Caste and the Bhakti Movement: The case of Tuka and the Varkaris[1]

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"Blessed the lineage, holy the land,
Where the servants of Hari are born.
Karmadharma's gone,
Narayan has purified the world (refrain).
Who is purified by pride of varna, tell me if you know!
Untouchables are saved by hymns to Hari,
Legendary stories become their bards.
Tuladhar Vaishya, the potmaker Gora,
The leatherworker Rohidas.
The momin Kabir, Latif the Muslim,
The barber Sena are Vishnudas.
Kanhopatra, Khodu, cotton-carder Dadu,
Sing hymns to Hari without discord.
Vanka and Cokha, by caste Mahar,
have united with the Lord.
What is the worth of Nama's Jani,
When Pandhari's lord eats in her company?
Can you tell the lineage of Mairala?
What greatness did Nama have, do tell!
Caste and caste's religion are not for Vishnu's servants,
The Veda's science so decrees.
Tuka says, which of your books
Have saved the fallen – I know of none" (#4299)

This *abhang* (song-poem) by Tuka (Tukaram, c.1608-49),[2] illustrates the way in which many radicals of the bhakti movement handled the issue of caste. Tukaram not only denies the relevance of caste distinctions for the *Vishnu-dasas* or "servants of Vishnu"; he claims that his denial has the sanction of the Vedas, and he projects an alternative form of community. This "community of saints"[3] goes beyond caste and is based primarily on the low-caste devotees, both men and women. Interestingly enough, although the Pandharpur-centered Varkari movement which was so important to Tuka is generally understood as a typically Maharashtrian movement, his community here stretches through much of northern India as well: in this and other songs, Kabir, Rohidas (Ravidas), Mirabai, Dadu and others are taken as part of the Varkari tradition. Tuka also refutes the difference of *saguna* and *nirguna* ("with form," "without form") which are often used to categorize the bhakti movement. This and some other songs are also relevant in terms of what we might call "affirmative action" - of thirteen people named in it by Tuka, three have a Muslim background, two are women, two are Dalits, and the rest are OBCs. In

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general his *abhangs* show relatively little interest in Brahman and high-caste devotees, except for Ekanath, mentioned as a "great leader" in #190, a devotee particular important for his own denial of caste. Tuka, in fact, mentions Kabir more often in his poetry than he does Dnyandeva, usually considered the "founder" of the Varkari movement.

The rejection of *jati* and *varna* is central to Tuka's conception of religious and social life. In a famous *abhang* (#189, sung by Lata Mangeshkar) he visualizes the Varkaris as players of a game, caught up in the ecstasy of their devotion to Vithoba/Vishnu, rejecting "the pride of varna and of caste" and humbling themselves before each other - in contrast to the usual hierarchies of caste, gender and age. In another he says very explicitly that "Brahman, Ksatriya, Vaishya, Sudra and Candala all have rights; [so do] little children, women, men, and even prostitutes" (#1142). In other words, not only access to religious experience, but rights, *adhikar*, are asserted, not only for the low caste, but for women and children, and even women considered the most "fallen." (The word is used today to translate "human rights": *manavaadhikaar*). In another powerful short song on caste, he says,

"He's not a Brahman who abhors
the touch of a Mahar.
What retribution will suffice?
Except to sacrifice his life!
A Chandal drives him wild,
it's his heart that's defiled.
Tuka says, his caste's defined
by what fills his mind" (#55).

Much of scholarship on the bhakti movement has argued that the rejection of caste was only at the "religious" level, that in social life it left things much as they were. I would argue that this borrowing of a "base-superstructure" distinction oversimplifies the matter. First, caste hierarchy had its roots in religious authority, and this authority - that of Brahmans - was contested at all levels by radicals like Tuka (and Kabir and others). Second, they also sought to project an alternative form of community, one which has been taken as a theme in Parita Mukta's book on Mirabai (Mukta, 1977). The "community of saints" was one that enveloped men and women of all backgrounds, in which they not only worshipped together but also ate together, danced together, often lived together, and, in their rejection of hierarchy, "fell at each other's feet." That the bhakti movement in the end failed to maintain this community is another matter, an important historical problem.

