Jotirao Phule's *Satyashodh* and the Problem of Subaltern Consciousness

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In an 1877 review of the third annual report of the Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth-Seeking Society), which had been established by Mahatma Jotirao Phule in Pune in 1873, Marathi Brahman journalist and litterateur Vishnushashtri Chiplunkar sharply criticized the efforts of Phule and his circle to set their lower-caste fellows on the path of truth (*satya*). In particular, he rejected their condemnation of Brahmans, encapsulated by the oft-used designation "Brahman-demon" (*brahmanraksha*). Referring especially to figures like Tukaram, the seventeenth-century Marathi poet-saint born into a family of the Kunbi-Maratha cultivating caste, Chiplunkar argued, "Brahmans have constantly sung of the greatness of saints and holy men born into the lowest of castes, and only giving attention to merit, they elevated them to a supreme position and made them their equals. What boldness and what loyalty to government [*rajnishtha*] and truth do these tough guys like Phule show in barking at Brahmans and licking their lips at scraps that might be tossed at their feet."[1] For Chiplunkar, the efforts of the Samaj to expose Brahmans were nothing more than servile attempts to win the affections of the British government. Phule's compositions, especially his polemical tract *Gulamgiri* (*Slavery*), were marked by a strange multiplicity (*vaichitrya*), traversing a bewildering array of genres, registers, and influences. Phule himself was a mere pest, aggravating newspaper editors with his persistent requests for publication.

Chiplunkar's scathing review is symptomatic of the scorn with which the Samaj was greeted by upper-caste leaders in Maharashtra, who found it very difficult to stomach its friendly relations with Christian missionaries and its sympathetic appeals to the benevolence of the British colonial state. The work of the Samaj over the course of its career from the 1870s to the 1920s straddled the boundaries of social reform, religious experimentation, and political representation. Its founder, Jotirao Phule, who had been born into a Mali-caste family in 1827, was educated at a mission school sponsored by the Free Church of Scotland. Having completed his own education, Phule, along with his wife Savitribai, concentrated his energies on expanding educational opportunities for lower castes. Later Phule began to produce some of his most radical texts, including *Chhatrapati Shivaji Bhosale yancha Powada* (1869), *Brahmananche Kasab* (1869), and *Gulamgiri* (1873), and to recruit like-minded peers to the Samaj. Though it initially confined itself to educational and charitable endeavors, the Samaj gradually established a presence in villages across Maharashtra, where it encouraged residents to dispense with the services of Brahman priests

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

1. Chiplunkar, "Marathi Pustake," 1:453.

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at ritual occasions. To further this sort of work, Phule delivered a series of speeches in 1882–83, later titled *Shetkaryacha Asud*, and from 1876–82 served on the committee of the Pune Municipality. His foray into religious composition, the *Sarvajanik Satya Dharmapustak* (*SSDP*), was published in 1891 by his son Yashwantrao, just after his death.

With equal parts ferocity and perspicacity, Chiplunkar identified qualities of Phule's thought with which this essay will grapple. First, he understood the Samaj to be a religious sect. Notwithstanding his enduring skepticism toward any religion's claim to absolute veracity, Phule articulated his vision of a search for truth (*satyashodh*) within a religious framework that was indebted, but not hitched to, the Protestant Christianity of his upbringing. This framework was anchored in a belief in the universal rights bestowed upon humankind by a generous and loving creator-deity. Chiplunkar was pessimistic about the viability of this *satyashohak* faith, arguing that it was not grounded in a concrete ethics. *Satyashodh* was a religion, but it did not seem to be a religion with any identifiable ideal or purpose—ethical, eschatological, or otherwise. Second, according to Chiplunkar, there was no consistency to the truth of *satyashodh*. How could Phule claim to have found the truth when he trafficked in so many disparate idioms, rewrote history to suit his undisguised rhetorical objectives, and paid little attention to grammatical and scriptural authorities? How could he have dared to encompass all of cosmic and human affairs from the origins of the universe to the Puranic time of Vishnu to the much more recent historic past of the assumption of British power in India? Faced with such a strange, unassimilable variegation of form and subject, Chiplunkar argued, one had no choice but to conclude that Phule was only an idol of knowledge (*dnyanmurti*), luring his worshippers into what could only be an ultimately fruitless search after truth.[2]

That Chiplunkar was unable to precisely define *satyashodh* should not suggest to us that Phule was somehow mad or deluded, but rather that he made epistemological indeterminacy itself into an ineluctable condition for the practice of *satyashodh*. In seeking the origins of a social order in which relations of domination and subordination hinged upon the knowledge of a dominant class, Phule found that he had to grapple with an even more intractable problem: the consciousness of the dominated. He articulates, in a prescient and inchoate fashion, the ways in which the transformation of a social order is predicated on an indeterminate process of transforming the consciousness of a collectivity. The primary purpose of *satyashodh dharma*, pace Chiplunkar, was not to identify any unitary, much less God-given, truth but rather to inculcate *satyashodh* as a deliberate and unending practice of inquisitive self-transformation. For Phule, the practice of *satyashodh* begins with the cultivation of a faculty of rational inquiry into the foundations of the given world. In turn, the capacity of a subaltern class to offer recognizable observations about the world in which it finds itself rests on a prior reflection upon the experience of domination. This elusive though decisive moment of the formation of experience within insurgent consciousness emerges most clearly in Phule's writings on the *shudra-atishudra shetkari* (cultivator).[3]

