding differences, they primarily reassert their non-Brahmin identity, the very identity which was consciously built up by their fathers at the turn of the century and singled out their state as one of the strongholds of the non-Brahmin movement. And, as could be expected, they represent themselves as the custodians of Shahu's story; as, so to speak, the owners of the Maharaja's history who have an exclusive right to recount it, espe-

[24] I owe this information to Prof. Sangave, who found such a decree in the Kolhapur Archives.

cially in relation to the government. For the issue is not only about officially published accounts, but also that they come from outside the locality and are alien. The unity among political factions in Kolhapur makes this very obvious: at the time of the controversy, the very groups usually trying to project themselves as the sole guardians of Shahu's image (e.g. the Shiv Sena, the Maratha Mahasangh, Hindu Ekta Andolan, Shahu Sena, BJP, and so on) united for the occasion into a single sweeping movement taking a stand against the Maharashtra State Government. Judging by the press accounts as well as those of informants interviewed a few years later, the Kolhapuri population projected this image of itself onto the outside world. Whether the Kolhapuri identification with this image was conscious or not, it invites us to consider the controversy as a case of inner versus outer, of belonging, of partaking or not in the emotional fabric woven around the history of the former local ruler. Consequently, given the local and regional backgrounds, any writing dealing with what might be seen as the Maharaja's drawbacks—i.e. his close relationship to the British—is perceived as a possibly Brahmin attempt at subverting his historiography.[25] This was crystallized in the Kolhapuri population's resentment about the editor of the 1989 Gazetteer, who was assumed to be a Brahmin.[26]

As could be expected in an electoral context (for the Corporation elections were coming up), the controversial gazetteer was most welcome to local political actors and parties. As has been noted, the press also played an active part in making a public issue out of what was first presented as a 'scrap-book replete with errors'. It is not entirely clear whether the initial move by the local newspaper was deliberately anti-Congress, for it also put forward an image of unity among the Kolhapuris regardless of political affiliations. Nevertheless, the newspaper's pro-BJP/Shiv Sena and anti-Sharad Pawar Congress orientation is worth mentioning. In any case, the public burning, whose first occurrence was decided upon by the Corporation members themselves, needs to be situated in the context of political contest. That the burning took place in front of the Corporation building, which is located near the temples of Bhavani (and of Mahalakshmi, tutelary deity of Kolhapur), has heavy symbolic and political

[25] And, one might also add, of polluting it. There indeed is an idea of purity about Shahu Maharaj, which is further reinforced by the purifying process implied in the holi of the Gazetteer.

[26] Which is not true: the latter belongs to the Leewa Patil community.

significance. The symbolism is quite obvious: the Marathi term used, *holi* (equivalent to Hindi *holi*), implies that just as in the Hindu festival one throws old and evil things into the fire, the same would be done with the *Kolhapur District Gazetteer*. There are further sacrificial implications: correcting and amending were expected as results of the purification by fire. This was stressed by many a newspaper (see, for instance, *Sakal* 1990 entitled 'only holi will not be enough', 'keval holine bhagnar nahi'). Evidence of ritualization also appears in the photograph illustrating the news item in *Sakal*: it shows the deputy-mayor and six of their respective former predecessors participating in the burning just as in a sacrificial fire puja, i.e. each contributed to the lighting of the fire, one by holding the book, one by handing over the matches, one by accompanying the main protagonist (i.e. the mayor)'s gesture by putting his hand on his arm, and so on. That the ritual was performed by the mayor also has particular significance in the kingly historical context of Kolhapur, because it clearly reflects the role always taken at Dasera (and often at Holi) by Hindu kings and rulers (Fuller 1992). In Kolhapur, Dasera is still performed annually by the actual heir to the former princely state. Thus, the ritualization of the public burning in the supportive presence of public figures, further strengthened the mayor's authority by legitimizing his power from a kingly and religious viewpoint, so as to make him appear as the guardian and conveyor of local history. At the same time, while ritually strengthening unity amongst the protestors—regardless of their political orientation—the first citizen enabled public discontent to crystallize, by encouraging and confirming the Kolhapuri people as a whole in their 'righteous wrath'.[27]

In contrast to the burning, the 'bandh' which followed a fortnight later in the streets of Kolhapur was not as ritually and symbolically powerful. Nevertheless, it revealed a further stage of politicization, now coupled with a definite anti-Congress orientation: in addition to the mayor's tract, the leaders of various political parties also thanked the population in a common circular for the bandh's success and the people's spontaneous, non-violent response. These political parties were the Shiv Sena (Municipality, District and State level

[27] Moreover, this burning is reminiscent of similar practices in Tamil Nadu which, as forms of social protest, date back at least to the early twentieth century. One instance is Gandhi's visit to the state in 1927 and the reaction of the non-Brahmin Self-Respect movement, when copies of the sacred Laws of Manu (Manusmriti) were burnt (Irschick 1969: 33).

representatives), BJP, its youth wing Bhartiya Janata Juva Morcha, Maratha Maha Sangh, and Hindu Ekta Andolan.[28] It is noteworthy that the issue eventually benefited no political party, or, rather, that the initial anti-Congress move[29] did not favour any of the coalition parties in the elections which followed. This may be why local scholars and journalists rejected claims about political manoeuvring.[30] Nevertheless, every leader and political party tried to project themselves as the guardians of Chhatrapati Shahu's image, either alone or by uniting with others against the government of Maharashtra. Several years later, anyway, this was how they would recall the event.