I will look at some aspects of the bhakti movement and caste, by focusing on the Varkaris of Maharashtra and Tuka, who lived in the early 17th century and was considered its greatest exponent and still one of the greatest of Marathi writers (See the introduction to Chitre, 1991). The Varkari movement centered on Vitthala, located at Pandharpur on the banks of a tributary of the Krishna river in southern Maharashtra, a deity with Kannada origins but identified with Vishnu/Krishna in the Brahmanic tradition. The story told today about its origins is that the god (Krishna/Visnu) came from Dwarka to the semi-mythical original devotee Pundalik; Pundalik however is so engrossed in service to his parents that he tells him to wait, throwing a brick for him to stand on. The Varkari movement began with Namdev and Dnandev and their cohorts in the late 13th-14th centuries and still draws hundreds of thousands of people on its annual pilgrimage today.[4]

Methodological Issues

The problem in defining exactly what the bhakti movement represented is only one example of a general problem of Indian social history, that of sources. First, it is not accurate to speak of "the bhakti movement"; there are, in fact, many "bhakti movements," some of which, like Sikhism and Veerasaivism, ended up as nearly independent religions. We can, though, identify one major bhakti movement which includes local expressions in northern and western India from about the 13th century through the 17th centuries. There seems to have been little direct contact with the southern or Tamil bhakti movement, which had a different history and social context. It was a period in which Brahmanic dominance and caste hierarchy had been consolidated in much of India. Muslim rule, it was true, opened up some space for dissidence, but Brahmans dominated also within the administrations of the Mughals and other Muslim rulers, and these administrations thus were ready to enforce *varnashrama dharma* as much as Hindu overlords.

In contrast to Buddhism and Jainism, and those movements which succeeded in establishing an independent political structure (such as Sikhism), almost the entire process of documentation and interpretation of the bhakti movements was in the hands of mainly Brahman men. Where the movements were centered around a particular temple or place of pilgrimage, this was in the hands of Brahman priests. In the case of the Varkari movement, the temple of Vitthal at Pandharpur remains controlled by Brahman priests even today (though now via a government committee) and for records, the main source is Mahipati, a Kulkarni from Ahmednagar district living in the 18th century (see

Mahipati, 1999). Internet interpretations, popular imagery, and films such as the early, awardwinning Prabhat film *Tukaram*, draw from this. For north Indian sants such as Kabir and Ravidas, the problem is similar. The problem of maintaining the songs/hymns of particular *sants*, of identifying which were authentic, is immense. Even where, as in the case of Tuka, they themselves kept notebooks, there are clear examples of interpolations.[5]

This had several important consequences. First, it meant a downplaying of the conflict with traditional authorities that was often involved. It meant a tendency to overemphasize the role of upper-caste *sants* (for instance, making Dnaneshwar the founder of the Varkari movement). There was also a process of linking the movement to more orthodox Brahmanic traditions, largely by giving the *sants* Brahman gurus. Thus Kabir and Ravidas were both said to be followers of a south Indian Brahman Ramananda, while Tuka is said to have had one Babuji as his own guru, linking him to Chaitanya, on the basis of what is likely an interpolated abhang. This is in spite of the fact that there is little evidence within the poems of Kabir and Ravidas for a link with Ramananda (Hawley and Juergensmeier, 1988: 13, 43-44) and that Tuka himself tended to reject the whole notion of a guru or any other authority. There was also a process by which the Dalit *sants* were "uplifted" in varna terms, for instance when Ravidas is said to have been a Brahman in an earlier life, and even as a baby, to have rejected the milk of his Chamar mother (Hawley and Juergensmeier, 1988: 16).

Hagiographers (and their contemporary followers) have avoided dealing with the Muslim influences on the bhakti movement. Many of the famous *sants* of north India (Kabir and Dadu, for instance) came from Muslim backgrounds. In Maharashtra, the "guru" of Eknath's own guru Janardan, was a Sufi. This link, however, has been systematically downplayed from both sides of the current Hindu-Muslim divide. Where it was said that both Hindus and Muslims fought over Kabir's ashes, within a century or so the Muslims were ignoring Kabir and Brahmanic Hindus claimed Kabir and others like him in the movement, but distorted their teachings in the process. Finally, we have to note that the surviving institutions of almost all the varying *sant*-traditions are today dominated by Brahmanism and are heavily Sanskritised, from the Kabirpanth to the "official" Varkari organization in Maharashtra which is largely controlled by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (see Youngblood, 1998).