These concerns may serve to enrich the existing historical scholarship on Phule and his legacy. A number of indispensable studies have reflected on the organizations, networks, and institutions of Phule and his circle; the larger Satyashodhak movement and its connections to working-class and peasant activism; the ideological and rhetorical facets of Phule's thought; and the ways in which it was inaugural for subsequent traditions of non-Brahman and Dalit politics. For the purposes of this essay, it will be useful to highlight three trajectories of anticaste thought and practice in which Phule's contributions were critical. Phule in his own time was a participant in circles associated with nonconformist Protestant missions and semiclandestine religious reform groups such as the Paramhamsa Mandali and the Prarthana Samaj.[4] These eclectic relationships facilitated the sort of

2. See ibid., 449.

3. Phule's term *shudra-atishudra* amalgamates both the laboring Shudra castes and the so-called untouchable castes. In its refusal of any substantive difference between the *shudra* and the *ati-shudra*, the term produces a collective dominated subject out of a critique of the fabrication of caste.

4. For more information about Protestant missionary and religious reform circles in western India and their influence on Phule's thought, see O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology*.

social and religious experimentation that Phule would later explore in *SSDP*. Phule inaugurated two very different anticaste political traditions. The fiery and bold language with which he described the actions of Brahmans was later distilled into a critique of Brahmanism, specifically Brahmanical dominance of political institutions, by non-Brahman activists in Pune, Satara, Kolhapur, and elsewhere.[5] The non-Brahman movement that arose out of this critique did not often recognize the specificity of Dalit experience, and so it must be distinguished from the trajectory of Dalit political thought that too drew on Phule's ideas. Dalit intellectuals up to and including B. R. Ambedkar in the early twentieth century emphasized certain elements of Phule's thought, such as the dispossession and deformation of the body in the historical experience of caste, that were lost in political non-Brahmanism.[6] Because of Phule's legacy in non-Brahman and Dalit as well as somewhat more diffuse regional and national traditions, it is useful to reconstruct the basic foundations of his intellectual practice.

This essay is one of a series about insurgent political thought in the non-West and more particularly, what insights such thought may provide about the possibility of an emancipated intelligence. In the field of South Asian history, the most influential theorizations of insurgent consciousness were offered by Ranajit Guha and his collaborators in the Subaltern Studies project.[7] In his landmark *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, Guha showed that instances of peasant insurgency under British rule betrayed a pattern of consciousness. The insurgency of consciousness lay in those contradictions produced when a dominated class sought to understand and transform a world it inhabited but had little part in defining. He elaborates:

> We must take the peasant-rebel's awareness of his own world and his will to change it as our point of departure. For however feeble and tragically ineffective this awareness and will might have been, *they were still nothing less than the elements of a consciousness which was learning to compile and classify the individual and disparate moments of experience and organize these into some sort of generalizations.* These were, in other words, the very beginnings of a theoretical consciousness. Insurgency was indeed the site where the two mutually contradictory tendencies within this still imperfect, almost embryonic theoretical consciousness—that is, a conservative tendency made up of the inherited and uncritically absorbed material of the ruling culture and a radical one oriented toward a practical transformation of the rebel's conditions of existence—met for a decisive trial of strength.[8] (my italics)

By reading the archive for its silences and exclusions—in much the same fashion that Phule read Hindu myth—Guha was able to demonstrate the ways in which an explanation of social and political domination as well as insurgency prompts an investigation of consciousness in formation.

Despite its animating interest in the connections between consciousness and social order, and by extension the process whereby critical thought emerges, Guha's work and the broader Subaltern Studies corpus has posed intractable problems for understanding complex social formations shaped by multiple axes of historical experience, particularly caste and gender.[9] As scholarship on Phule, Ambedkar, and other non-Brahman figures has demonstrated, caste and gender became important nodes around which political subjectivities developed in colonial South Asia. The representation of power offered in Guha made domination and insurgency into such dialectical counterparts that the intimacy of modern colonial and postcolonial institutions to anticaste thought and practice was largely neglected. As Anupama Rao in particular has suggested, Dalit critiques of history, violence, and embodied experience were central to the definition of political modernity in India.[10] Finally, the later works of Guha, Partha Chatterjee, and Di-

5. On political non-Brahmanism, see Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt*, and Phadke, *Keshavrao Jedhe*.

6. For an examination of the intellectual specificities of Dalit thought in western India, see Rao, *The Caste Question*, 39–81. For a dated but still useful discussion, see Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit*.

7. See, in particular, Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, and Chatterjee, "More on Modes of Power."

8. Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, 11.

