Excavating Identity through Tradition: Who was Shivaji?

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Introduction

Shivaji (c.e. 1630–80) came from a family by the name Bhosale, native to northern and central Maharashtra for several generations before him. His father and grandfather served one or the other from among the rulers of the neighbouring kingdoms of Ahmadnagar and Bijapur (both in the Deccan plateau) and the Mughal emperor in north India, by raising armies and collecting revenue from lands assigned to them. As landholders and warlords, the Bhosa_les enjoyed a reasonably high social status. This social status was tied to their j"ati (the localized endogamous kin group to which they belonged), called ‘Mar"āth"ā’. Being Marāthā encompassed three important features of their identity and activity: control over land, martial prowess, and a connection to the linguistic-cultural region of Maharashtra.

From this background, Shivaji inherited his father’s ties of subordination and service to various Muslim kings. However, slowly but steadily, through battle, conquest, resistance, massive exercises in fort-building, as well as a series of strategic alliances and conflicts with rulers all across south India, the western coast, the Deccan, and the Mughal empire, he carved out an independent sphere of territorial and military control for himself. When he had, over the course of twenty-five years, established his power on par with if not exceeding that of his former masters, he decided to confirm his attainments by formally assuming the title of a king. To do this, he planned a ritual of royal consecration (rājābhīṣeka), in c.e. 1674.

It is at this juncture that the story of Shivaji takes a curious turn. For he felt that before he could be king, he had to establish an unassailable
position for himself in terms of his caste status. More precisely, he sought to be perceived as a member of the *kṣatriya varṇa*, the second highest social order according to Brahmanical texts, and the one proper to warriors and kings. In order to achieve this end, he employed various means. These included a bid to connect himself genealogically with a ruling Rājpūt family that enjoyed a high status in north India, and the engagement of a scholarly *brāhmaṇa* (pundit), also from north India, to perform for him the rituals proper to a *kṣatriya*. Eventually Shivaji was able to undergo the royal consecration and become king, with the title ‘Chatrapati Shivaji Mahārāj’ or ‘The Great King Shivaji, Lord who bears the Royal Umbrella’.

Why did Shivaji perceive a lack of fit between his actual social and political strength, and his caste status? From whose perspective was he a low-caste person, an upstart trying to seize a royal title, and why did the existence of this point of view seem to affect Shivaji’s perception of himself? How do we evaluate claims and counterclaims to the effect that he was or was not a *śūdra*, and that consequently his kingship was invalid or valid? In re-examining the episode of the consecration of Shivaji, it turns out that the reality of his power is historically unquestionable. The fact of his caste identity, however, is problematic. This is because the lens through which it is projected onto history—the category of the *śūdra*—itself is unstable.

The transformation of Shivaji into a king is a moment that has captured the historical imagination of the people, not only of Maharashtra, but of India as a whole. Using genealogy as a mechanism of self-(re)presentation, Shivaji circumvented the handicap of a birth that might have been construed as low, and with the cooperation of an authoritative *brāhmaṇa* he performed the rituals proper to someone with a high birth. He then went ahead and assumed royalty, that too in a spectacular ceremony the likes of which was not seen anywhere on the subcontinent in a long time before or since. These events have been repeatedly brought to bear on the problem of the relationship between political power and caste status, even as this relationship has been repeatedly transformed from pre-modernity to the present.

**The Event: The Royal Consecration of Shivaji**

*HOW SHIVAJI BECAME CHATRAPATI SHIVAJI MAHĀRĀJ*

The great Marāṭhā warrior Shivaji, who lived in Maharashtra between CE 1630 and 1680, had, in June CE 1674, at the age of 44, at his seat in
Raigarh, a formal abhiṣeka. I translate this for convenience as ‘royal consecration’. The rituals performed on this occasion were conducted by a specially invited pundit of Maharashtrian extraction who lived in Benaras, named Viśveśvarabhaṭṭa, or more popularly, Gāgābhāṭṭa. Gāgā had to find, or—depending on which historian one reads—invent, or ratify, a long-lost genealogy that showed Shivaji as descended from the Sisodias of Mewar (Udaipur), a Rājput clan from Rājvāḍa (modern Rajasthan).1 With this claim of a Rājput descent in place, Shivaji could be declared a proper kṣatriya and made ready to assume the title of king.

But first, with Gāgā’s intervention, Shivaji was made to perform expiations for having allowed his kṣatriya status to lapse early on in his life. After this he was made to don a sacred thread in the manner prescribed for a (reinstated) kṣatriya subject, and then he was remarried to one (or more) of his wives according to Vedic rites allowed to kṣatriyas. The mantras chanted in the course of the rites were all Vedic, again predicated on the kṣatriya status of Shivaji. After the thread ceremony (upanayana) and the marriage(s) (vivāha), he was asked to assume the rājacinha, or emblem of royalty, namely a chatra, or an umbrella, and named Chatrapati or ‘Lord who bears a Royal Umbrella’.

The abhiṣeka was a dramatic moment. The ceremonies were lavish and lasted seven days (between 29 May and 6 June 1674). There was a coronation, an enthroning, a triumphal procession; there were several baths, ritual meals, and other rites; people from all over the region attended, along with cows, horses, and elephants; gifts of jewels and silken clothing were given, weapons were displayed, and wealth distributed.2 Brāhmaṇa priests chanted mantras in Sanskrit, musicians played their instruments. Foreign dignitaries and observers brought precious presents as well as their still more precious pens to record the event for posterity. Shivaji’s closest men, newly become ministers and generals, gathered around him in a show of support and servitude.

1 Shivaji sent his emissary Bāḷāji Āvāji Chitnis to Udaipur to inspect the royal family’s genealogical records, in which a relationship was indeed discovered between the Bhosāles and the Sisodias through an ancestor of Shivaji. The veridical status of Chitnis’s report is unclear: did he find what he was specifically instructed to find, or did he find what was actually there? Did the Sisodias direct Chitnis to a record in their possession, or were they amenable to being persuaded by a claim he presented to them? The answers to these questions are not available to a historical certainty.

2 See footnote for sources that have life-like descriptions of the pomp and ceremony surrounding the abhiṣeka.
The *Visnu dharmottarapurāṇa*, the *locus classicus* of the abhiṣeka procedure, carries instructions for the post-abhiṣeka celebrations, which include generous donations, a tour by the newly consecrated king, and mass feasting, all of which were followed by Shivaji (Inden 1981: 53–7). Here was the spectacle, witnessed by commoners and courtiers alike, of a powerful man making a powerful gesture. As local literature and popular culture will attest, the sheer visual effect of Shivaji’s consecration—the sense, this being a momentous occasion—has never been forgotten in the historical imagination of Maharashtra.

**THE ROLE OF GĀGĀBHAṬṬA**

Gāgābhaṭṭa, the officiating priest, was not a ritualist, but a renowned jurist. He belonged to an entire family of Paithān brāhmaṇas settled in Benares who were scholars of, among other disciplines, dharmaśāstra, or law, over multiple generations. Gāgā’s background is significant. The kind of knowledge that Shivaji required from him did not have as much to do with the procedures of rājabhāṣaka, or royal consecration, as it did with the legal rules and regulations concerning the brahmanical discourse of varṇaśramadharma, which Shivaji was interested in using to his own advantage. If anyone could tell high-born kṣatriyas from lowly śudras, it was Gāgābhaṭṭa. This expertise made Gāgā particularly suited to identify Shivaji as a true kṣatriya and dismiss the insinuation from any quarter that he might, on account of his obscure family background, be a śūdra after all.