A careful look at the actual songs of *sants* such as Tuka and Nama refutes much of the traditional interpretation. In regard to the history of the Varkari movement, as noted, Dnaneswar is normally taken as its founder: a famous *abhang* now attributed to Tuka's (Brahman) woman follower Bahenabai sees him as "laying the foundations." In the popular tradition today, his name is coupled with Tuka - "Gyanba-Tuka." Dnaneshwar wrote *abhangs*, but his most influential writing was what is called the *Dnaneshwari*, which is really a Marathi philosophical commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. Readings of this commentary, or *parayans* are a normal practice in Maharashtrian villages today, sponsored usually by the village elites, while the more genuinely popular songs of Tuka and others are more rarely heard. Yet it can as well be argued that it was Namdeo, the 14th century *shimpi* (tailor-caste) *sant*, who really made Viththala of Pandharpur the center of the movement, who wandered all over India, whose poems were in Hindi as well as Marathi, and are today are found in the Adi Granth of the Sikhs as well as other northern sources. Tuka himself projects Nama as the founder in another abhang on the "game" theme (#190). Here Nama is mentioned first, "He made Vitthal the leader, ho!" and then come "Dnandev, Muktabai, Sopan, Changa Vateshwar" who "made the cowherd Kanho [Krishna] the leader in their game". This may well be historically and sociologically accurate – with Namdeo focusing on Vitthala and Dnaneshwar and others identifying the deity with Krishna.

With these problems of interpretation and documentation kept in mind, let me put forward some themes of the radical section of the bhakti movements,[6] focusing primarily on Tuka and the Maharashtrian movement.

The Rejection of "Brahmanism"

The rejection of crucial aspects of Brahmanic ideology and religious authority is fairly clear in Tuka's abhangs. As with Kabir, there is a strong and often sarcastic rejection of "pandits" and bookish authority. Tuka rejects *brahmadnyan*, the mystic identification of the absolute; in fact this term appears (usually negatively) so often in his abhangs that he almost appears to be obsessed with it.

"His mouth utters brahmadnyan
He slits the throats of common men,
He shows wisdom to the folk,
Without experience of his own.
He tells the stories of the gods,
Inside he is naught but greed,
Tuka says he is a madman,
Slap his cheek" (#4021)

"Without foundation are
the stories that you tell.
Until you know Pandharirao,
scope for everything is found.
Who is there to heed
your barren brahmadnyan?
Tuka says, the store
of knowledge is so much more" (#876)

"Call him pandit, he's in bliss,
Yet everywhere he looks an ass.
What will you do by muttering
the Vedas, wasted sputtering?
He does not do what the Vedas say,
Brahma's equality is kept away.
Tuka sees goodness in life,
This is experience" (#1622)

"Experience" (*anubhav*) is the major theme which Tuka contrasts to panditry and its claim to authority. Such experience is open to a person of any background, and it is what is valid. It is because of his "experience" that Tuka claims that the secret of the Vedas, of the puranas and all the shastras lies in the teaching of devotion. In at least partial contrast to Kabir, Tuka does not directly reject the Vedas - but he rejects their authority as interpreted by Brahmans, claiming that he himself is telling the "true" teaching. Calling Tuka "*vedapramanya*" as most Marathi interpreters (including both Sadanand More and his rival A.H. Salunkhe) do, is misleading: Tuka clearly does not accept their authority, he claims the authority to say what their teaching is. The power conditions of the time should also be remembered: Tuka was in enough trouble with courts and powerholders even without a direct attack. His occasional references to the Vedas may be either interpolations by others or put in on his own for self-protection. In any case, Tuka comes close to Kabir in taking experience - not so much mysticism — as authentic, self-accomplishment - as crucial.

He more directly rejects *advaita*, the favored philosophy of Brahmanism. This is most clear in one striking *abhang*:

"It is for this I wander wild,
Leave my home, go to the wood.
My love will gain intuition
My understanding be liberated.
I will not hear the preaching
Of Advaita's teaching.
Illusions like "I am Brahma"
Should not, says Tuka, come in the way" (#737)

These bhakti sants celebrated the relationship between god and devotee; the dissolution of any relationship that was implied by the ideal of "liberation" from the sense of a separate self was not for them. "The Munis won liberation, they feared to be reborn/We servants of Vishnu find this a boon" (#1051).