9. This point is one of the central foci of O'Hanlon, "Recovering the Subject."

10. For the full argument, see Rao, *The Caste Question*, 1–39.

pesh Chakrabarty made the important and enduring insight that any account of intellectual thought in South Asia must begin with categories and logics that make sense within whatever life-world is in question. Yet the histories of thought that subaltern studies have produced tend to ignore the cross-cutting local, regional, and global itineraries along which ideas travel in favor of resolutely male, Hindu, and generally upper-caste domains of thought. Of course, this tendency is not unrelated to the methodological shifts away from social history, political economy, and critiques of capitalism that have marked the development of subaltern studies. Eleanor Zelliot, Gail Omvedt, Rosalind O'Hanlon, Rao, and others have shown that anti-caste thought, if it is understood in its specificity, may in fact offer its own categories for apprehending and representing the universal. With respect to Phule's interests, one might point to the exploitation of lower-caste labor within agrarian and semi-urban economies, the violent marking of the lower-caste body, and the turn to religion as a site for ethical self-fashioning, prior to and proximate with political self-fashioning. This essay restages Subaltern Studies' call for an engagement with the relationship between thought and subalternity against its own inadequacies and opacities. To do so is not to posit consciousness above or outside of the material determinations of social order, or conversely, to tether consciousness to society, but rather to describe the evolution of a deliberate practice of observing, apprehending, and making judgments about the world.

It is only in this framework that we are able to make sense of Phule's account of the consciousness of the *shudra-atishudra*. Phule works through an analytic of misrecognition, positing that the artifice of caste division (*jatibhed*) has been imprinted onto the consciousness of the *shudra-atishudra* such that he or she can only (mis)recognize caste as a given object, already rendered fatally separate from his or her grasp. In order to restore subject and object—the *shudra-atishudra* and the caste order of which he or she is a necessary component—one must enact a transformation of mind by making visible the conditions that give rise to the impressed consciousness of the *shudra-atishudra*. Phule made sense of these conditions by describing multiple forces of coercion, or, as Guha terms it, a "composite apparatus of dominance."[11] That is, he elaborated a logic of objectification reiterated by a constellation of social forces, ranging from colonial state officials to Brahman ritual specialists to village moneylenders. No wonder, then, that he conceives caste to be an instrument of domination, manufactured to assist Brahmans in their self-interested exploitation of lower-caste labor, yet one that is facilitated by the routine procedures of the colonial state apparatus.

With these theoretical and methodological considerations in mind, this essay will return to the root issues of mind, consciousness, and knowledge with which Phule struggled. Over the course of his intellectual career, he returned to these same issues within different epistemological fields, defined most prominently by three symbolic devices: the Puranic epic, the colonial ethnographic report, and the religious scripture. At the same time, we can discern a more decisive, strategic moment of negative critique in the earlier texts and a more experimental and uncertain moment of positive reconstruction by the time of the composition of *SSDP*. In *Gulamgiri*, he offers an account of the objectification of consciousness that is hitched to the writing of a suppressed ancestral mytho-history of strategy, encounter, and domination. Such a consciousness is to be remade not only by interrogating the validity of Puranic narrative on empirical grounds, but also by reinscribing its archetypal figures with new aesthetic and moral attributes. He continues to make use of the moral force of story, setting, and character in *Shetkaryacha Asud*, but in this text, it is connected to an effort to describe the actual condition (*vastavik sthiti*) of the everyday life of the *shudra-atishudra shetkari* and the ways in which this condition is misconstrued and misrecognized. He renders the tensions of the Maharashtrian countryside in exceedingly concrete terms, laying emphasis on the ways in which Brahmans drive *shudra-atishudra* cultivators to poverty, madness, and death and prevent them from seeking succor through the tendering of advice (*upadesh*).

11. Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, 8.

For Phule, it is through this intimate mediating function of the Brahman in all realms of life that the social order attains its seeming objectivity and fixity. Finally, making particular reference to *SSDP*, I will explore the extent to which Phule's exposition of a *satyashodh dharma* in the form of a religious book (*dharmapustak*) makes plain the limitations of a practice of *satyashodh* in enacting an ethical project of subaltern self-emancipation.

Brahmanical Strategy and the Objectification of Consciousness

Gulamgiri is dedicated to the "good people" of the United States for their efforts to free African American slaves and was delivered as a plea to the British government to emulate the Americans. Although *shudra-atishudras* may be free from the physical slavery (*kayik dasyatva*) of Brahmans, Phule states, they have not been fully freed from the bonds of mental slavery (*mansik dasyatva*). Published only ten years after the Emancipation Proclamation, *Gulamgiri* may be situated in a global history of slavery, emancipation, and freedom. These issues took on world-historical salience through the conjunctures of the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions; the nonconformist British missionary critique of the excesses of plantocratic and mercantile exploitation in the colonies; and the many advances and regresses in the career of the abolition of slavery. Phule grappled with the legacies of these conjunctures in *Gulamgiri*, and in so doing, his was only one of many statements across the nineteenth century on the incomplete project of emancipation. In his case, to argue that this project was still incomplete was also to point to the contradiction between the Anglo-American political and intellectual traditions—which he associated with Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) as well as revolutionary war heroes George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette—and the persistence of bonded labor in the British Empire. He suggests as much through an anecdote about a group of Brahmans who exhorted him on the basis of Paine's views to suppress any affiliation to caste sentiment and instead to fight for national liberation from British rule. Phule responds in the manner of a loyal, freedom-loving British subject: rather than listening to the lies of Brahmans, *shudra-atishudras* ought to expand the scope of freedom by directing their complaints to a benevolent, if misguided, British government.[12]