British Rule and Nationalist Struggle in Maharashtra

But what exactly is the resentment of the Kolhapuri population about? How do we explain the wrath directed against the government, focused on the 'caretakers of official writings' who are the members of the Gazetteer Board? Interestingly enough, the *Kolhapur District Gazetteer* controversy took a pattern similar to that of events which happened decades ago at the time of Shahu himself and, what is more, over the same matter of contention. Getting an insight into them will therefore enable us to understand fully how the account published in the gazetteer resonated in the local social memory and why the population responded so 'spontaneously' at the time of the 'bandh'. The news items published in the local Marathi press under the headline 'Maharaja Shahu A Traitor, says Maharashtra Government', directly refer to what happened when the Non-Brahmin Association (Bramhanetara) was established in 1920 in Kolhapur, and elicited a 'barrage of criticism' from nationalist groups which opposed Shahu (Gore 1989: 63). The nationalist newspaper *Bombay Chronicle* then published a secret letter purportedly written by Shahu

[28] See note 4.

[29] The anti-Congress move appears undeniable at the state level, both in the Legislative Council and Assembly. The returning of the sold copies of the gazetteer moreover implied that hardly anyone had been able to read it. The government's decision to dissolve the editorial board was not grounded in a scientific or scholarly purpose, but in a political counter-move, since the tenure of the board had already expired by a few weeks!

[30] Interestingly enough, only journalists and scholars from outside Kolhapur identified local political manoeuvring. As for those from Kolhapur, they were reluctant to acknowledge any trace of it.

to the Bombay government pointing out how the nationalist movement, if unchecked, might affect the police and the military. What made it worse was that Shahu pleaded in a letter to British official Muir Mackenzie written in 1910 that 'the letters he had frankly written and in confidence to the Governor should not be allowed to fall in the hands of nationalists' (*ibid.*: 57). These and other such letters were published under the caption 'Our Unpatriotic Chhatrapati'. Another nationalist newspaper, the *Kesari*, wrote editorials criticizing the Chhatrapati and there were open clashes between Brahmins and non-Brahmins in Kolhapur and Satara.

Yet, the complexity of the relationship among non-Brahminism, social reform and nationalism still needs to be addressed. Most of the Brahmins who opposed Shahu and radical social reformers more generally were nationalists. B. G. Tilak himself, the famous nationalist leader, attacked Shahu vehemently on several occasions, as well as during the vedokta controversy. The antagonism between social reformers and nationalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in western India has been widely documented. Schematically, what was at stake at that time was a choice of strategies for Indian society: social reformers wanted to reform society before any political change be made, whereas independence was the overriding priority for nationalists. Once political freedom has been achieved, they thought, society would reform itself.

What should now be reintroduced into this pattern is the British raj element: while Brahmins' foremost role in the nationalist agitation gave rise to British 'brahmanophobia' in the early twentieth century, Shahu's relationship with the British took a closer turn, as he would confide in them about his state affairs and his fight against Brahmins opposing his rule. Likewise, between 1907 and 1910, when terrorist activity was at its peak in Bombay Presidency, the Maharaja gave secret information to the British government (Gore 1989).

Much has been said about the way in which the British construed and used indigenous reality (Cohn 1983, 1988, 1996; Inden 1990; Trevithick 1990). As regards kingship and 'native princes' in particular, Dirks has made much of the argument that India's 'theatre state' was a product of colonialism in which 'little kings [. . .] were constructed as colonial objects and given special colonial scripts' (1987: 384). However convincing Dirks's account of the South Indian principality of Pudukottai may appear, it seems to elide the actual interaction between the British and these 'little kings', which has been well studied elsewhere in India. In Rajasthan, for instance, Haynes

(1990) showed not only how the British used kingly symbols to assert their power over their dominions, but also how these symbols were perceived by the 'natives', and at times actively recuperated by them to serve their own purposes. 'Colonized lords' were progressively 'constructed as edifices not only of loyalty and subservience, but of a newly created and gentrified managerial elite: a tribute, and a support, to British rule' (Dirks *ibid.*); what also needs to be brought into the picture is how these so-called lords made use of their position for their own private and public ends. Should the 'enthusiasm and loyalty displayed by the Native Chiefs of Bombay on the Jubilee of the Queen-Empress in 1887'—which in Kolhapur was expressed, 'in addition to public almsgivings', by the founding of 'numerous institutions' as 'permanent memorials such as the Jubilee Bridge over the Hiranyaskeshi river at Ajrá' (Hunter 1892: 124)—truly be seen only from the viewpoint of native subservience to the British crown? In fact, as is well-known, the imperial power needed the support of the princely states for maintaining its own stability, particularly in the late nineteenth century after the 1857 rebellion.[31] In this respect, the princes were considered as the 'most conservative element of India obviously opposed to any popular participation in the legislative process' and 'at the same time [. . .] respected by peasants and intellectuals alike' (Copland 1973: 211).