The Meaning of Bhakti

Bhakti is translated as devotion and is usually taken as submission to God, a personal relationship between god and the devotees. (In this sense, "*nirguna bhakti*" appears meaningless, and much of Kabir's poems, especially in *Bijak*, are singularly lacking in "devotion"). The frequent sociological analysis of this, illustrated by the influential writing of D.D. Kosambi (1975) links bhakti with feudalism, with the idea of a personal relationship(or relationship of dependence) between overlord and vassal, with loyalty and love as the exchange for protection. Generally the idea of dependence on a transcendent, powerful deity would appear to fit the situation of a strong state confronting helpless subjects, with religious aspirations for equality and liberation asserted from within a stratified and exploitative society.

However, many aspects of Tuka's bhakti do not fit this model. While Tuka projects a personal God, this is not the awe-ful, transcendent deity of Islam or Christianity. Tuka in fact very often comes close to saying that God himself is created to serve the needs of the devotee, that in the relationship between the two, the devotee takes the initiative, may even have the better part. It is not the mother, he writes in one, who knows the joy of taking milk, but the baby who does so. God and devotee are like jewel and ornament: they are incomplete without one another; together they make each other beautiful (#102). Again, he argues that God is in a sense created from the experience of the devotees:

"God of stone, steps of stone -
we worship one, walk on the other.
Emotion's the essence, emotion's the essence,
God is what we experience.
The waters are separate, does that mean they're
opposite?
the Ganga is sweet, do the others have no taste.
Says Tuka, this is the devotees' secret power.
About dharma and adharma, ask the others" (#2230)

[It could be noted here that the god is of stone, not of gold or silver; in this sense also Vitthala was a bahujan deity!] Here *bhav* (emotion, feeling) links to *anubhav* (experience). This seems to be not only what the devotees "experience" passively, but also what they do. "Our

emotion makes you divine - Why do you keep forgetting this?" he sings to Vitthala, (#2946), adding "I'm reminding you, I've come to collect my dues."

Tuka's songs run through the whole range of emotional relationships, including scorn, abuse and rejection. There are a number of "death of god" songs:

"God has died for me
For others let him be.
I'll not tell his stories or take his name again.
We have killed each other and gone (refrain).
Abuse along with praise,
that's how I spent my days
Tuka says, I'm standing calm,
that's how my life has been" (#2349)

As a devotee, he asserts his own power:

"Our emotion makes you divine-
Why do you keep forgetting this?
You have no power to remember our favors,
I'm reminding you!
Life and motion are through the servants' strength,
You should nourish the roots of nirguna.
Tuka says, I've come to collect my dues,
Give love, O Hari and satisfy me (#2946)

"I gave birth to myself,
I came into my own womb.
Enough now of vows,
My yearnings have died away.
It is good that I fell prey
and I died at that time.
Looking both ways,
Tuka is what he is" (#1337).

This is a "bhakti" that projects the authority of the devotees or sants, one very different from the interpretation of submissiveness that frequently (as with D.D. Kosambi) links bhakti to a feudal political regime.[7] Tuka is at times extremely submissive in his posture, but it is almost as a role he puts on. He refers to himself quite often as of "low caste" but without a hint that he really has a negative self-image: he is sardonic about this low social status. "Good you made me a Kunbi, otherwise I'd have died of pride."[8] The relationship between devotee and deity, as between the *sants* themselves, are "horizontal" more than "vertical." It almost seems that at times he has a "modern" approach to religion: man uses god for his own purposes, creates him - and rejects him, once he has become strong enough (Chitre, in his Marathi work, *Punha Tukaram*, also makes the point that he is in a way more modern than any of the sants before him; Chitre, 1990, introduction,).

This may seem a strange theme to hear from seventeenth century India. Yet, if we remember that India was not simply isolated but part of a world order, if we take seriously the fact that many historians are now talking of "early modern India" as a significant period, we can begin to understand the situation. The very period in which Tuka was lambasting the Brahman priesthood and panditry, and yet being forced to qualify his powerful poetry with constant references to the Vedas and Puranas was the period in which Galileo was confronting the Inquisition, and finally abjuring his entire work simply in order to stay alive (1631). Similarly, William Tyndale, the first person to translate the Bible into English directly from the Hebrew and Aramaic, was burned at the stake in 1531 for his presumption. The establishment of science and human authority took a fight – several decades after Galileo, Newton was proving his point; and within a century after Tyndale, the King James version of the Bible was released. In India, Tuka was a major example of this "early modern" fight for rationality and against religious oppression.[9]