In *Gulamgiri*, Phule declares that a suppressed history of war, conquest, and domination lies at the center of *shudra-atishudra* consciousness. The basic outlines are simple: the Aryan ancestors of Brahmans came by sea from Iran, invaded India, conquered and slaughtered the Kshatriya forefathers of *shudra-atishudras*, enslaved the remaining population, and then concealed their crimes by means of scripture, law, and custom. This history of foreign invasion is overlaid with a retelling of the Puranic battle between the gods (*devas*) and demons (*asuras*) wherein various avatars of Vishnu incrementally established Brahmanical power in strategic, calculated, and brutally violent ways. This history culminates in a dramatic confrontation between Vamana, the dwarf avatar of Vishnu, and Bali, a demon who is refigured as the last surviving Kshatriya king. Bali's defeat marks the beginnings of Brahmanical rule and the demise of *shudra-atishudra* power and prosperity, now existing only in spectral form in the memory of today's *shudra-atishudras*. By finding and excavating a realist history from the recesses of a deep Puranic past, Phule simultaneously marks Brahmanical dominance as an originary and consequential moment while suggesting that the strategic manner of its institution allows for contestation by *shudra-atishudras* in the present.

Phule's buried history of real, situated relations of domination and subordination has two purposes in the text of *Gulamgiri*: to serve as a necessary first stage of an account of the objectification of consciousness and to demythologize the Puranic corpus, thereby making it responsive to new epistemological and affective practices of mind. As mentioned above, the final crime of the Aryan invaders was to conceal their misdeeds. In the preface to *Gulamgiri*, Phule elaborates: "Having attained preeminence, the Brahmans wrote many artificial books [*banavat granth*] based on their self-interest to guarantee their control for eternity, and they told the ignorant Shudradi-Atishudra people that these books came from

12. See Phule, *Gulamgiri*, 139–40.

God. In these books, they wrote that the Shudras were created by God so that they should be eager to serve the Brahmans and to attain happiness through this service."[13]

Phule positions his critique of consciousness against the ideology of caste *dharma*, arguing that the metonymic relationship between devotion to Brahmans and devotion to God is a strategic, self-interested, and all too human imposition. Nonetheless, he goes on to say, this imposition is such that it appears not as a calculated and therefore contestable maneuver, but as an objective fact: "In order to fill their stomachs, Brahmans again and again instruct ignorant Shudra people from their self-interested books, and as a result, a sense of devotion (*pujyabuddhi*) for them is produced in their minds—he who is forced to give to them is he who gives appropriate worship to God."[14] Devotion to Brahmans, in its entrance into the field of *shudra-atishudra* apprehension, mutates from a forceful tactic of domination into a self-originating quality of mind.

Phule illustrates the process whereby *shudra-atishudra* consciousness is formed and objectified under Brahmanical influence through the metaphorical language of weighing, stamping, imprinting, and impressing. To make sense of his language, we might turn to Georg Lukács's critique of the commodity form: "The transformation of the commodity relation into a thing of 'ghostly objectivity' cannot therefore content itself with the reduction of all objects for the gratification of human needs to commodities. It *stamps* its *imprint* upon the whole consciousness of man" (my italics).[15] For instance, Phule relates, "Those people imposed their weight [*vajandari*] on the minds of this people."[16] He continues, "The heavy weight [*vajan*] of Hindu religion sits on the minds of farmers" (94). He also describes this process through the figure of fixing or stamping an impression: "The impression [*thasa*] of their instruction has become fixed on the minds of ignorant Shudra people" (96). These metaphorics of weight and impression reinforce that *shudra-atishudra* consciousness is formed by and through Brahmanical craft. Such craft weighs so heavily on the mind that one can only perceive the world through its ways of explaining and constructing that world. Most central for Phule is the example of the caste order itself:

> They created fictitious arrangements for caste division [*jatibhed*], and they wrote many self-interested books about it. . . . Seeing this deed, today's Shudras egotistically gave themselves names to match their occupations such as Mali, Kunbi, Sonar, Shimpi, Lohar, Sutar. They do not know the secret—that the ancestors of these same groups, being of one family, fought the Brahmans with passion for their ancestral nation, leading the Brahmans to bring misfortune on them and make them produce food. They have learned to hate from what the Brahmans have told them. (97–98)

As a result of the objectification of consciousness by the device of *jatibhed*, caste designations appear to *shudra-atishudras* to be given facts, and concomitantly, their occupations appear as separate, independent conditions determining their relationship to the material world.