In the Bombay Presidency, those territories under 'Native Princes or Chiefs' accounted for more than one-third of the whole area (Hunter 1892: 80). The state's relations with the British were regulated by a long series of treaties and engagements, many of them dating from 1775 onwards and most of them signed at the close of the third Maratha war (1818–20). Political relations between the British government and the native states were maintained by the presence of a British agent or representative. As for Kolhapur, and despite E. Thornton (1857)'s allegations that the place was little known to the British before 1825, when they actually 'marched' to it, Lord Elphinstone had signed a treaty with the then Raja in 1812, thereby guaranteeing British protection to the latter (Ballhatchet 1957).

In fact, the Indian princes' collaboration with the British at the time of nationalist agitation seems to have always been 'a conditional

[31] And these territories were definitely a force to be reckoned with: at the time of merger (1949), they were estimated as covering two-fifths of the country (Menon 1956).

bargain, reflecting the immediate interests on both sides' (Copland 1973: 209). Thus the Maharaja of Kolhapur was concerned not only about raising the status of non-Brahmins, but also about increasing his own political power at the expense of Brahmins who had long held regional hegemony. Some of Shahu's minor feudatories had been established by means of local titles and estates granted to their Brahmin ancestors by the Brahmin Peshwas. These proved particularly troublesome to him, especially because of their support for the local Brahmin priesthood (Rosenthal 1973). From the 1900s to the 1920s, the government of Bombay was only too content to 'encourage Shahu's anti-Brahmin movement as part of its "anti-sedition" campaign directed against the largely Brahman nationalists' (according to Copland, cited by Rosenthal 1973: 910 note 6). Thus, mere 'loyalty to the British' was not in evidence, but rather princely interests meeting British ones as against nationalist ones.[32] Indeed, these interests met to such extent that in 1939 the princes attempted to have the British conception of 'paramountcy' included in the future Constitution, so as to protect them from any possible encroachment upon their states by the national government (Hurtig 1988). The setting-up of the Chamber of Princes nearly two decades earlier—on 8 February 1921—also has to be understood in this context (Phadnis 1968). Princes tried to secure their interests amidst the growing popular agitation, which was starting within their states and would last in the form of 'praja mandals' or 'lok parishads' until 1935, when Congress took over and launched massive agitation campaigns (Hurtig *ibid.*).

In 1937, nationalist agitation finally began in Kolhapur. Shahu's successor, his son Rajaram, had acceded to the throne in 1922. The agitation was started by a journalist and a public worker, and was institutionalized in 1939 as the Kolhapur Praja Parishad. But in spite of the nationalist sympathies held by its general secretary, the Parishad remained largely preoccupied with Kolhapur public life. Its president put greater emphasis on the 'autonomy of Kolhapur as a non-Brahman state and more generally, the realisation of higher status for non-Brahmans in Indian society than upon national independence as such' (Rosenthal 1973: 908). Later on, the two agitators

[32] In this respect, it is noteworthy that Valentine Chirol, a British journalist, portraying Shahu as a 'faithful friend and ally of the British Raj' who 'fought against the intolerance of the Brahmans' further identified against the ruler the 'same machinery of agitation and conspiracy which they [the Brahmans] have set in motion against British rule in British India' (1910: 65).

were to side with different sections of the Congress (respectively the nationalist-Gujarati and Maharashtrian non-Brahmin). Shahaji, son of Rajaram's sister, who accessed the throne in 1947, was himself reluctant to merge Kolhapur into a Gujarati-dominated Bombay state (Menon 1956; Rosenthal 1973). On this issue, he received the support of the Parishad President and its followers at the time of independence.[33] Interestingly enough, a resolution was passed at a special meeting held in 1948 stating these politicians' claim to merge with a separate Marathi-speaking state of Maharashtra instead of with the Bombay state that existed. Until the present Maharashtra state was created in 1960, they 'called for the retention of Kolhapur's distinctiveness as a political unit' (Rosenthal *ibid.*: 909). But an important event was to speed up the whole process in 1948: the large-scale arson and looting, which resulted from the assassination of Gandhi, all over western Maharashtra gave the Central government an opportunity to abolish the prince's ministry and impose direct rule over the native state. Thus was effected the actual merger of Kolhapur state into Bombay in 1949, with much bitterness on the part of its subjects (*ibid.*).