Critique and Conflict

There are also many *abhangs* that have direct social critique, most frequently in regard to what Tuka considers as religious fraud (see #272 for an all-around attack; though on the whole he seems hardest on the shakta cults), but on other social-political issues as well. In one he sings:

"They clasp gold coins inside their hands,
And sell their daughters to become pregnant —
Such is the dharma of our time,
The good is slave, the evil strong (refrain)
Leaving righteousness
Vile Brahmans are only thieves.
They hide the caste-marks on their face,
wear pants and leather shoes.
They sit on seats of power oppressing
to keep the people starving.
They keep the kitchen's accounts,
Living on oil and butter.
They're servants of the base
get beatings for mistakes.
The king exploits the people,
holy places nourish evil.
The Vaisyas, Sudras, all
are easily made low.
These are all the outer colors,

the green inside is masked by sham
Tuka says, O God,
Don't sleep, but run to help" (#267)

This of course could be read as arguing that the king should be (and thus could be) just, that Brahmans should be superior, challenging the degradation of an ideal not the ideal itself and thus accepting the role of the Brahman and king. Sometimes in fact an "ideal Brahman" is described. However, actual Brahmans and kings as depicted throughout the poems are so consistently bad that this seems a problematic interpretation. If we compare this way of handling the "kaliyuga" theme with an obvious interpolation which I call "The Brahman's Lament,"[10] we can see Tuka's emphasis not just on falling into evil ways, but on exploitation as such.

In regard to political rulers, the famous incident where Tuka refuses to meet the young Shivaji, in spite of proposals to honour him, illustrates that even an apparently "ideal" ruler - or at least one who had not proved to have negative qualities; Shivaji must have been 20 or less at the time - could not suffice. Though some of the *abhangs* that tell of this are clearly interpolations, the first seems quite genuine: "Torch bearer, parasol, a horse these don't seem right—Honour, hypocrisy the shit of pigs—" (#1884; see also #1888).

The conflict was the greatest with Brahmanism; one song makes sense if we take the next-to-last verse as a quote:

"Empty knowledge without bhakti they preach,
don't listen to what they say.
Extolling devotionless Advaita
the listener gets sorrow only.
Saying "I am Brahma" they nourish their bodies;
don't bother to quarrel with them.
"He is a heretic, speaking rudely outside the Vedas,
his blackened face is among the sants."
Tuka says, the lowest untouchable is above
he who scorns devotion to god" (#1491).

Most of Tukoba's Marathi interpreters (Chitre, More, Dhere) have sought to emphasize the inclusiveness of his thinking; even G.D. Deshpande, a Marxist who believes in contradiction in terms of classes seems unable to see caste issues as expressing any real contradiction (Deshpande, 1988). Like the Buddha (who used a similar strategy of projecting the ideal Brahman and rejecting any idea that "birth" [jati] made a Brahman), Tuka was in a situation of contradiction and conflict. A major difference was the power situation: by his time, political power was in the hands of Brahmans – the ruling regime at Bijapur was headed by a Muslim, but the administration was more thoroughly in the hands of Brahmans than was true of north India – and thus the necessity of toning down some of the radicalism of his thinking, or at least masking it a bit by appeals to the Vedas and Puranas.

Actual conflict during Tuka's life was illustrated with many incidents attested to in the *abhangs* and in the various histories of his life: he was brought up before the village council; he was beaten and attacked; his *kirtan* or devotional sessions were disturbed, he was forced to drown his manuscripts in the river. The most controversial issue though is that of his death. He is the only *sant* of whom it is said that he was taken bodily to Vaikuntha (the official religious version). Modern liberal interpretators either ignore the issue or argue that he simply decided to leave home and wander off, perhaps on pilgrimage, perhaps suffering an accident. The nonBrahman story is that he was murdered by Brahmans. The most recent expression of this is a serious Marathi book, *Vidrohi Tukaram* ("Tukaram the Rebel") by a Sanskrit professor in a district college A.H. Salunkhe and published in 1997. Salunkhe's arguments are entirely based on circumstantial evidence but they are persuasive (the day of his disappearance was the day after Holi, when rowdiness and general chaos made any kind of villainy possible; his wife and brother fled the village afterwards and his son did not return until 20 years later when the regime of Shivaji's son Sambhaji had some anti-Brahman character; and his property was confiscated, with half going to a known local Brahman enemy). More (1999, 1996) and Chitre (1991) dismiss this with the general argument that Tuka was too popular for such villainy;[11] this is a touching naivete in a world where popular and powerful prime ministers and presidents get assassinated.