Jatibhed is one of several symbolic devices invented to render the social order into an incontestable fact—others mentioned in *Gulamgiri* include spells and hymns (*jadumantra*), orally transmitted folk tales (*dantkatha*), the sacred thread of twice-born castes, the Gayatri mantra, and even the art of palm-leaf writing, said to be the creation of Brahma in the guise of a wily administrator (112). In pointing to the instrumental use of symbol, Phule does more than offer an account of the formation of dominated consciousness; in fact, he demonstrates the basic accessibility and malleability of image, word, and narrative to competing human purposes. Ritual can be desanctified, and *purana-itihasa* can be demythologized, making their content sensitive to a new strategic purpose, which in *Gulamgiri* is the composition of a realist history of Aryan conquest. Such malleability of symbol in turn encourages the adoption of new practices of mind on the part of the dominated. In this way, *Gulamgiri* is not just a polemic about Aryan enslavement, Brahmanical domination, or even the origins of *jatibhed*; rather it is a blueprint for repurposing the categories with which the

13. Ibid., 87.

14. Ibid., 88.

15. Lukács, "Reification," 100.

16. Phule, *Gulamgiri*, 93.

shudra-atishudra has been taught to make sense of his or her world. I will suggest in the remainder of this section that this blueprint serves at least two distinct imperatives: the empirical interrogation and the affective revaluation of received stories and archetypes.

In his tale of the misdeeds of Brahma and various avatars of Vishnu, Phule subjects these figures to scrutiny on empirical and even scientific grounds, encouraging the reader to reject the received knowledge of texts like the *Manusmriti* and the *Bhagavata Purana* in favor of an inductive analysis of sense-derived evidence. For example, he casts doubt on the capacity of Brahma to conceive the human race from his body parts alone; he questions the potential for sound to travel between Bali and an inflated Vamana with his head in the sky; and he makes comparisons between the physical and behavioral characteristics of humans and animals. Take the following discussion of Matsya, the half-human, half-fish avatar of Vishnu:

> In their bodily composition, diet, sleeping patterns, mating, and reproduction, how many differences exist between humankind and fish? And accordingly, how many miraculous differences exist between their brains, hearts, lungs, intestines, and reproductive organs? Mankind is a species that subsists on land. If a human falls into water, he will gulp down water and die. Fish is a species that lives out its entire life-cycle in water, and if you take a fish out of water, it will die. Human women give birth to one child at a time, but female fish first lay eggs, hatch them, and then draw out their offspring. . . . Even in the civilized countries of Europe and America, not even one man well-versed in the sciences would put his hand on his heart and swear that he would be able to hatch fish eggs. . . . Given these doubts, we cannot be satisfied with the extant histories, and we must come to the conclusion that some crafty people took the opportunity to stuff the ancient books with these folk-tales. (102–3)

Ironically recalling Chiplunkar, Phule in such passages exposes the strangeness of chimerical Puranic characters and demonstrates the efficacy of an empirical, inductive method for determining the veracity of inherited stories. Such a practice of mind might enable the *shudra-atishudra* to discover the essentially human-manufactured nature of sacral or mythic symbolic devices and thereby repurpose them into new categories for making sense of the world.

Phule reinscribes characters and stories from the *purana-itihasa* tradition with an eye not just for their empirical verifiability but also for their role in the making of moral character. In particular, he takes Puranic figures to be exemplars of an array of associated moral attributes; by creating an affective or sentimental attachment to these figures, the reader learns the ways in which one ought to conduct oneself in the world. Hence it becomes part of Phule's task to create new associations between exemplary figures and particular moral constellations. Vishnu's lion-avatar Nrisimha, for instance, destroys the demon-king Hirnyakashyapu in the traditional Puranic story because the latter, in an arrogation of absolute power, has been tormenting the gods. However, in Phule's retelling, Nrisimha plots murder not to protect the gods but to seize Hirnyakashyapu's kingdom. Describing Nrisimha's character (*svabhav*), Phule states, "He was greedy, crafty, traitorous, deceitful, murderous, hard-hearted, and cruel. He was firm and strong of body" (106). Even more extreme is the case of Parshurama, another avatar of Vishu to whom Phule assigns responsibility for the final massacre of the original Kshatriya inhabitants of India, which culminates in Parshurama's exceptionally violent decision to kill off the newborn infants of the remaining Kshatriya widows. He emphasizes the brutality of these events, using an apostrophic mode to illustrate the emotional state of the widows as they flee from Parshurama. But the greatest crime, he tells us, is that Brahmans included the story of Parshurama's deeds in a sanitized form to make an example of the proper ends of man (*purushartha*). Here again is Phule's claim that an originary history of the violent institution of social order has been buried in order to control lower-caste consciousness, but in this instance, control is exerted through moral exemplification (92).

In this section, I have demonstrated that Phule's effort in *Gulamgiri* is as much to encourage the development of a certain cast of mind as it is to provide an account of the formation of *shudra-atishudra* consciousness through a history of violence and domination. It should come as no surprise that this effort is deeply tutelary, given that

Phule was first an educator. Nonetheless, *Gulamgiri* largely presents *shudra-atishudra* consciousness as a theoretical object, produced by Brahmanical design in the hoary past. It is in Phule's writings published after the formation of the Satyashodhak Samaj that he broaches the question of the living world and consciousness of the *shudra-atishudra* and how it is to be transformed through *satyashodh*.