Coming back to the present controversy, two elements pertaining to the contentious matter of the revised gazetteer will unfortunately remain unexplained: the editor's motives and the context of revision. It cannot be denied that the editor made hasty judgments when quoting from letters addressed by the Maharaj of Kolhapur to the British representatives. Shahu appears as a loyal agent of the British and the phrasing of inferences drawn from these letters is categorical (i.e. 'it is obvious', 'there is evidence', 'this conclusion can be drawn', 'this gives evidence', 'loyalty to the British is seen', and so on). Similarly, the very introduction to the revised gazetteer is larded with unusual caveats: reference to the present gazetteer as an 'objective' (vastunishta) account is made four times in the first eight pages, as if to prevent possible, or even probable, accusations of bias or partiality. Could the editor have deliberately incorporated biased historical accounts into the new edition? Neither do we know whether any discussion went on within the editorial board about sanctioning the account, nor who—apart from the editor—actually prepared it. For the 1960 revision, however, the Editorial Board was assisted by a

[33] Quite significantly, one may want to remember that the 'vidyapeeth' where the lectures on Shahu were held at the time of the controversy, defending the ruler's fame, is named after the said President Madhavrao Bagal.

Gazetteers Unit of the Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs of the Government of India. Amendments 'suggested' by the Unit had been incorporated in the volume. In addition, the Indian government gave a grant-in-aid which amounted to Rs 6000 per volume (for the compilation cost) and met 40 per cent of the printing charges (*Kolhapur District Gazetteer* 1960). Needless to say I never came close to meeting the present editor, or even getting an answer to my letter to him. The only member of the Editorial Board whom I was able to meet (the scholar who wrote to the *Maharashtra Times* after the board had been dismissed) responded to my questions by emphasizing local politicization in the pre-electoral context and the government's interference after the volume had been published, when it dismissed the editorial board.

Yet, one has to bear in mind that the whole Marathi gazetteers project was set up in the early 1980s by the then Congress-led government of Maharashtra. Knowing the crucial role that this party played in the struggle for independence, it is possible that this government—which had lost popular support and was facing the increasing appeal of the extremist right-wing Shiv Sena party—might have seized the opportunity to give its own account of the nationalist struggle with a view to securing electoral support. The anti-nationalist struggle in Kolhapur in Shahu's time, as well as the anti-merger stand of the subsequent heirs, Rajaram and Shahaji—before and at the time of Independence—would further account for the present nationalist portraying of the former princely state's emblem (i.e. Shahu) as a traitor to the nation.

Consequently, what may also account for the Kolhapuris' strong reaction at the time of the gazetteer controversy is precisely their non-recognition by government writers of their participation in the nationalist history. According to Kaviraj (1992: 33):

> the transaction of a narrative creates a kind of narrative contract. For the recipient of narrative cannot be just anybody: it is only some people belonging to particular categories who are privileged by the narration. [. . .] Nationalism clearly uses the contractual character of the narrative to extend its ideological message. Across segments of society, across generations, across all political divides it creates a vast, constantly open and constantly renewed political contract.

Seen in this light, the Kolhapuris' claim that the gazetteer editor gave false guidance to future generations may be interpreted as an attempt to gain recognition of their contract with the Indian nation: their willingness to re-enter national(ist) history, from which they

may have felt unfairly excluded, especially since the creation of the Marathi-speaking state of Maharashtra which parishad followers had in fact advocated. In this controversy, Kolhapuris are demanding that their local history—the history of their past kingdom and royal social reformer, together with his participation in the fight for the country's freedom—should be acknowledged and consequently integrated into the larger Maharashtrian one,[34] of which the Indian nation, in their eyes, is the ultimate product.

Interestingly enough, this claim was mostly made through the press, which played a double role. In addition to reporting the issue, it became one of the sites of the controversy itself: politicians, journalists and scholars in turn made use of various newspapers' columns to state their position. The public matter had turned from being physically acted out (started with people taking to the streets, burning copies of the gazetteer, closing shops and observing a bandh, and so on) into being written, thus enabling diverse views and positions as well as emotional reactions to be expressed and further crystallized. It is noteworthy that in this controversy, the very press newspapers which, at the beginning of the century, had been very antagonistic towards Shahu Chhatrapati and his anti-Brahmin social and administrative policy, were all united in favour of Shahu and against the government of Maharashtra. Indeed, most other newspapers were content to follow *Pudhari*—sometimes reproducing its wording without acknowledgment—which played an active part in bringing forth an image of Kolhapuri unity (centring on Shahu) as against the outside world and in making a public issue of the Gazetteer.