Some Conclusions

Two important points can be made in conclusion in regard to first, the question of "Hinduism" and second, the question of caste, its reality and history.

Is the bhakti movement "Hindu"? Of course, we have to ask this in the plural because there were many movements and local expressions. I am speaking of the Varkari movement, in Tuka's interpretation. We can note - first, Vitthala, like all the other popular gods of Maharashtra, Khandoba, Jotiba, Naikba, the various goddesses - was and is not part of the Brahmanic great tradition. The Maharashtra case in this sense fits what Kancha Ilaiah argues in in his controversial but popular

book, *Why I am not a Hindu*. Of course, Vitthala is identified with Vishnu, and Tuka clearly knows all the Puranic stories and occasionally uses them. But the local identification is primary; the icon is unique - standing on the brick, arms folded on hips. This also cannot fit easily into the conceptual framework of a Sanskritic "great tradition" and local little traditions. Tuka has his own great tradition, illustrated in my beginning quote, ranging over much of India.

The term "Hindu" itself never appears in his abhangs, as far as I can discover. What if anything did it mean in the pre-British period? It is apparently used by Kabir in the famous references to "Hindu/Turk" conflict; yet Kabir's songs using these are not easily dateable (see Dharwadkar, introduction; and Millennium Kabir). Eknath has a "Hindu-Turk" dialogue, however the term translated as "Hindu" is apparently most often "pandit." Kabir clear does not identify his with either "Hindu" or "Muslim/Turk," and Eknath does not seem either to identify his own spiritual position as a Varkari with what he describes as the "Hindu" point of view.

One way of asking the question is this: can /should a spiritual/religious position that rejects varna and Brahmanical authority as well as the philosophical position of Advaita be called part of the same "religion" as one which is based on these? My answer would be no.

As far as caste is concerned, the case illustrates the (obvious?) truth that caste is a social reality with a history and that it was never uncontested.

It is fashionable today to say that caste is constructed [in a process of discourse, like all social phenomena]. It is even more fashionable to say that it was constructed during the colonial period by British processes of enumeration, classification and other administrative practices. All social phenomena are constructed but not by one set of actors only, by all the members of society. And they are constructed within a context with an outcome that is not determined by the intentions of any individual or set of individuals. As Marx famously put it, "Men make history but they make it under conditions not of their choosing." What happened during the colonial period certainly affected the structure and practices of the caste system, but the influential set of actors in the process were not primarily the British but the Indian elite.

It would be more accurate to say that caste has a history (see G. Aloysius, 1999) that it has arisen out of social activity at a particular period of time, has developed and changed, is developing and changing. It was never simply "there" but always contested, both promoted and challenge. My brief reading of that history is that varnashrama as ideology was projected as the model of a social order (ie. that caste had its "beginnings" then) around the middle of the first millennium BCE [though claiming the authority of the older Vedas] and that the caste system as real structure and practices came gradually into existence after that. The Brahmanic texts do not describe an existing reality but rather prescribe one. (See Omvedt, 2005:). For about a millennium this model was strongly contested, primarily by Buddhism but also by Jainism and other *shramana* traditions; it was only with the establishment of Brahmanic hegemony and the disappearance of Buddhism after about the 5-6th century BC that the caste system became a hegemonic social reality. Between the 7th and 12th centuries "village society" with its varied structure of castes and jajmani systems takes shape. It is only after the 12th-13th centuries, for example, that we appear to have reference to actual untouchable jatis such as Mahars, Paraiyas etc. as opposed to "Chandalas," an ideal-type. Muslim rule brought some new challenges but general reliance on Brahman administrators and Rajput and other military feudatories meant an alliance with Brahmanism was in effect. At the same time, however, bhakti movements, especially those after the 12th century[12] emerged with new religious expressions that contested caste, that is to say all the social structures of jati and varna that were linked to *varnashrama dharma*.

The colonial period and post-independence brought again new changes, which should be analyzed in the context of the earlier period - something outside the scope of this paper.