Until Shivaji’s coronation, there was nothing in Gāgā’s scholarly oeuvre to suggest his competence in rājadharma, or the rights and duties of kings. In order to establish his bona fides in time, he especially composed a Sanskrit work for this occasion, called the Śrīśivarājābhisekaprayoga,

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3 Paithān is in Aurangabad District of modern Maharashtra. It has a long history as a seat of brahmanical learning, whose activities may have been disrupted with the fall of the Yadava kingdom at the end of the thirteenth century. The Yadava capital of Devagiri was barely 50 km from Paithān. Medieval Benares was a centre of Hindu juridical scholarship. Gāgā’s paternal uncle, Kamalākarabhāṭṭa, writing between CE 1610 and 1640, was perhaps the best known among these experts in dharmaśāstra. The Bhaṭṭas had migrated permanently from Paithān to Benaras in the generation of Gāgā’s great-great-grandfather, Rāmeśvara, who moved north in CE 1525 (Bendrey 1960: 22–3). But as records of Gāgā’s own travels indicate, the family still maintained its ties with its ancestral home a good 150 years later.
Manual for the Royal Consecration of the Great Śiva (= Shivaji) (Bendrey 1960). This text detailed, with all of the learned apparatus, the procedures by which Shivaji was made the right-royal chatra-bearing ruler of his dominions. By all accounts, Gāgā’s presence was central to the preparatory rituals, as well as to the actual ceremony of the consecration, and he was lavishly remunerated.4

After the coronation, Shivaji, now Chatrapati Shivaji Maharāj, went off on various military expeditions. Gāgā was paid over one lakh, or 100,000 hons, or gold coins for services rendered, in addition to other gifts. Presumably he returned to his home in Benares, although there is no reason to rule out the possibility that he settled permanently in Maharashtra, under Shivaji’s protection. A folk account often heard in Maharashatra is that he was completely indifferent to his stupendous fees and to Shivaji’s favour, and in fact renounced the world directly after receiving the money. This legend attempts to silence any suspicion as to why Gāgā was paid such an extraordinary amount of gold. It dismisses the idea that the size of the payment might reflect on the veracity of his claims as to Shivaji’s being a Rājput, or being a kṣatriya.5

Formalist Analysis: Structure and Pragmatics of the Ritual

THE ABHIŠEKA: HOW IT WORKS

The upanayana, or investiture of the male subject with a sacred thread, is one of the cornerstones of varṇāśramadharma. According to brahmanical ideologies underpinning this ritual, once a male person dons this thread, he is reborn as a member of society invested with the dharma proper to him according to his birth. In this sense, he becomes a dvija, or a twice-born subject. He comes into existence as a full-fledged member of one of the three varṇas, or social estates that are already always stipulated as

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4 For an almost filmic description of the spectacle of Shivaji’s consecration, with Gāgā radiating religious authority at the heart of the proceedings, see Sarkar (1920: Chapter 9). Other vivid accounts, which also keep Gāgā’s brahmanical presence very much in centre-focus, are provided by Keluskar (1921: Chapter 13), and by Vaidya (1931: Chapter 32). For the testimony of an English observer present at the events, see Kale (1931: 369–76): ‘Oxinden’s Narrative’.

5 For different views about the truth of Shivaji’s Rājput ancestry and Gāgā’s relationship to this truth, see Gordon (1993: Chapter 3, esp. 86–9). Gordon calls Gāgā a ‘creative brahman’. 
ritually fit to be twice-born, namely brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya or vaiśya. Birth and naming—coming into being as someone and coming to be called as someone—are closely related as the two fundamental modalities of identity formation and social existence. Thus we can think of upanayana as a baptismal ritual, in which the subject is simultaneously reborn as a brāhmaṇa/kṣatriya/vaiśya, and named or deemed a brāhmaṇa/kṣatriya/vaiśya.

Abhiśeka bears a close similarity to upanayana: the same person, already born from his mother’s womb, is reborn from a mere human state into a royal state; he is also in that same instant named a king; thereafter he will be called king. There is the sprinkling of holy water on the person, he is abhisiktta, or baptized, that is, sprinkled with this water, and thereafter assumes his new identity as a royal personage. Note that Shivaji had, one after the other in quick succession, an upanayana and an abhiśeka, an investiture and a royal consecration—he was reborn (dvija) as a kṣatriya and as a king, and he came to be called kṣatriya and king. The agent of both these baptismal rituals was the brāhmaṇa Gāgābhaṭṭa, the midwife who birthed the new Shivaji, the priest who named him chatrapati.

According to the normative order of the rituals of rebirth prescribed in dharmaśāstra texts, the abhiśeka presupposes the upanayana, because the upanayana confirms the person’s recruitment, by birth, into one of the three twice-born estates. Someone who has never had an upanayana cannot have an abhiśeka. Shivaji was such a person. This is why Gāgābhaṭṭa had to first perform his upanayana, and then only could he move on to the abhiśeka. The upanayana was essential in order to (re)confirm that Shivaji was a kṣatriya, and the fact that he was indeed a kṣatriya by birth was established through the Rājpūt genealogy.

Granting for a moment the logic that Gāgābhaṭṭa ostensibly followed, the fact that Shivaji, being of Rājpūt descent, was born a kṣatriya, ought to have resulted in his having an upanayana at a very young age. Such a timely investiture of the sacred thread would have confirmed his kṣatriya

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6 This is merely the classical explanation of the upanayana ritual, not a critique or analysis of it.

7 Heesterman too, following Hocart, has referred to unction (his term for abhiśeka) as a baptism (1957: 116–17). Both Heesterman and Inden (1981) stress that within the complex moment of the abhiśeka, there is a tight connection between—indeed the lamination one upon the other of—birth (rebirth), that is, the gaining of a new body and a new social persona, and baptism, that is, and the bestowal of a new name/title, which entails the entrance into a new role. The ritual is radically formative (transformative) along every axis of identity: ontology, social being, nomenclature, role inhabitation.
status early on, and there would never have been any hindrance to the abhiśeka when the time was ripe. However, this did not happen, and so the upanayana and the abhiśeka had to be squeezed in together into a single juncture of his life—the moment when he was ready to become king—in 1674, when he was 44 years old. Because the two rituals followed so closely one after the other, the analogy in their structure and function was reinforced. The latter one echoed the first, the first one adumbrated the second. The abhiśeka presupposed the upanayana, but it also resembled it. Their resemblance and near-simultaneity amplified them both, and thus made them both more efficacious.

The similarity between the upanayana and the abhiśeka may be a function of something Inden (1981: 37–8) notes: that abhiśeka works much like the samskāras, or life-cycle rituals (of which the upanayana is one). Inden himself compares abhiśeka not to upanayana but to another equally important sāṃskāra, that of vivāha, or marriage: ‘Just as a man could not properly become a householder (grhaṭha) and follow the householder’s code (grhaṭha-dharma) unless he had undergone the rite which controlled access to that status, marriage; so, too, a man could not become a king unless he had undergone the abhiśeka ceremony.’ The point of sāṃskāras is to ‘provide entry’ into a ‘new status or role’ (Inden 1981), which is another way of saying that they are baptismal.8 Importantly, Shivaji, who had already been married several times in his youth, was also made to undergo vivāha again at the time of the abhiśeka. This is because abhiśeka presupposes vivāha too, just as it does upanayana. (Naturally, the vivāha in turn also presupposes the upanayana.) Only someone who has had his investiture may be married, and only someone who is married may have a royal consecration. In 1674, Shivaji was therefore remarried, only this time with Vedic mantras, as befitting a proper kṣatriya. With the three similar and sequential rituals—upanayana, vivāha, and abhiśeka—taking place in quick succession, the makeover of Shivaji was a fait accompli. The whole sequence, however, could only be initiated because his kṣatriya birth was allowed by the Rājpūt lineage.

8 Like one’s name or kingship, one’s varṇa also has to be formally given to one before it can be recognized by others. All three properties (name, kingship, varṇa status) must be conferred by a properly qualified agent, the priest. One enters into ownership of them via the corresponding rituals conducted by this priest, namely, the nāmakarana (naming ceremony, not analysed here), the abhiśeka, and the upanayana. The baptismal form and function of the upanayana ritual, and its propensity to be analogized to the abhiśeka, militate against the hegemonic view that varṇa is innate and intrinsic.
Perhaps in addition to mutually reinforcing structure, giant expenditure is another factor in making rituals successful! Gāgābhaṭṭa’s 100,000 hons begin to seem like pocket money relative to the total expenditure incurred in the consecration. Shivaji had to go to the extent of raiding and looting nearby territories and levying new taxes on his subjects, in order to pay for this extravaganza. Moreover, the entire proceedings were performed publicly, as a grand show lasting several days. Shivaji’s rebirth as a kṣatriya king was a spectacular event. If the royal consecration worked so well because it took place in tandem with the investiture and the marriage(s), and at such enormous expense, it worked even better because having witnessed it, large numbers of spectators deemed it a success. Shivaji was reborn in full view of hundreds if not thousands of people. The rituals of his baptism had more than an adequate number of witnesses. In witnessing his transformation into their king, the people simultaneously became transformed into his subjects. His new status determined theirs—their new role confirmed his.