Pudhari, like most of these newspapers, was founded by a Brahmin nationalist fighter, the father of Pratapsingh Jadhav. It nowadays has the largest circulation in Kolhapur (100,000) and covers the southernmost part of Maharashtra and north Karnataka (i.e. Districts of Kolhapur, Satara, Sangli and Belgaum). The Marathi periodical press was closely linked to the development of a regional and nationalist consciousness (McDonald 1968a, O'Hanlon 1985). Just like other presses elsewhere in British India, it was kept under close scrutiny by the imperial rulers (Barrier 1976).[35] A striking feature

[34] Many examples of this are subsequent writings (Jadhav 1991, Jadhav 1992, Suryavanshi 1992) in which the authors painstakingly emphasize the helpfulness of Shahu towards the nationalist movement and leaders such as Lokmanya Tilak.

[35] Lytton had sought to control it by passing the Indian Press Law even before 1881 and later on, a Press Act was to be voted in 1910 (Chirol 1910) with a view to circumscribing the role of the 'nationalist press' in the freedom movement.

of the Marathi press is that it grew very rapidly in the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century: 'By the end of the century, every Marathi-speaking district of the Bombay Presidency had at least one such newspaper, usually a weekly; and those districts closer to Poona had as many as five locally published periodicals' (McDonald 1968a: 237). In 1905, Bombay was the proud holder of a record 320 newspapers, against 179 in East Bengal and Bengal, 197 in the United Provinces and 263 in Punjab and the North Western Frontier Provinces.[36] Another famous newspaper is *Kesari*, founded by Lokmanya Tilak, which still has a circulation of 15,000 in Kolhapur today. This evidence corroborates Anderson's argument (1983) about the importance of printing in the making of a nation and, we should add, of a region.

Colonial Documents and the Reappropriation of Indian/Maharashtrian Heritage

Now, does the interest gazetteers usually fail to elicit nowadays prevent us from considering the possibility of their selective use for other purposes, such as reclaiming identity and/or reappropriating history? I hope to answer this question by showing that the Marathi gazetteers scheme launched by the Congress government in Maharashtra in the 1980s is but one instance of the numerous processes of reappropriation of history which started by the end of the last century.

Regional consciousness is part and parcel of the building of nationalist consciousness and, as we have seen, the one cannot be conceptualized independently from the other. As Cohn summarizes (1988: 124):

> It is one of the paradoxes of modern Indian history that, at the same time that British rule was establishing some of the preconditions of a national identity in the modern sense of the word, it also established the conditions for regionalism in the form that we have come to know it from the late nineteenth century.[37]

[36] According to Barrier (1976: 10), whose book provides detailed treatment of the questions of surveillance and control of these mass media by the British.

[37] He further shows how in Bengal as much as in Bombay, while western-educated Indians endeavoured to 'find cultural superiority in Indian civilization concerns with distinctive regional traditions were made coherent and were fixed' (*ibid.*). On Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gopal Krishna Gokhale's regional heritage as 'makers of modern India', see Wolpert (1989).

This association is particularly close in Maharashtra because Maharashtrian historians have, since Ranade (1900), strongly argued for a unique Maratha state and nation from the time of Shivaji in the late seventeenth until the early nineteenth century. In his *Rise of the Maratha Power*, Justice Ranade meant to paint a positive picture of Maratha history in the face of the conquering British. The only available historical account of the Marathas had been Grant Duff's, which was first published in 1826 and had served as textbook to western Indian schoolchildren for about half a century. Reprinted three times in English, it had been translated twice into Marathi (Dighe 1961). Ranade's principal aim was to demonstrate how the Maratha power was a genuine and unique effort 'on the part of a Hindu nationality, not merely to assert its independence, but to achieve what had not been attempted before—the formation of a Confederacy of States animated by a common patriotism' (Ranade 1900: iv). It is primarily through these regional symbols and history that ideas of nationalist consciousness were transmitted (Gokhale 1983). Tilak, amongst others, made famous and generous use of Maharashtrian cultural, historical and religious traditions as shown by the Ganapati festival and Shivaji celebrations he sponsored.[38]

In 1900, historiographic concern was at its peak throughout the country, as nationalists began to challenge the orientalized India in which Indians appeared as 'inert objects of knowledge' (Prakash 1990). In Maharashtra, this concern had been at work since the nineteenth century, long before nationalism became a mass phenomenon in the 1920s and 1930s. The impetus to history-writing in Marathi had come with the rise of the Maratha state in the seventeenth century in the form of *bakhars* (chronicles) and had lasted throughout until the Peshwa downfall in the early nineteenth century (Dighe 1961). At the close of the century, a few Maharashtrian historians managed to revive public interest in historical studies, often by means of the vernacular press. Chiplunkar's journal *Nibandhmala* was one of these instruments and so was the *Kavyatihas Samgraha Patra Yadi*, founded in 1878, which published old *bakhars*. The vast enterprise of exhuming old sources was to take a new turn with Rajwadé and Kharé, who ushered in an 'age of documents', collecting them all over Maharashtra and

[38] See Cohn (1988: 125–6) and for a more detailed treatment of these, Cashman (1975).

printing them at their own cost.[39] Others were to follow their lead. In 1910, there was a felt need to set up an institution to keep all records, which resulted in the creation of the Bharat Itihas Samshodhak Mandal in Poona.