But I would like to conclude with two sayings (*dohas*) and a devotional song from Ravidas/Rohidas, the great Dalit bhakta of north India. The first are given in Hindi and published without describing the source in a Marathi Dalit movement weekly

"Ravidas says not to honour (do puja to) Brahmans, who are without merit/honour instead the feet of Candalas who are full of merit—.

Dependency is evil, the dependent are miserable/ Ravidas considers dependence the lowest of all" (*Shalvan Patrika*, 25 June 2001)

The second is from a song found in the Adi Granth of the Sikhs and other sources, and shows that Ravidas' utopia includes both freedom from taxes and property as well as something specific to the untouchable condition of being traditionally barred form most "public" places in India, the right to "walk where they wish" with what we have talked about earlier as the "community of saints."

"The regal realm with the sorrowless name,
they call it Begumpura a place with no pain.

No taxes or cares, none owns property there,
no wrongdoing, worry, terror, or torture.
Oh my brother, I've come to take it as my own,
my distant home where everything is right—
They do this or that they walk where they wish,
they stroll through fabled palaces unchallenged.
Oh, says Ravidas a tanner now set free,
those who walk beside me are my friends"
(Adi Granth #3, adapted from Hawley and Juergensmeier, 1988: 32).

Notes

1. This is a revised version of a paper originally given at a Symposium on "Caste and Its discontents: Rethinking the Nation," Southern Asian Institute, Columbia University, New York, October 18,2000. All translations are by Gail Omvedt and Bharat Patankar.
2. The "proper" way to refer to him is said to be "Tukaram Maharaj," where the term "maharaj" is normally used for a nonBrahman sant in contrast to "swami" for the Brahman. However, he referred to himself only as "Tuka", and his devotees most often call him fondly, "Tukoba" or "father Tuka".
3. "Community of saints" here conveys about the correct meaning; otherwise I use the Indian term "*sant*" rather than "saint"; the differences from the Christian tradition, where "saints" are normally defined and sanctified by the Church, is important: in India, *sants* are made so by the people.
4. The most important studies of the movement, in English and Marathi relatively, are Deluery, 1994, and Dhere, 1984. For a survey of the Varkaris, especially Namdeo and Tuka, see Omvedt, 2008: 67-90, 109-132.
5. For example, Abhang #1886 in the collected *Gatha* refers to Shivaji as *chhatrapati*, a title he took only after Tuka's recorded death.
6. The radicals can be distinguished sociologically from the more conservative sants such as Ramdas, Vallabhacarya, etc., in that they had no institutional backing or livelihood: they lived primarily off their labor, secondarily on donations from villagers.
7. This is not to reject the idea of analyzing "material" or socio-economic relations as crucial in understanding any religious or ideological movement. The problem with the way bhakti is usually analyzed is first, that it is too often done in a simplistic way (ie simply restating the mechanical Marxist models of "slavery-feudalism-capitalism" etc.) is applied, and second, that it often gives no role at all to factors of consciousness.
8. *bara kunbi kelo*: here the Marathi "*bara*" is a weak and even ironic form of "good", something that Easton does not take account of in his otherwise interesting article, where he uses this poem to argue that Tuka "could not break free of thinking in terms of caste" (Eaton, 2005: 133)
9. Pollock, 2001, has stressed this similar in his analysis of Sanskrit-based "new intellectuals" of the 17th century. As he notes, however, the revolutionary changes reached a dead end (28-9). This was precisely over the issue of caste and the predominance of the Vedas. The Indian intellectual elite, which was the only one in the world so thoroughly birth-based, could not easily reform itself. Thus the really revolutionary and modern, democratic intellectual trends are found among the Dalits and non-Brahmans. Tuka was a forerunner of this.
10. Tukaram, *Gatha*, #3035. This abhang in fact is "signed" as *Sevak Tukayaca*, not "*Tuka*."
11. See also the heated exchange between Salunkhe and More in the *Maharashtra Times*, 28 February and 28 March, 1999. More also finds it a crime that Salunkhe could go against the established tradition of the Varkari cult. Salunkhe dismisses this with the offer to meet and debate any time, any where in Maharashtra.
12. In this way, the Lingayat or Veerasaiva movement led by Basavanna in the 12th century contrasts strongly with earlier Tamil movements in its social radicalism; see Ramanujan, 1973, Introduction.

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