Biographical Analysis: The Consecration in Shivaji’s Political Career

THE ABHIṢEKA: FUNCTION

Why did Shivaji need to be initiated as a kṣatriya, and undergo a formal abhiṣeka in order to be recognized as de facto ruler of Maharashtra? Did he not already have effective control over the territories that were to become, after the performance of the royal ritual, his kingdom? Hardy (1981: 196) uses the term ‘operational legitimacy’ to describe the sanction a king has under certain theories of authority, simply by virtue of having become king, since ‘political success is taken as evidence of divine favour…’. Shivaji already had operational legitimacy. Why did he then

9 Shivaji imposed a special cess called the śiṁhasan-paṭṭi or throne-tax on powerful land-holding elements in his territories, called vatandārs, within six months of his consecration. This move was designed to refill his empty coffers, as also to send out the message confirming that he now had the royal authority necessary to levy taxes (Chandra 1974: 256).

10 A question that arises is: what was the relationship of these people to Shivaji before he became their king?

11 While the idea of operational legitimacy comes out of Islamic practice as evidenced by the thirteenth century, Hardy also refers to Medhātithi, a commentator on Manu’s foundational text of dharmaśāstra, according to whom someone
bother with the consecration? The answer clearly lies in the ritual legitimacy that Shivaji sought. He had to establish unequivocally his supremacy over several Marāṭhā peers and competitors. He had to declare himself not just the most powerful among a phalanx of chieftains, but king above them all.

Moreover, he had to make a definitive gesture of overlordship not just to other Marāṭhā contenders, but also to the notoriously orthodox Maharashtrian brāhmaṇas of his time. For them, a non-brāhmaṇa of uncertain varṇa status, no matter how learned, powerful, or wealthy in real terms, was for all intents and purposes a sūdra, unfit to rule by his very birth. These brāhmaṇas would only recognize a man like Shivaji as king if he could somehow manage to get, by playing politics and paying money, šastraic sanction for his influential social position and his aspirations to kingship.12 It is noteworthy that Shivaji especially had to bring a brāhmaṇa, namely Gāgābhaṭṭa, from outside Maharashtra, all the way from Benares, to grant him this sanction through the performance of public rituals and the writing of Sanskrit texts.

Shivaji also needed a royal title to free himself of any residual possibility that he might be called upon to serve one of the Deccan sultans again, as his father had had to do throughout his life, and he himself had to do in the early part of his career. But most importantly, Shivaji needed to stand up, not just militarily but also symbolically, to the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Theirs was the definitive political rivalry of the age. Shivaji could no longer afford to be a mere rebel against the Mughal drive southwards into the Deccan. His kingship in Maharashtra had to be as unimpeachable, as ritually sacrosanct, as Aurangzeb’s was in Agra and Delhi. Only a chatrapati could take on a shahenshāh (Persian, literally: ‘king of kings’).13 For all of these reasons, a kṣatriya tag that would underwrite his independent royal status became indispensable to Shivaji, and he pressed ahead with his consecration.

who has had a royal consecration and functions as the ruler, is king and must be recognized as such, whether or not he was born in the kṣatriya varṇa.

12 ‘Shastric sanction’ means sanction based on the contents of the śāstras, normative Sanskrit texts, mastery of which was supposed to ground the authority of the brāhmaṇas.

13 On the desired equivalence between Aurangzeb and Shivaji being actualized through the abhiṣeka, see Heesterman (1989: 117–18). Heesterman reads the contest between the bādshāh and the chatrapati in strongly communal terms, as representing Muslim versus Hindu claims to universal rule.
Socio-Historical Analysis: Shivaji and the Rājpūts

THE BHOSALE FAMILY

We know that Shivaji was a Marāṭhā, from one branch of a local clan named Bhosale. The Bhosales were in service of the Deccan sultanates and the Mughal empire, exactly like other leading Marāṭhā families of the times. Traditionally, Marāṭhā families were counted as ninety-six in number, with a subset of five being treated as, or at any rate claiming to be, the true Marāṭhā élite.14 There was a complicated set of internal conflicts, tussles, feuds, hierarchies in play among these families, who together controlled most of what is today Maharashtra on the ground, in the name of the various Muslim kings of north and south India.15 Shivaji, his father Shāhji, and his grandfather Māloji, all occasionally used the Marāṭhi word rājā (or rāje) which literally means ‘king’, as an epithet before their names. But in the first half of the seventeenth century, when the Bhosales were slowly coming into ascendancy, this could perhaps be read as a more generic title indicating martial valour and administrative control over a localized area, rather than actual royal status. The real kings—those with trans-regional political overlordship—were mostly Muslims, and to them such titles did not apply.

THE SISODIA RĀJPŪT GENEALOGY

As mentioned earlier, at the time of the consecration Shivaji let it be known that he was genealogically linked to the prestigious Rājpūt Sisodias of Udaipur, and that thus he too was a Rājpūt. Historical evidence suggests that Shivaji’s claim to Rājpūt ancestry was tenuous, if not outright inventive, and that he used it to justify the upanayana, or sacred thread investiture ceremony, that he had Gāgābhāṭṭa perform to make him a dvija, or twice-born kṣatriya. His father Shāhji once used the term rājpūt to describe himself in a letter to the Adil Shah, but in that context he apparently meant something closer to ‘honourable warrior-chieftain’, much like rājā/e, rather

14 The families in the group of ninety-six were called, in Marāṭhi, śannaukulī, those in the group of five pāṭīcakulī. The inclusion of the Bhosales in this count of ninety-six was never a sure thing. In fact, they were almost certainly not on this list.

15 Later on Marāṭhās came to be perceived as landowning cultivators with martial traditions, thus simultaneously, or alternately, kunbi kulvādi (farmer) and kṣatriya (warrior), somewhat like Jats in the north (see Chandra 1973: 214–17).
than literally a person of Rājpūt extraction originally from the north. Shivaji’s own descendants never picked up the Rājpūt appellation, although they continued to style themselves as chatrapatis. Once the motif of a Rājpūt connection had done its job, namely, guaranteed Shivaji’s claim to being a kshatriya fit for royal consecration, it disappeared from the family’s subsequent projections of its identity.

THE RĀJPŪTS AND THE MUGHALS

The term Rājpūt itself in Shivaji’s usage of it has to be understood as signifying a member of a clan with its own ‘clan-state’ (Hallissey 1977: 21), a political form prevalent in Rājvādā for many centuries. Rājpūt clans had power, a lineage structure, and almost invariably, a descent claim from mythical kṣatriya ancestors. Habib (1995: 89–90) points out that the word Rājpūt as the name of a caste shows up for the first time in Persian records as late as the sixteenth century. It signifies a section of the rural aristocracy beginning to coalesce as a caste. By the seventeenth century, almost all the major Rājpūt rulers in Rājvādā were mansabdârs or military commanders and jâgîrdârs or landholders under the Mughal emperor; they owed political allegiance to and had marital ties with him and his family. While they continued to perform various Hindu

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16 Bal Krishna (1932: 189–92) includes this letter of Shâhjâ’s in a list of proofs for Shivaji’s Rājpūt ancestry.

17 However, according to one scholar, in his Sabhâsad Bakhar (ca 1696), a eulogistic chronicle commissioned by Shivaji’s second son Rajaram, the author Krishnaji Anant Sabhasad ‘...claims Rajaram’s right to rule as a Kshatriya, the descendant of the Rajput Sisodia clan. Very adroitly, the text has Mirza Raje Jaisingh, Aurangzeb’s Rajput commander “acknowledge” the “fact” that Shivaji’s bravery stems from his Rajput heritage.’ See Deshpande (2002: 21).