Yet, the 'great storehouse of Maratha documents', the archives of the Peshwas, was still inaccessible to scholars (Dighe 1961: 477). These records had been taken over by Mountstuart Elphinstone after his victory over the Peshwas in 1817 and they were kept secret, while being used to settle the claims of Maratha jagirdars and chiefs. By the close of the century, as a result of Ranade's efforts, the 'records of the Poona Daftar were made available by the Government of Bombay to the public' (Ranade 1900: iii). However, the access was limited to parts of the Alienation Office.[40] It was only in 1929 that the government 'in response to clamant public demand ordered preliminary exploration' and further documents were published until 1960. More than a century after the last Maratha battle had taken place on the ground, another battle was being fought on paper, in which the vanquished were slowly reconquering the territories of their social heritage.

It is particularly significant that, just as nationalists were blossoming into historical consciousness and printing,[41] the years 1903–12 saw 'more district gazetteer activity than any other decade in Indian history' (Scholberg 1970: 6). Indeed, as has often been pointed out, gazetteers together with administrative reports constituted other forms of objectified knowledge of the 'historiographic modality' (Cohn 1996), which encompassed, analysed, studied, and penetrated every nook and corner of the Indian way of life, habits, mentality, environment, and so on (Ludden 1993).[42] Although it belonged to the 'mercantile history of India', this 'survey modality' was also part of a conquest of knowledge over the 'native' population. It assumed a systematic form from 1765 with the nomination of James Rennell as surveyor of the newly acquired territories.

[39] For the sake of the anecdote, Kolhapur was one of the few states in Maharashtra which encouraged the writing of their histories and got them published (Dighe 1961: 479).

[40] Stewart (1993) and Kulkarni (1996); both references were indicated to me by E. Vanina.

[41] Between 1890 (beginning of the publication) and 1960, over 200,000 documents were published in various series by public and private agencies (Dighe 1961).

[42] Thus, Sir W. W. Hunter was to say: '[. . .] if the history of India is ever to be anything more than a record of conquest and crime, it must be sought for among the people themselves' (1885: xvii).

The first District Surveys had come in 1790 and together with topographical maps they provided statistical information about cultivation and possibilities of irrigation for each District. Gradually, these statistical accounts were extended to cover botany, mineralogy, climatology, soils, agriculture, hydraulics, fauna and flora.[43] Then Colonel Mackenzie, Engineer and Surveyor to the Subsidiary Force at Hyderabad, proposed enquiries into statistical history as well and the bulk of the work was started in January 1800. The general reports and statistical investigations were thus to become a significant part of the source material for gazetteers.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the British felt that no authoritative book on India was yet available for the purpose of both government and 'science'. Thus wrote Sir Denzil Ibbetson:[44] 'Our ignorance of the customs and beliefs of the people among whom we dwell is surely in some respects a reproach to us, for not only does that ignorance deprive European science of material which it greatly needs, but it also involves a distinct loss of administrative power to ourselves' (cited by Chaudhuri 1964: 17). Sir W. W. Hunter was to share the same view and wrote in his 1869 plan for the imperial gazetteer he had been ordered to compile that, 'nothing is more costly to a Government than ignorance' (*Imperial Gazetteer* 1885: xxxii). By May 1876, one-hundred and sixty-two out of the two-hundred and twenty-three districts of British India had been surveyed by Hunter and his aides and a statistical account had been prepared for each of them. In 1885, the Statistical Surveys of British India were completed in one-hundred and nineteen volumes and 54,504 pages.[45] Thus was made ready the 'monument to the Administration under which it may be composed, more profitable than the Conquest of a new Province, and as lasting as the British rule itself' (p. 69 of the Plan, cited by Chaudhuri 1964). In the

[43] By the second half of the nineteenth century, India had in large parts been measured, studied and mapped, and routes surveys had been done beyond India by native explorers (Markham 1878). As in the preparation of the Census (Appadurai 1992), Britishers not only assessed and quantified, but also trained the natives, so that most of the bulk of the work was done by the natives themselves.

[44] Despite Walter Hamilton's *East India Gazetteer* brought out in 1815, followed by Montgomery Martin's *Eastern India* in 1838 and Edward Thornton's *Gazetteer* in 1844.

[45] Although in the Feudatory States and Chiefdoms no investigation had been made lest 'the native princes would have been likely to misunderstand, and able to frustrate' (Hunter 1885: xiii), the Native States were to be included in the ultimate compilation for all India, the Imperial Gazetteer.

Bombay Presidency, the earliest record of attempts to arrange for the preparation of Statistical Accounts of different districts dates back to 1843, and the question of preparing District Statistical Manuals was not raised again until 1870, when a gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency was compiled by James Campbell and published in twenty-four volumes, between 1877 and 1886 (*Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* 1896). As mentioned above, the gazetteer pertaining to the Kolhapur state came out in 1886.