Rendering the Social World of the *Shudra-Atishudra Shetkari*

Phule was not a peasant, much less an insurgent one. Educated, respectable, and loyal to the British colonial state, he was in many ways a very unrepresentative spokesperson for the rural subaltern classes that were the subject of his abiding preoccupations. Nonetheless, he was able to describe the conditions of life for the *shudra-atishudra shetkari* of nineteenth-century rural Maharashtra in a sustained and systematic fashion, thereby refining his critique of Brahmanical dominance into a more complex representation of a social totality. In so doing, he anticipated the arguments that would be made by twentieth-century scholars about the transition to capitalism in Maharashtra.[17] Omvedt, Jairus Banaji, and Neil Charlesworth have in different ways observed that the relations of domination found in the countryside of turn-of-the-century Maharashtra reflected a rural economy that was neither entirely capitalist nor entirely precapitalist.[18] Although production of cash crops for export, especially cotton, had become a significant sector of the rural economy by Phule's time, it was not the primary source of livelihood for most rural farmers, and reinvestment of capital into agricultural production was largely nonexistent. Agriculture consisted mainly of small-scale farming for subsistence that the rural laboring classes could only sustain via loans with local moneylenders. Insofar as their means of production were controlled by rural and urban holders of capital, they had been effectively proletarianized. Moreover, some cultivators could no longer subsist on their own plots and instead were forced to perform wage labor for other landowners or in the nascent urban industry. In short, they were entangled in recurring relations of debt and wage bondage. These relations were enforced by what are sometimes termed "feudal" forms of domination backed by the threat of physical or psychic force and organized along precapitalist lines of caste and community.[19] To grasp such a situation, one that was neither totally capitalist nor precapitalist, Phule had to think caste *and* capitalism in one and the same instance.

In the later sections of *Gulamgiri* and especially in S*hetkaryacha Asud*, the site of Phule's investigation shifts from mytho-history to the everyday world of the *shudra-atishudra shetkari*. Concomitantly, the target of Phule's epistemological critique is no longer the Puranic text, but rather the British administrative report. He makes critical reference to the efforts of W. W. Hunter, a Bengal administrator who had been appointed director general of statistics in 1869 and director general of gazetteers in 1877, to collect information on the subjects of the government of India. Casting doubt on the veracity of Hunter's conclusions, Phule reflects, "He traveled by train to all three Presidencies with his assistant, but due to the illiteracy of the *shudra-atishudra* farmers, he did not visit the filthy huts of the cultivators himself to view their actual [*vastavik*] circumstances and collect their testimony so as to conduct a careful investigation of the misery that they endure."[20] To fill the apparent lacunae of an avowedly empirical project that had failed to grasp the actuality of *shudra-atishudra* life, Phule introduced an analytic for apprehending experience in its formation.

Phule sought to push beyond the limits of a colonial ethnographic lens to a more radical empiricism that apprehends the concrete world as it is formed in *shudra-atishudra* experience. That is, the *shudra-atishudra* encounters a world that has already been mediated by a constellation of social forces beyond his or her control. Lukács speaks to the ways in which a recogition of this process of mediation is a necessary first step to apprehending reality in its givenness:

17. For a sense of the mode of production debates of the early 1970s, which grew out of theoretical and thematic concerns that lie far outside the scope of this paper, see Thorner, "Semi-Feudalism or Capitalism?"

18. See Omvedt, "Development of the Maharashtrian Class Structure"; Banaji, "Capitalist Domination and the Small Peasantry"; and Charlesworth, *Peasants and Imperial Rule*.

19. See Chatterjee, "More on Modes of Power."

20. Phule, *Shetkaryacha Asud*, 213–14.

> But in fact, to leave empirical reality behind can only mean that the objects of the empirical world are to be understood as aspects of a totality, i.e., as the aspects of a total social situation caught up in the process of historical change. Thus the category of mediation is a lever with which to overcome the mere immediacy of the empirical world and as such it is not something (subjective) foisted on to the objects from their outside, it is no value-judgment or "ought" opposed to their "is." *It is rather the manifestation of their authentic objective structure.*[21]

In the course of elucidating a total social situation, Phule found that an array of mediations were immanent to the world as it was given to the *shudra-atishudra*. Thus, he could no longer explain social order simply by way of an external and imposed Brahmanical design. Rather, he had to grapple with how the designs of a composite configuration of domination had actually come to shape the appearance of the world for the *shudra-atishudra*. Insofar as it accounts for the ways in which an experience of the world is an effect of an always prior mediation, this mode of critical thought works to expand the sorts of questions that a straightforward empiricism can bring to bear on the social world.