18 The Rājavādā of Shivaji’s period included most of what is today Rajasthan, but also, at its extremities, contiguous parts of modern Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. The ‘clan-state’ must by definition be a hybrid political form, though Hallissey himself does not theorize it sufficiently. See Thapar (2000) for a discussion, with reference to ancient and early medieval India, of how the transition from a society based on clan structure (jana) to one based on caste structure (jāti) corresponded to a transformation of tribal polities into monarchical states.

19 Habib (1995) succinctly defines key terms used in the Mughal administrative system. A jâgîr is a parcel of land assigned for a short period of time by the Mughal emperor to a jâgîrdâr for the collection of revenue. A mansab is a rank with two components, one indicating salary earned (zāï) and the other cavalry maintained
rituals (marking themselves as Hindu in contradistinction to the Muslim Mughals), including ones that installed the new head of a clan as king when an older one passed away, their most important royal ritual was not the abhiśeka but the tīkā (literally: ‘auspicious mark’). This ritual was not the installation ceremony as such, but the recognition of the new king, or a confirmation of his royal status, by the Mughal emperor, who was the greater power above him (Hallissey 1977: Chapter 3, also 91–2).

Clearly, the fact that it was always and only the Mughal emperor who conferred the tīkā, and always and only Rājpūt chieftains who received it from him, made this something of a hybrid ritual. It was neither Muslim nor brahmanical, drawn neither from Islamic political doctrine, nor from the dharmaśāstra. Rather, it evolved in response to the particular historical problem of allowing Rājpūts to maintain their identity as independent Hindu rulers, even while they constituted a service nobility in the Mughal administration. The tīkā continued to be in vogue through the reign of the Mughal Emperor Shāh Jahān (CE 1628–57), although in his rule it was delegated to the prime minister. Shāh Jahān’s son Aurangzeb during his reign (CE 1658/9–1707) abolished the practice altogether in May 1679, on the grounds that it was unIslamic, or, as Sarkar puts it, that it ‘savoured’ of Hinduism. But this abolition of the tīkā was decreed five years after Shivaji’s consecration. While the claim to being a Rājpūt permitted Shivaji to call himself a kṣatriya, following the Rājpūt practice of getting tīkā (or its equivalent approval) from the bādshāh (or a representative, like his prime minister) would hardly have been a useful move for him to make. The abhiśeka, by contrast, was a type of royal consecration that had no reference to Mughal authority.

In rejecting the ritual currently in vogue, which would have been politically compromising, and instead deliberately choosing an archaic form, (savār), granted by the Mughal emperor to a mansabdār (Habib 1995: 94). Under Mughal rule, jāgārdārs and mansabdārs were often drawn from Rājpūt clans and also from some Marāṭhā families (Habib 1995: 99).

A tīkā is a vermillion mark (‘a spot of paint’, in Jadunath Sarkar’s words) put on the forehead, between or just above the eyebrows.

Aurangzeb’s abolition of the tīkā in the twenty-second or twenty-third year of his reign is mentioned, but not analysed in any detail, in Sarkar (1916: 100, 1930: 92) and in Sharma (1962: 108). This information is drawn from the Mūsir-i-Ālamgīrī. Sarkar (1916) further points out that ‘the newly created rajahs had only to make their bow (taslim) to the Emperor who returned their salute’. Perhaps this indicates that Aurangzeb retained the right to confirm or deny the royal status of a Rājpūt designated as king.
perhaps Shivaji was being something of a Hindu revivalist *avant la lettre*.\(^{22}\) But more importantly, he was putting his royalty as chatrapati on par with rather than under the shadow of Aurangzeb’s title of *ālamgir* (Persian, literally: ‘World Compeller’) and the imperial authority that went with it.\(^{23}\) Simultaneously, he used his kṣatriya status, founded, as we have seen, on his Rājput descent-claim, to hoist himself over the level of the Rājputs as well. Through the abhiśeka Shivaji entered into an implicitly higher form of pure kṣatriya kingship that harked back to a pre-Islamic past when groups like the Rājputs would not have had to make compromises with non-Hindu overlords, but would have ruled independently.

**THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE RĀJPUTS**

The early past of most Rājput clans indicates that they began as either indigenous or foreign tribal groups which, at different points in time over 1500 years, took on Sanskritic or at least Indic names, and either Buddhist or kṣatriya identities once they had achieved political power.\(^{24}\) Thus starting with the Greeks (Yavanas), the Śakas, the Kuśānas, the Hūnas, the Ābhīras, the Hulhayas, the Kālacūris, the Candelās, the Gāhadavālas, the Gurjaras, the Cāhamānas, the Pratihāras, and the Cauḷūkyaśas all underwent these processes of indigenization and status change (Bhandarkar 2001: 197).

\(^{22}\) Strange though it might be for us, to find Hindu revivalism in pre-modern South Asia!

\(^{23}\) When Shivaji’s audience with Aurangzeb at the latter’s court in 1666 went badly, Shivaji was impugned by Aurangzeb’s close circle, including his sister Jahanara and Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur, for being a mere ‘bhūmiyā’ (Chandra 1978–9: 146; Sarkar 1963: 27). This term (evidently a north Indian one) indicates the referent’s relationship to the earth or to soil (*bhūmi*). In the context, as a term of insult, it appears to mean something like ‘country-bumpkin’, someone lacking the breeding to conduct himself appropriately in a royal court. Certainly the connotations for the varṇa status of a bhūmiyā would not be very flattering to Shivaji. The term bhūmiyā seems to play on the ambiguity of Marāṭha identity, which, as is seen elsewhere in this chapter, fluctuates between kṣatriya (one who would have political control over the land) and kuṇbi (one who would merely cultivate the land).

\(^{24}\) By ‘foreign’ we can understand groups that arrived and settled, as migrants or conquerors, from the Asian mainland—mostly from north and west of the subcontinent—into the subcontinent proper. The ‘indigenous’ tribes already inhabited the subcontinent, so that their entry into new forms of identity was not literally a matter of spatial relocation conjoined with militaristic supremacy, but rather a metaphor for the cultural assimilation necessary to ground their political power.
1911). These groups successively formed the first sedimentations of Rājpūt identity on the subcontinent throughout the first millennium.

When Shivaji claimed to be a kṣatriya on the basis of a genealogical connection with the Rājpūt Sisodias, what he was doing was no different from what most Rājpūt clans themselves had done early on in their own history, which was to seek ‘validation’ for their political authority by claiming genealogical links to mythical kṣatriya ancestors (Thapar 1974). By late medieval times, origin myths extant among Rājpūts included accounts of a period when kṣatriya status was lost, leading to great sorrow in the community, followed by the partial recovery of that status (Ziegler 1981: 236). During the royal consecration, the Bhosas too came to be seen as a kṣatriya family that had fallen into a phase of amnesia regarding its own status, which was now being rightfully reclaimed and regained through the abhiṣeka of Shivaji.25

**RĀJPŪTS IN SHIVAJI’S TIMES**

Perhaps it would be useful to compare Shivaji not so much with the Rājpūts of Rājvād—a—even though it was with the ruling family of one of their clans that he sought to affiliate himself—but with the ‘Rājpūtized’ tribal kings and chieftains of central and eastern India who were more or less his contemporaries. A limited historical reconstruction, to the extent permitted by a patchy record, combined with ethnographic fieldwork among the Bhumij (Sinha 1962) and the Chero (Singh 1974), suggests that these tribes underwent marked transformations of group identity and structure once they came into contact with Rājpūts and brāhmaṇas from areas other than their own.

An area in which the influence of Rājpūt culture upon such tribes was significant, was the state. Indeed, many scholars have attributed the very emergence of the state in these groups to their ‘Rājpūtization’.26 However, this is not the place to undertake a systematic comparison of three contemporaneous non-Muslim state or state-like formations that lie along a

25 Under this theory, the amnesia about their identity was presumably what led the Bhosas to drop the practice of getting the upanayana at the right age (11 years), and thereafter wearing the sacred thread. In the language of the dharmaśāstra, such a forgetting of the rituals proper to one’s varṇa is called ‘samskāralopa’, ‘the disappearance or elision of samskāras (life-cycle rites)’. It was to correct this situation that Gāgābhāṭa had to belatedly perform Shivaji’s upanayana and vivāha, preceded by expiations to atone for the lopa.