The metaphorical reference to conquest by Hunter when describing his administrative work is unsurprising, considering that it was a translation onto paper of the British territorial conquest of India; the metaphor highlights once again the nature of gazetteers as surrogates for subjugation.[46] Seen in this perspective, the gazetteers' revision scheme, started just after independence, was a definite instance of the nation reconquering what was assumed to be its Indian heritage; it was one more use of the 'historiographic modality' which shaped the views of Indians about themselves and later became a tool for reaching political ends (Cohn 1988) and one more illustration of the use made by Indians—since the inception of Census and its 'allied literature'—of these very tools to alter the order described (Jones 1981).

Remarkably enough, the Bombay Presidency pioneered the work of rewriting the district gazetteers after Independence. In 1949, as per the 'general desire that there should be a new and revised edition of this monumental work' (*Kolhapur District Gazetteer* 1960), an Editorial Board was created in 1949 by the then government of Bombay for the purpose of revising and republishing the gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency. Bombay's lead was followed by Madras and Bihar in 1952. It was only in 1955 that the Ministry of Education took up the idea and a common pattern was evolved to be followed by different States (Scholberg 1970). The central scheme for a new pan-Indian gazetteer was reported by Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad to Parliament in April 1951 (*Gazetteer of India: Indian Union* 1965). At a Conference of representatives of State Governments, it was decided that although they had been 'conceived and devised to meet

[46] A rather interesting anecdote happened at the time of the preparation of the first volume of the Bombay Gazetteer: in 1871, two youth peons stole the thirty-one drafts of the District Accounts which were being stored at Poona Collector's office 'for the sake of the trifling amount they fetched as waste paper'. Seven out of the thirty-one later managed to be recovered 'in an imperfect state' (1896: viii). Could this be a case of unconscious rebellion against the pillage of local knowledge?!

a particular and limited need under the British regime, [they were] nevertheless a storehouse of authentic information [. . .] and one of great value for the general public and particularly for those concerned with administration' (*ibid.* 1965: v). The Centre was to give subventions for this work to each State. With the reorganization of states in 1957, the Board was reconstituted, and again in 1960, after the creation of Maharashtra state (*Kolhapur District Gazetteer* 1960). In 1965, Bihar was top State with twelve District Gazetteers published (plus three in the press) out of a total of seventeen, whereas Maharashtra, Madras and Kerala had revised four Districts. By 1965, all states governments and union territories except Jammu and Kashmir had taken up the work of revision. India as a nation was beginning the process of reappropriating her 'repositories' of knowledge and taking Britannia's place as described in Rennell's lithograph (Ludden 1993: 271).

To be sure, revision need not necessarily mean reappropriation and at the time of India's independence, the idea was mostly to carry on with the same type of work as had been done by the British. Moreover, the information contained in the gazetteers was increasingly ignored, because the statistical accounts which now really counted were those of the Planning Commission and other new agencies; hence the gazetteer revision scheme had more a hue of 'tokenism' than actual reappropriation. Yet, concern was definitely expressed over the bringing out of a pan-Indian edition for national purposes. When the first volume of *The Gazetteer of India: Indian Union* came out in 1965, Humayun Kabir emphasized in its preface the importance of the need for a new approach, free from 'British imperialist interests', and he announced its national objective of 'educat-[ing] the public in these regards [nationwide poverty, illhealth and ignorance] and also play[ing] an important role in reconciling local patriotism with love and loyalty for India and the world' (1965: iv–vii). Also reinforcing the idea of gazetteer revision as part of a nationalist enterprise is the clear reference to India's independence in the date of publication specified on the title page: not just 1965, but 15 August 1965. In addition, that a book on the history of the gazetteers (Chaudhuri 1964) paying tribute to the 'contribution and dedication of the British in bringing out such considerable knowledge to public availability' was released around the same time is certainly no coincidence. What better way is there to dispose of the former colonial power and take back what one views as one's own?

It is also very obvious that the purpose of national integration advocated in the preface of the 1965 pan-Indian edition has to be considered in relation to the respective Indian states. Given that nationalist consciousness was first and foremost shaped and expressed in regional terms in what later became these states, it is at their level that the revision scheme appears of particular importance; not only was it originally started by one of the states, but it is at the state level that actual reappropriation of knowledge takes place, serving as a marker both of regional and national identities, in which language, of course, is also a crucial issue. (Let us not forget that the boundaries of the present states were decided after independence on linguistic bases.) In Maharashtra, well-known for its outstanding role in the nationalist struggle, the gazetteer revision project significantly began soon after independence. The first volume brought out was that of Poona in 1954. The first revision of the 1886 Kolhapur gazetteer came out in 1960. Yet, considering the crucial importance given to language by early Maharashtrian historians such as Chiplunkar as the 'guardian of cultural identity which is the precursor and definer of historical and political identity' (Gokhale 1983: 14), it was incomplete for the purpose of regional and nationalist consciousness because the language used was still English, as it had always been in compiling these instruments of colonial power.