In S*hetkaryacha Asud*, Phule offers his most sustained account of the living conditions of *shudra-atishudra* farmers, describing how they live, eat, and work in all of its sensible plenitude. He employs an exceedingly colloquial Marathi specific to the common usages of cultivators, naming their farming tools, cooking supplies, foods, clothes, and other articles of daily life. He attempts to describe in toto the forms and appearances that compose the world of the cultivator. As he builds up layer upon layer of detail, this world becomes recognizable for his audience: "Brothers, if you yourselves investigate, you will easily agree that all of the two-, three-, and four-room homes of the cultivators are tiled or thatched. In each house, in the corner with the stove there is an iron ladle or spatula, a wooden bowl, a blow-pipe, a griddle, a milk pitcher, and metal dishes for roasting underneath."[22] The overflowing presence of specific functional objects in such passages suggests the concreteness that Phule sought to lend to his representation of rural life.

Exemplary is Phule's long sketch of a day in the life of a single farmer whom he takes to be a specimen (*masla*) of the indebted and uneducated albeit extremely proud population of *kunbi* farmers. Following the farmer from his angry visit to the tent of a local British tax collector back to his home, Phule depicts the immediate surroundings of the cultivator's dwelling. In order to demonstrate the way that he moves from the environment to the body of the cultivator to construct a total image, I will quote a passage at length:

> On the front side of the house, stakes have been placed into the ground, and a thatched pen has been erected for tying up cattle. Inside, two or three wretched cattle are grazing. Two or three 1 ¼ kandy corn-bins are lying in the corner to one side. Outside in the garden on the right side is an eight-bullock cart. On top of it is a torn woven basket. On the left side, a shrine of holy basil has been built on top of a raised square pedestal, and nearby there is a large tank. Two or three earthen jars filled with water have been set on top of it. Next to it there is a bathing-room with three walls and a clumsily laid floor. A stream of water flowing outside from the bath has formed a puddle swarming with maggots. Some of this water has trickled onto the bodies of a group of stark naked children assembled beneath a nearby white chafa tree. They are foul with itchy sores on their heads and snot falling from their noses.[23]

The richness of these illustrations of every corner of the cultivator's home forces the spectator to grapple with the substance of his life. The cultivator is conceived to be a product of his natural environment, which, as shown here, is blooming with pestilence and disease. Phule notes that the innermost recesses of the cultivator's home are made toxic by the collected detritus of spiders and insects. Unknowingly inhaling this poisonous matter on a daily basis, the cultivator is struck by a cough that develops into a more serious illness, and he eventually dies in the arms of his mother.[24]

21. Lukács, "Reification," 162.

22. Phule, *Shetkaryacha Asud*, 240.

23. Ibid., 235–36.

24. See ibid., 239.

Though extraordinary for its level of detail, the depiction of the life and death of a *kunbi* farmer in this section of S*hetkaryacha Asud* is representative of the extent to which various states of transient, impoverished existence mark this world. For example, Phule states, "Many farmers who cannot subsist on their fields alone will leave home and become vagrant [*paraganda*], working for wages in a big city instead of starving." Vagrancy and wage labor fall on the same continuum as sickness and death. Phule relates, "Whenever he gets enough bread to fill his stomach, he eats and eats without drinking any water. On account of this, he feels indigested and bloated and experiences various kinds of illness. And in confusion he takes some insignificant medicinal seeds or ginger! In this way, he succumbs to malarial fever and goes to the house of death."[25] Note his desperate, impassioned tone when speaking of the misfortunes that befall the *shudra-atishudra*, here in *Gulamgiri*: "Do not many fall into the business of stealing and lose their life? Do not many succumb to a sickness of the brain and go crazy? And do not many grow out their beards, go half-crazy, and roam around the streets telling whoever they meet about their problems?"[26] Phule also gestures to the ways in which material deprivation destroys the *shetkari* family and affects *shetkari* women. Take his discussion of the disastrous effects of the cost of marriage: "If an extremely indebted farmer is not able to take out a loan with a Brahman or Marwari moneylender, many young women in the prime of their youth go down different paths and eventually begin to consume liquor. At last, they are stricken with consumption."[27] In all of these instances, Phule conceives the life of the *shudra-atishudra shetkari* to be constantly exposed to the possibility of death.

Phule depicts an agrarian world in which relationships among *shudra-atishudra* cultivators and craftspeople, Brahman clerks, judges, assistants, and British administrators were deeply commodified, routinized, and atomized within a social totality. For example, the first chapter of *Shetkaryacha Asud* contains instance after instance of encounters between Brahmans and *shudra-atishudras* in which the latter are compelled to provide cash, meals, and hospitality on some ritual pretext. The very birth of a *shudra-atishudra* provides an occasion for expropriation by the Brahman astrologer: "The happiness of the birth of the uneducated farmer's child becomes clouded with fear, and the next day, the friends and relations of the farmer are made to sit down [*basavtat*] before the linga for a ceremony and give the Brahman enough money for his diet of fruits and vegetables [*devavtat*]" (5). Through verb choice, Phule reverses the usual logic of ritual exchange and asserts that the Brahmans enjoin *shudra-atishudras* to give them gifts. These encounters become ritualized as Brahmans circulate between *shudra-atishudras* and across the *shudra-atishudra* life cycle such that the experience of exploitation and conflict takes on a certain density. Indeed, Phule's stock formulation of the poor, miserable cultivator working day and night (*ratrandivas*) is mirrored by the repetition of the Brahman begging day and night.