26 The term ‘Rājpūtisation’ (with an ‘s’) is used by Sinha (1962: 36).
continuum: the Rājpūt, the neo-Rājpūt tribal, and the early Marāṭhā (as created by Shivaji). Nor will we evaluate the place of clan, territory, and feudal structure in each of these types of non-identical but similar polities.27 This is because the case in point is not really that of the Bhosaḷe clan, or of the Marāṭhās as a whole, comparable to particular families among the tribals, or to entire tribes, but of Shivaji as an individual historical agent who acted as such.28

Nonetheless, even if we set aside the matter of the state, the process of Rājpūtization among medieval tribal societies appears to have had certain other features that can help us better situate Shivaji’s royal consecration within a larger context. As the work of Sinha, Singh, Chattopadhyaya, and Thapar cumulatively shows, these included, for the ruling families of various tribes:

(a) Concern with status: (i) The construction of spurious genealogies tracing descent from mythic ksatriya, or quasi-historical Rājpūt ancestors; and (ii) the express aspiration, often achieved through diligent pursuit over generations, to ksatriya status in the varṇa hierarchy.

(b) Adoption of rituals: (i) The ostentatious performance of the rituals of the twice-born castes, especially the ksatriyas; and (ii) the display of the markers of dvija ritual identity, like the wearing of the sacred thread, or the use of Vedic mantras.

(c) Expansion of kinship networks: Aggressive affiliation with established Rājpūt families, through (i) (re)claiming long-lost kinship ties and/or (ii) forming new marriage alliances (specifically, by asking for their daughters).

(d) Change in terminology: (i) The adoption of Rājpūt titles like rājā and rāṇā that connoted a high birth if not royalty; and (ii) absorbing and espousing Sanskrit vocabulary in matters of state and religion, or switching

27 We could, in a different type of study, raise questions such as: To what extent was Marāṭhā society or polity clan-based in a way reminiscent of the Rājpūts? Did the subset of ninety-six, or the smaller subset of five, Marāṭhā families approximate more closely to the Rājpūt model than the entirety of the community? Did the Bhosaḷes in particular demonstrate a strong clan structure?

28 Stein describes ‘corporate mobility’ as a relatively modern form of social mobility. On the other hand, the medieval period according to him was more likely to afford opportunities for ‘individual family mobility’ (1968: 79). Shivaji acted on his own, for his personal mobility, although his consecration may have had a penumbral effect, later on, of raising the status not just of all Bhosaḷes, but of all Marāṭhās.
altogether from the native tribal language to the regionally available Indo-Aryan language.

(e) *Transformation of religious practice:* Entering into a process of Hinduization, either partial or complete, whereby Hindu deities, shrines, rites, and symbols were taken on board, sometimes to the detriment of their indigenous counterparts.29

Naturally, brāhmaṇa priests and genealogists had a large role to play as tribal heads and aristocracies became Rājputized (to whatever extent they did). Such historical evidence as is available to modern historians seems to suggest that large numbers of brāhmaṇas either migrated on their own to or were invited to settle in tribal areas, and received patronage, mainly in the form of land grants and temple grants, in exchange for these sorts of services.

It is not clear that Shivaji had to systematically engage the brāhmaṇas of Maharashtra, of any or some or all major denominations, as a class, in order to achieve his objective of gaining first varṇa legitimacy and then royalty. He simply brought in the expert from Benares to do the needful. What entire communities of brāhmaṇas did for the rulers, their families and other powerful sections of numerous tribes throughout the medieval and late medieval periods, one Gāgābhaṭṭa single-handedly did for Shivaji in a matter of a few months. Still, what was needed to be done through brāhmaṇa agency was much the same for Shivaji as for, say, the Bhumij and Chero chiefs—the conferral and confirmation of kṣatriya status, of Rājput identity, and of Hindu kingship.

In addition to brāhmaṇa participation in the processes of legitimation, what Shivaji had in common with Rājputized kings of tribal origin were several of the key mechanisms of social mobility listed earlier—the deployment of fabricated genealogies, affiliation and association with known Rājpūts, and the adoption of savarna rituals and ritual markers and their deliberate outward display. It is strange, then, that in the historiographic

29 In his essay ‘Kṣatriyaization and Social Change: A Study in the Orissa Setting’, Kulke (1993: 83) points out, correctly, I think, that a whole family of terms in the historical and sociological literature of India, beginning with M. N. Srinivas’s 1952 coinage ‘Sanskritization’, and including ‘Aryanization’, ‘Hinduization’, and ‘Brahmanization’ (and presumably ‘Kṣatriyaization’ and ‘Rājputization’ as well), all suffer from the defect of seeming to refer exclusively to one aspect of a complex process of social change, whether this aspect is language, or race, or religion, or caste. In fact, the nature of this process in both medieval and modern times was such as to proceed along several of these related axes at the same time.
literature, Shivaji has never been compared to the neo-Rājpūts of his times. It would seem that his claim to being of Rājpūt descent does not point us with a high degree of certainty to a genuine (or at least a traceable) Sisodia ancestor. It does nonetheless open up a useful line of inquiry into the very real similarities between Rājpūt modes of establishing status and those used by Shivaji.

What set Shivaji apart from other Rājpūts was not the nature but the audacious scale of his moves. He did not try to link himself to just any Rājpūt family of respectable social cadre. He straightaway claimed kinship with the Sisodias, who arguably enjoyed perhaps the highest status among all Rājpūt clans of old and new vintage spread across north India from west to east (Sinha 1962: 74–5). The way in which he connected himself to them was ambitious, swift, and decisive. He did not, for instance, attempt to marry into the family, which would have been transparent as a hasty bid to improve his status in the present. Instead he claimed to already be related to the Sisodias through a common ancestor who lived many generations ago. Once this relationship had been established, so to speak,

Shivaji’s claim to Sisodia ancestry and Rājpūt descent has been peremptorily dismissed in much of the modern historiographical literature, often on the basis of a (Brahmanical, anti-Marāthā) prejudice inherited from the Peshwa perspective on him (which itself, it has been argued, was highly politically motivated). But even while being sensitive to Shivaji’s predicament of feeling the pressure to establish varṇa legitimacy in order to confirm his fitness for royal status, just on the evidence (and also on its lack!), one has to admit that he was not, in fact, a Rājpūt. The point being made in this chapter, however, is that his being or not being a Rājpūt is in itself neither as interesting nor as informative as his attempt to represent himself as such. What is being examined here is not the authenticity of this claim (or not just its authenticity), but its logic. The former may not hold up under scrutiny, the latter definitely does.

There is a suggestion, however, that like the neo-kṣatriya Candelā dynasty of the tenth century with the Goṇḍs, the Sisodias too had tribal associations, in their case with the Bhīls (Thapar 2000: 795).

With no objection from the Sisodias themselves, apparently. By contrast to the way in which he decided to proceed vis-à-vis the Sisodias, Shivaji had used marriage for upward social mobility on previous occasions. Thus, at an earlier stage in his career when he was yet to come into a position of political supremacy in Maharashtra, Shivaji had married into Marāthā families that were better established in the social hierarchy than his own: the Mohites, the Shirkes, the Nimbalkars (Chandra 1973: 213–14; 1974: 255; Mehendale 1999: 1122–31). By the time of the royal consecration, however, he sought to raise himself above the level of even those very local families whose status he had formerly aspired to.
he did not merely perform kṣatriya rituals and don a sacred thread, he had an abhiseka, and that too one the likes of which had not been seen anywhere on the subcontinent in recent historical memory.

RĀJPŪTS ACCORDING TO THE DHARMAŚĀTRA

Whatever the realities of Rājpūtization among powerful tribal families seeking to enter the varṇa system with a certain status, and emigré brāhmaṇas helping them to do so, by brahmanical dharmaśāstra definitions prevalent in Shivaji’s lifetime, Rājpūts are a miscegenated jāti produced from non-alike fathers and mothers of specified types. According to the Śūdrakamalākara, an authoritative Sanskrit text on the dharma of śūdras written by Gāgābhaṭṭa’s own uncle, Kamalākarabhaṭṭa, in the early part of the seventeenth century, the progeny of a kṣatriya man and a śūdra woman would be an ugra, otherwise known as a rajapūta.33 Such a person does battle and is expert in wielding weapons, but he must follow the duties proper to a śūdra. In Kamalākara’s classification, being a sankarajāti, or mixed group, ugras, or rajapūtas are śūdrasamāna, as good as (or as bad as!) śūdras.