The Marathi language has long played a crucial part as vehicle of expression for Maharashtrian culture, be it under the more popular religious form of *bhakti*, or that of the Maratha court *bhakars*. The tradition of saints and poets devoted to the cult of Vitthal or Vithoba (a regional form of Krishna) dates back to the thirteenth century and it has been instrumental in creating and popularizing traditional Marathi literature. Of particular interest is the latter's intricate relationship with Maratha political culture: leaving aside the chronicles celebrating Maratha military victories, Marathi popular literature reached its acme at the height of the 'Marathi empire', between the late sixteenth and late eighteenth centuries (McDonald 1968b: 592). Also noteworthy in the present context is the standardization of the Marathi language which took place under the British Raj. In the first half of the nineteenth century, standardization was decided upon by the British in order to communicate better both the government's intentions and western learning to the populace, but it also served to facilitate communication among Marathi speakers from different regions. In the process, it enabled them to develop a sense

of commonality—less prevalent before, owing to the variety of dialects—which in turn helped to create regional political consciousness.

The linguistic policies enforced by the government of Maharashtra since its creation have further reinforced a sense of political 'Maharashtrianhood'. The deliberate effort made to publish the gazetteer material in Marathi in the 1980s by the Congress government of Sharad Pawar was part of the process of affirming regional identity by means of language. This process encompasses various spheres of public and political life, including the preparation of school textbooks. The pattern in Maharashtra nowadays exactly reverses that under the British Raj, when a number of school textbooks were translated from English into vernacular languages.[47] School textbooks are now first devised in Marathi by the Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education. Only later are they translated into English, as well as other languages recognized as media of instruction by the Maharashtra government (i.e. Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Sindhi, Urdu).

The state policy to enforce supremacy of the Marathi language over English or the national language (Hindi) has gone a long way. Whereas in the first decades of the state's existence (1960–1980), most administrative work was still being carried out in English, Marathi has replaced English extensively over the last ten years, and inter-state communication may progressively become possible only in Hindi. As well as in primary and secondary schools, in higher educational institutions the Marathi language has gained precedence over the former colonial one and the present national one; most universities in Maharashtra—including prestigious ones such as the University of Pune—have gradually suppressed compulsory English (even for M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees) and passed resolutions so that even where classes are conducted in English, examination papers can be written in any of the six vernacular languages recognized by the government of Maharashtra.

Coming back to the *Kolhapur District Gazetteer*, what appears of particular interest is that many of the arguments in the controversy were very similar to those that have always surrounded gazetteer writing in India. In this sense, the controversy has a flavour of *déjà*

[47] See, for instance, the Report of the Sub-Committee on Vernacular Class Books of 1841. Translation of English text-books also included most of 'what work was done in the field of history' prior to the turn of the century (Dighe 1961: 475).

vu: aside from the 'controversy within the controversy'—which echoed the *vedokta* dispute that reverberated from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century—the main contention of the journalists, later taken up by scholars and other people, was about government interference and, no less important, the distinction to be made between historical and official documents.

In analysing the Kolhapur controversy, it is important to emphasize that government interference in gazetteer writing was not new. The 1960 edition of the gazetteer had also been subject to changes imposed by the Maharashtra government. Even in the preparation the *Provincial Gazetteer* and of the *Imperial Gazetteer*, the colonial government had wanted to exercise control and intended to 'check fresh matters imported in Hunter's work'. Similarly, in May 1874, the Government of India drew the attention of the Government of Bengal to certain passages

> which appeared to be drawn up in a manner not altogether consistent with the purpose of the Gazetteer. Opinions were freely expressed which, whether right or wrong, the Government considered, should not be contained in a publication of this kind that must carry with it, to a considerable extent, the authority of Government. [. . .] *controversial topics were to be carefully avoided*. [. . .] Expressions that caused offence should not be used (emphasis mine, Chaudhuri 1964: 86–7).

More than a hundred years later, *Pudhari* and other local journalists—insisting that the form of the gazetteer did not allow for interpretation or evaluation of material—were reflecting the British colonial position, in which the core of debate was the line to be drawn between official accounts and historical works. Exactly the same debate has been continued at the official level ever since independence: thus S. B. Chaudhuri—after stating how difficult it is to determine the 'borderline between gazetteers and historical works [. . .], as the two types of writing tend to project on each other' (1964: iv)—finally opts for the position that historical writings belong to a different category 'with their emphasis on interpretation and evaluation of material. Ideas of history differ accordingly to the perspective of the historians, and more often than not, they offer different explanations precisely on the same subject of study' (pp. iv–v).

In this sense, the controversy over the Marathi Kolhapur gazetteer edition of 1989 has offered us not only variations on a nationalist theme (at a local, regional and national level), but also a new antiphonic manuscript.

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