Now Gāgābhaṭṭa, master of dharmaśāstra, was himself, like his famous uncle, the author of an entire text on the rights and restrictions of śūdras called the Śūradharmodyota.34 So when he cleared Shivaji as a Rājpūt and therefore as a true kṣatriya, he too must have agreed to take the term Rājpūt for its contemporary meaning in realpolitik, and not for its normative and unhistorical meaning in dharmaśāstra texts, even the ones he himself had written! Gāgā clearly understood that a Rājpūt and a rajapūta—one a type of socio-historical subject, the other a category in Sanskrit legal

33 See Kamalākarabhaṭṭa, ‘Jātinirnayaprakaranam’, in his Śūdrakamalākara, p. 255. A progeny whose father has a higher varṇa than the mother, as in this case, is called an anulomaja, or ‘one born in accordance with the natural flow’ (that is, the descending order) of social hierarchy, from man (superior) to woman (inferior). Kamalākara lists the ugra among the six types of anulomajas (Ibid.: 254–5). An earlier text in this genre, the Śūdrācārāśiromani by Śeṣakṛṣṇa, also provides the same definition of a rajapūta (Ibid.: 15). ‘Ugra’ literally means ‘scary’, or ‘fear-ocious’. In equating the ugra and the rajapūta, medieval dharmaśāstra writers no doubt intended to refer to the warlike properties of the class of person they were describing.

34 This text was actually a volume devoted to the subject of śūrdharma, in a series of texts by Gāgā’s father Dinakarabhaṭṭa, collectively referred to as the Dinakarodyota. Significantly, Gāgā completed the particular volume on śūdras.
discourse, which may or may not have corresponded to any such type—were two different things in the world. The jāti hierarchy in a social landscape may be apparent at all times to all members of the jātis that are so arranged. But the varṇa status of a given jāti may not become clear until it is put under pressure (and even at that point, it is more likely to become complicated than clarified). The dharmaśāstra text may try to fix the place of a jāti like ‘rajapūta’ somewhere low down on the varṇa scale, close to the śūdra, but the socio-historical type ‘Rājpūt’ always gravitates to the kṣatriya varṇa, making the lexical similarity between the two terms semantically utterly misleading.

THE POLYPHONY OF RĀJPŪT IDENTITY

From its earliest appearance in north India, the category of ‘Rājpūt’ seems to have been by definition an open and accommodating one. Repeatedly, over the course of centuries, its persistence, or reinvention, allowed politically and sometimes even economically ascendant groups, especially those with a clan-based structure, to be recruited into kṣatriya status. Time and again brāhmaṇa and non-Rājpūt kṣatriya interests denigrated it as a category for arrivistes, insinuating or charging that Rājpūts were nothing but ersatz kṣatriyas. Shivaji’s Rājpūt claim could therefore be seen as a double-edged sword: it was liable to be read as shorthand for ‘upwardly mobile śūdra’ and at the same time act as a short cut to dvija respectability. Apparently Shivaji was willing to risk the former to gain the latter. To achieve this, he appears to have understood the kṣatriya genealogy for what it was: not a historically verifiable record of a powerful individual, or family’s origins and subsequent descent, but as a mode of self-representation—precisely re-presentation—whose deployment marked the need for ‘actual status’ and ‘ritual status’ to come into a new alignment with one another (Thapar 1974, 1996).

The dissonance between how Rājpūts projected themselves (and surely there was a difference in the self-projection of well-established Rājvādā Rājpūts and the neo-Rājpūts who till recently had been tribals), how they were described in late-medieval brahmanical texts, how the Mughals regarded them, how aspiring Rājpūts and Rājpūtizing groups regarded them, and how an ambitious Marāṭhā warlord might choose to construct them as his ancestors, illustrates the simultaneous prevalence of radically

35 A point made by Professor Satish Chandra (personal communication February 2002).
different ethno-sociological perspectives on putative kṣatriya groups in the seventeenth century. To this mix we can add yet another folk account popular at the time—that the mythical sage Paraśurāma had exterminated the race of kṣatriyas in an iterative genocide a long time ago and therefore in the kaliyuga, the current and final epoch of cosmic time, there remained only brāhmaṇas and śudras on earth. Ergo, in this view, anyone who was not a brāhmaṇa had to be, by default, a śūdra, political authority notwithstanding.

In other words, some theories (like the dharmaśāstra’s) could not clarify which communities were historically and/or genealogically kṣatriya and which were not. Others (like the one implicit in the practice of making genealogies) allowed for any group that had achieved real dominance to be recruited into kṣatriya status if it so desired, while some (like the Puranic) cast doubts on the very possibility of the existence of kṣatriyas in the present time. The fact that these incommensurable views could coexist meant that there was a lot of space for the flux and play of identities. This was the space that Shivaji occupied for most of his life, and the space he sought to close off once and for all with the abhiṣeka, in order to enter into his new avatar, that of the only kṣatriya king of his kind in late medieval India.

Genealogical Analysis: Who were Shivaji’s Real Ancestors?

A NEW HYPOTHESIS

Ramachandra Chintaman Dhere, a Maharashtrian scholar of folk communities and their religious traditions in the Deccan, has recently come forward with a new theory regarding the identity of Shivaji and his family. Dhere abandons the Rājput trail altogether and looks for other traces (rather like recessive traits) in the known history of the Bhosaṇes to pick up and amplify. The book laying out his theory, Śikhar Śīṅgāṇāpūrcā Śrī Śambhū Mahādev (Marathi) appeared in July 2001 and has been causing controversy in Maharashtra ever since it was published. What this work

36 Varna was not unreal (far from it!), but rather not unambiguous. It was not empirical, but rather perceptual and perspectival. It was not a system of things-in-the-world, but of social semiotics. Different groups believed in different definitions of varna, jāti, and other types of categories of status, but in a way that they sought to actualize and not merely theorize.
promises to present for the first time is an entirely new set of data pointing in a hitherto unprecedented direction as the right place in which to look for Shivaji’s elusive ancestors. According to Dhere, the Bhosaḷes were descended not from the Rājpūts of the Aryan north but from the Hoysaḷas and Yādavas of the Dravidian south; not from kings who were kṣatriya warriors but from kings who were cow-herding pastoralists. In his view, the Bhosaḷes drew their charisma not from the momentarily expedient distant connections of power that Shivaji claimed, but from long-practised local traditions of devotion whose origins they themselves had forgotten. Dhere’s story in its bare outline runs something like this:

Sometime in the first half of the thirteenth century, a first cousin of the Seuṇa Yādava king Śiṅghaṇa I (1200–47 CE), relocated from what is today the Gadag District in north-central Karnataka to Satara District in southern Maharahstra. This migratory chieftain was named Bāḷiyepā Gopati Śirsāt, or Bāḷīp, for short. He was a first cousin of the Yādava ruler on his mother’s side, but in fact he himself was a Hoysaḷa. Yādavas and Hoysaḷas were constantly at war in Kannadiga country and had had a decisive battle at Soraṭur, Bāḷīp’s place of origin, ca. 1190 CE, which the Hoysaḷas had won. Nonetheless, the two clans had both risen to eminence by starting out as feudatories to the Calukyas, both claimed to be yaduvamsī or descended from King Yadu, and it is highly likely that inter-marriage between them continued despite overt political hostilities. All yaduvamsī communities, in north India and the Deccan, conceived of Kṛṣṇa as one—and certainly the most prominent—of their mythic ancestors. His people, the Yādavas of the epic Mahābhārata, are figured as a migratory pastoral people, with Kṛṣṇa being the archetypal cowherd in his youth. Most of the Yādava lineages of medieval India were nomadic cattle- (rather than sheep-) pastoralists (Thapar 1996: 302), which may explain Bāḷīp’s middle name, ‘Gopati’ (Lord of the Cows).37

When Bāḷīp moved north, he took with him a considerable herd of cattle; his people, who were a cattle-herding pastoral community called the Gauli; and his own and his people’s deity, Śambhū Mahādev, a local variant of Śiva. Bāḷīp probably decided to migrate for two reasons: (i) ecological pressure (there is evidence to suggest droughts in his native

37 See Thapar (1996: 300–1) on key features of Yādava lineages: (i) their reference (more often) to descent groups like clans and tribes, rather than to royal dynasties; (ii) their wide geographical spread across northern, central, and peninsular India; (iii) their relative openness, whereby colonized groups could be incorporated into them and upwardly mobile groups could ‘latch-on’ to them; and (iv) their inclusion of both agricultural and pastoral groups, corresponding to a quasi-tribal social and economic structures, but not of advanced agriculturalists, who would have evolved more complex state-like polities.
country and surrounding areas during this period) and (ii) association with his royal Yadava cousin, Singhana I. Although he ruled in distant Devagiri (modern Daulatabad, in Aurangabad District), Singhana may have established a small southern outpost named, after himself, Singhanapat. It was to this place, modern Shingnapur, that Balip went, with his head of cattle, his cowherd subjects, and his god.

Shingnapur is at the base of a hill. On top of this hill, which came to be called, quite simply, Shikhar, or ‘peak’, Balip established a shrine for Śambhū Mahādev. In our time, the town at the base of the hill and the hill are compositely referred to as Shikhar-Shingnapur. Even today, on the hilltop at Shikhar, there stand two temples: the higher one for the god Śambhū and the one slightly lower down on the slope for his devotee, Balip. These temples are not survivals from the thirteenth century, but more recent structures, that have several times in the intervening centuries fallen into disuse, been repaired, rebuilt, expanded, replaced, neglected, revived, and so on. At present they are fairly important living sites of worship in the religious landscape of Maharashtra. Once Balip had installed the deity Śambhū at Shikhar 650 years ago, there is not too much available by way of information about historical activity at this location for about 250 years. All we can glean are slight references to continuing traditions of ritual practice at the Śambhū temple.

After three centuries of near total aporia, we find Shivaji’s grandfather Māloji (c. 1552–1620) renovating the temples and building a tank in their vicinity (Krishna 1932: 52, 53; Sarkar 1929: 18). This tank still survives today. Māloji’s son Shahjā (c. 1594–1664) continued to patronize the shrine, as did his son Shivaji (c. 1630–80), and his sons Sambhājī

38 For a dated, but nonetheless useful, description of the temples at Shikhar Shingnapur, see Henry Cousens (1931: 61–2). Anne Feldhaus’s on-going research will eventually bring the scholarship on this site up to date.

39 Even if we disregard the numerous available narratives about Balip being the founder of the Śambhu temple, on the basis of architectural style alone Deglurkar (1974: 101) has dated the original structure to some time between c. 1250 and 1350. The earlier of these two dates takes us almost exactly to the period of Singhana I, whose father was Balip’s mother’s brother. (Subsequent architectural layers date to the Marātḥā period, and the most recent changes, made in the late twentieth century, are in a south Indian style. See Kanhere 1988: 71–3.)

40 These include an annual yātrā or pilgrimage in the month of Caitra, when devotees carry water up the hill to the god to celebrate his marriage to the goddess Umā. During these festivities, the tops of the two temples are tied together with a very long cloth.
The temple built by Balip was thus the family-shrine of the Bhosales, and Śambhū Mahādev their family god (*kula daivat*). The *sāmāḍhis*, or resting places of Shāhjī, Shivaji, and Sambhāji are all right next to the Śambhū temple, on the Shikhar hillside, confirming the family’s relationship with this site.41

According to Dhere, the Bhosales’ patronage of the two temples is explained by the fact that they are the descendants of the founder of Shikhar, Balip. The earliest known Bhosal was one Kheloji, the great-grandfather of Māloji. We do not have any genealogical records that fill in the gap—from about CE 1250 to about CE 1490—with names of Balip’s descendants or Kheloji’s ancestors (who Dhere claims would be the very same people) (see Figures 10.1a, 10.1b). Nor do we see any Shikhar-related activity till the fourth known generation of Bhosales, that is, Māloji. Nevertheless, Dhere claims that the Bhosales were the descendants of Balip and Balip was the founding father of the Bhosal lineage.

**DHERE’S SOURCES**

What is the kind of evidence that Dhere uses to reconstruct the historical narrative of Balip’s migration and the descent, from this original figure, of the Bhosal line? The answer lies not in official archives, imperial epigraphical materials, and élite discourses (howsoever these may be entextualized), which are the usual sources for historians. Rather, he looks at minor literary texts, oral stories and songs, practices of worship, community profiles, cultic geography, and, to a limited extent, nomenclature and etymology, from vernacular traditions in south-eastern Maharashtra and north-central Karnataka, as also adjoining parts of Andhra Pradesh. While he writes in Marāthī, Dhere’s methods have a lot in common with those of scholars who combine ethnography and literary analysis with history and archaeology, the most notable exponents of this school in Maharashtra being D. D. Kosambi, Gunther Sontheimer, and more recently, Anne Feldhaus.

Under the broad category of literature, Dhere studies some genres more often than others because these are more likely to yield the fugitive

41 See S. Settar, *Memorial Stones: A Study of their Origin, Significance and Variety*. Dharwar: Karnataka University and University of Heidelberg: South Asia Institute (1982), p. 252. The resting places of Shāhjī, Shivaji, and Sambhāji are marked by *vṛndāvanas*, square basins with *tulasi* (Indian basil) plants growing in them. None of these personages died or was cremated at Shikhar. Their memorials have been set up there because this was the family temple.
histories he is trying to unearth. In both Sanskrit and Marathi, he is especially interested in kṣetra māhatmyas, or eulogistic texts about places; sthala purāṇas, or mythic histories of particular sites; sant sāhitya, or devotional literature by Maharashtrian saints, and mahānubhāvīya vānmaya, or the canon of the Mahānubhāva sect. However, most of the literary texts that Dhere examines contain only versions of the saga of Bālip. Very few also carry references to the early history of the Bhosales, in a way that directly connects this family to Bālip and his journey.
In order to find this link between the Balîp legends and the Bhosale histories, Dhere studies the cults of local deities, their shrines, and the modes by which they are worshipped. The lynchpin of his argument is the temple of Śambhû Mahâdev at Shikhar-Shingnapur, which is both remembered as having been founded by Balîp and recorded as having been patronized by the Bhosal. Dhere pays careful attention to the rituals, the songs and the stories of the communities that visit this temple and related shrines elsewhere in the Deccan. These holy sites, when seen as being connected by trans-regional folk traditions, form a network. He is then compelled to hypothesize a genealogical thread binding all those rulers and patrons of Shikhar and its sister Śaiva sites whose memory is preserved by the people of these communities in their vernacular forms of text and practice.

PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

Many contemporary historians of Maharashtra seem sceptical of Dhere’s evidence. The accounts he pays close attention to usually come from the mouths of rural and pastoral-nomadic women. Many consider this data as ethnographic rather than historical; others simply dismiss it as unreliable repository of folk memory. Further, even if we admit the bulk of Dhere’s evidence at face value, there are still 250 years of a missing link between Balîp and Kheloji that are simply not accounted for in his hypothesis.

However, Dhere’s work is compelling, despite the fact that his story has gaps that are not easily filled. We may never be able to retrace an unbroken father-to-son lineage from Balîp to Kheloji Bhosale, but the distance between them begins to look much less problematic if we replace the notion of direct patrilineal descent with that of the descent group. If the Bhosal were not descended from the founder of the Shikhar temple, then why did they treat this temple, and no other, as their family shrine, and the god installed at this temple, Śambhû Mahâdev, as their family deity? It may be possible for us to think of the Bhosal’s patronage of the shrines at Shikhar as the manifestation, albeit in a somewhat weak form, of an imperial cult centred around a temple/temple complex, which is another way of building royal legitimacy. Further, the name ‘Bhosale’ (bhosale) does patently resemble ‘Hoysala’ (hoysala), from which Dhere argues it is linguistically descended. Moreover, there is a branch of the Bhosale clan extant in Maharashtra that goes by the name ‘Śirsāṭ Bhosale’ and Balîp’s full name, from inscriptional sources cited by Dhere, was Balîyeppa Gopati Śirsāṭ.
Even though the Bhosales did not rear cattle and did not lead or rule the Gaulis of Maharashtra exclusively and directly, their markedly Śaiva and nomadic (or at least itinerant) profile does make Gauli, or at least Gauli-like origins seem feasible. From pastoralist big men to warlords on horseback is not an impossible distance to cover in two to three centuries. Certainly many other non-Muslim ruling lineages in the medieval Deccan, from the Yādavas and Hoysalas, through the dynasts of Vijayanagara, to the Nāyakas who came after Shivaji, have all been known to have pastoral or tribal origins. Is it so inconceivable that the Marāṭhās should fall into a pattern with their immediate predecessors and successors in peninsular India?

Moreover, from Shivaji’s time, Marāṭhās became cultivators at both ends of the economic spectrum—on the one hand poor peasants, kūnbīs, treated as lowly in the social hierarchy, and on the other rich landowners, whose martial heritage was valorized. From pastoralism to settled agriculture is the trajectory of sedentarization that many communities in the Deccan and elsewhere (in eastern and central India, for instance) have traversed in the transition from medieval times to modernity. This is especially true of Rājpūtizing tribal communities, which historically are seen to follow the trajectory that Dhere’s theory seems to map: a mixed agrarian and pastoralist economy to begin with (in some cases, for example among forest-dwelling tribes, simple cultivation goes along with hunting and gathering rather than pastoralism), followed by the growth of settled agriculture. This tends to coincide with the long-term occupation of a territory, and, very often, with the increased patronage of brāhmaṇas, who, along with agriculture, induce or facilitate the other features of Rājpūtization already discussed (Chattopadhyaya 1998: 60, 63; Singh 1974: 320, 328).

There has been scholarly disagreement about the agricultural profile of the Bhosales in particular (vide Krishna 1932: 50 contra Sarkar 1929: 13–14, 16–17), but Habib (1995: 90) has suggested that, at least among north Indian Rājpūts during the Mughal period, ‘[a]t its lower levels the rural aristocracy must have sometimes stood at the fringe of the big peasantry. The occasional vagueness of the line of distinction between the two is indicated by the contemporary use of the term...ra’iyat, which

42 In Maharashtra today, the Marāṭhās have left the Gaulis far behind in the hierarchy of caste and the pecking order of economic and political influence, which is why they so abhor the idea of ceding their most prized identity symbol, the archetypal Marāṭhā, Shivaji himself, to those they consider their social inferiors.
stood sometimes for the common peasantry and sometimes for...the
headman and other superior elements.’ It is well possible that, analog-
ously, Marāṭhā identity in the seventeenth century was a continuum from
kṣatriya to kūṇḍī, which is what it is even today. Seen in this perspective,
neither genealogical links with nomadic-pastoralist communities nor an
overlap with cultivating communities throughout the colonial and post-
colonial periods constitutes a contradiction, one that must be ruled out for
Shivaji and his people.

Dhere is trying to find the real origins of the Bhosales in their pre-
Marāṭhā past. What it might have meant for Shivaji to assert himself or
to be perceived by others as a Bhosale/a Marāṭhā/a Rājput/a rāj/a śūdra/
a kṣatriya/a chatrapati and so on—this consideration comes later. Dhere
suggests that Shivaji was actually the direct descendant of one Balip, who
himself was a Hoysaḷa chieftain, a leader of cow-herding Gauḷi people,
a cousin of the Yādava king of Devagiri in the thirteenth century, a
Kannadiga, a Śaiva, and a migrant settler in Maharashtra proper. Clearly,
all these results tend to upset received notions of the ‘truth’ about Shivaji.
They can only be arrived at by excavating vernacular traditions in the way
that Dhere, unlike all other historians, has done.

In the later part of the nineteenth century, Jotiba Phule would go on to
paint, in his ballad, Shivaji’s identity as a ‘kulvādi bhūśan’, literally an
ornament (bhūśan) to the community of cultivators (kulvādi) (Phule 1869).
When translated into the terms of the varṇa scheme, both Phule’s kunbi
Shivaji and Dhere’s Gauḷi Shivaji gravitate towards the category of the
śūdra. However, the Shivaji of traditional Marāṭhā historiography and the
Shivaji of Yādava–Hoysala ancestry that Dhere posits tend to fit better
into the category of the kṣatriya. Phule wanted this kind of connection to
be made, for the political empowerment of śūdra and ati-śūdra commu-
nities by the invocation of a powerful historical symbol like Shivaji. Dhere
does not appear to have any interest in highlighting either pole of the
bipolar—Gauḷi (śūdra) and Hoysala–Yādava (kṣatriya)—Shivaji that he
reconstructs.

It is noteworthy that the first official expedition (not counting raids and
looting forays) that Shivaji made after his consecration was to a number
of religious sites, including the temple of the goddess Bhavānī at Pratāpgaṛh
and the temple of Śambhū Mahādev at Shikhār. His first gesture after
consolidating his power and achieving the royal status he had sought was
thus to return to his family shrine, and pay thanks to his family god. Perhaps
in this way he sought to reconcile the Bhosale in him with the Chatrapati,
the pastoralist with the warrior, his past with his present.
Conclusion

Just as we run aground if we try to look for a historical Rājpūt person of the Sisodia family who might have been an ancestor of the Bhosales, so too we are unlikely to be able to draw an unambiguous line of descent from Baḷīp to Khelojī. However, it is not the case that these narratives can be dismissed as either unverifiable theories, or outright fabrications. Instead, both stories point to a historical process that does seem to account for and to accommodate a figure like Shivaji. This is the process of tribal communities (like those who went on to be Rājpūt) as well as pastoral nomadic communities (like the Gauḷī) gradually becoming sedentary and developing an agricultural economy. With sedentarization and agriculture came a certain relationship to the land, which, over time, yielded territorially based power, at least for some families in the community. Once these powerful families had begun to evolve state-like polities, they developed a concern with status that, in medieval times, was best secured through participation in hegemonic forms of ritual practice, and subscription to their attendant ideology (both the practice and the ideology being mediated by Sanskrit texts and their brāhmaṇa exponents). Hence the desire to enter the varṇa system, to claim kṣatriya status, to perform royal rituals, and to assume ritual kingship.

Whether or not he actually came from a north Indian Sisodia background, or a south Indian Hoysala–Yādava one, the trajectory of Shivaji’s ambition and action made sense. It is not possible for us to conclude that he was a śūdra. What we can say is that if he had tried to have himself declared king as a Marāṭhā or as a Gauḷī, he may have laid himself open to being construed as a śūdra pretender to the throne. Whether or not being a Marāṭhā and being a kṣatriya went together, being king and being kṣatriya had to go together in order for his power to have social significance along with political meaning. This is what Shivaji’s own claim of Rājpūt lineage, and similarly Dhere’s hypothesis about Gauḷī origins for him, both help us to understand, each in its own way. They do not help us to trace the mūla purusa (founding father) of the Bhosale line, nor do they answer the question: Who was Shivaji? Shivaji’s story is about becoming, not being—and this, precisely, is the story of varṇa identity too.

We need to flesh out the relationship between how upwardly mobile, ambitious groups negotiated power on the ground in and through the flux of identities, and what they did to become accommodated into second-order ideological templates—like the varṇāśrama grid—that assigned status to individuals, families, and communities in highly codified, determinative,
and rigid ways. Shivaji’s mode of making his ‘ritual status’ commensurate with his ‘actual status’ (Thapar 1974) was particularly marked, by the performance of the abhiśeka. In his political and military career, he was able to actualize himself as a sovereign ruler. But he discovered soon enough that if he sought legitimacy by a brahmanical yardstick—which, paradoxically, was the only kind of legitimacy that would allow him to one-up his local adversaries and confront the Mughal emperor as an equal—then his hard-won authority was not self-grounding. He had to claim to be a kṣatriya by birth with the help of a Rājpūt ancestry; next he had to become a kṣatriya through the rituals of investiture and marriage; and then he had to assume kṣatriya kingship through the royal consecration. After the abhiśeka, Shivaji was called Kṣatriyakulāvataṃsa, the ornament of a kṣatriya family; Sarvabhauma, possessor of all territories; Chatrapati, lord who bears the royal umbrella. None of these titles could apply without the others.

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