Phule finds that Brahman *kulkarnis*, or village accountants, exercise an intimate mediating role in village affairs by incititing *and* resolving conflict between *shudra-atishudras*. He describes how Brahmanical counsel (*upadesh*) magnifies small disagreements over shared resources:

> When ignorant cultivators bicker amongst themselves over the boundary between their fields or turns at the well, a mischievous Brahman will go to the lanes of both sides and give them various kinds of advice [*upadesh*]. The next day, he sends a complaint in his name for one side to the mamletdar. Later the defendant and the witness are brought to the house of the kulkarni, and with a soldier at the door, both sides are brought separately to one side and told that they should meet with the kulkarni at an appointed time to come to a proper settlement. (206–7)

The remainder of the sketch recounts how the Brahman *kulkarni* manipulates the case as it is brought through the *mamletdar*'s office in order to extort money from both sides. The term *upadesh* here indicates an intimate relationship of counsel between the Brahman and the *shudra-atishudra*.

25. Ibid., 242–43.

26. Phule, *Gulamgiri*, 130.

27. Phule, *Shetkaryacha Asud*, 243.

The former is a trusted confidante whose seemingly friendly advice has the unexpected effect of breaking the bonds among *shudra-atishudras*. Additional opportunities for creating fratricidal conflict fall on the day of *pola*, a village cattle festival, and on Holi. In these cases, the Brahman *kulkarni* involves nearly the entire village government, including the *patil*, the police, unemployed soldiers, the *havaldar*, *mahars*, and others hanging about the village hall and prison. Through the machinations of the *kulkarni*, a family matter becomes a village affair in which all involved take their cut in cash, food, liquor, or simple attention (208–9). Because of the Brahman's familiarity with the relations and flows composing the totality of village affairs, he is the center around which different social strata are co-articulated, amplifying and routinizing conflict between *shudra-atishudras*.

But it is above all through the operations of the colonial state in the administration of law and land that Brahmanical craft (*kasab*) mediates reality. Phule explains that the predominance of literate Brahman clerks (*kamgar*, *kalamkasai*) in rural districts obstructs the state from realizing its capacity to represent the interests of its *shudra-atishudra* subjects. Because these interests can only be made known through the medium of Brahman clerical knowledge, they are mystified, and ultimately the reality of *shudra-atishudra* suffering is left opaque to the state. He relates:

> If a party has given him a bribe, he [the *kulkarni*] asks them some leading questions and takes down their statements, but if a party has not taken his hand, he wreaks havoc with their statements such that whoever listens to or reads the statement will not understand its actual form [*vastavik svarup*]. While writing down the statements of ignorant cultivators, many Brahman clerks outright exclude certain points. Many will take a statement home with them at night and bring a different one with them to the government office. (207)

In emphasizing the manipulation of forms of legal representation, Phule calls into question the transparency of the colonial state apparatus in reflecting the actual form (*vastavik svarup*) of *shudra-atishudra* experience. Going further, Phule explains, "Sometimes while taking down the statements of the cultivators, they play various kinds of tricks and so frighten them that no matter what they truly [*kharokhar*] saw with their eyes or heard with their ears, they do not have the heart to give evidence of what actually happened [*itthanbhut*]" (211). The very possibility of representing reality as it was first apprehended by the *shudra-atishudra* is confounded by Brahmanical skill exercised through the seemingly neutral functions of the colonial state.

The colonial state's blindness to the realities of rural life is also manifested in the attitudes of its British servants. In another one of his stock formulations, Phule refers to British servants who are too absorbed (*gung asne*) in leisure (*aishaaraam*) to realize the transgressions of their Brahman assistants. In one especially vivid sketch, Phule relates how a British tax collector dispenses with a cultivator's appeal with one line in broken Marathi and then proceeds to return to his life of pleasure: "The master [*saheb-bahadur*] is distracted in enjoying the air in the evening with his wife. If there is some strict master who also understands Marathi well, he will be lazy and sleepy from having been up all night at some friend's. Or in the confusion of going out for a hunt, he will easily dispense with a matter read out to him in the way that he ordered the day before" (208). For Phule, the relationship of the British civil servant to pleasure and leisure is different than that of the Brahman. While the latter aggressively pursues and consumes the fruits of *shudra-atishudra* labor with a kind of reckless abandon, the British official is stupefied and incapacitated by pleasure. He is unable to penetrate the veil of Brahmanical knowledge to see in fine detail the actual conditions of life for the *shudra-atishudra*. By subjecting the colonial state in its mediated encounters with *shudra-atishudras* to the scrutiny of a more radical empiricism, Phule casts doubt on the soundness of the epistemological apparatus of the ethnographic state.

In this section, I have highlighted the complexity of Phule's conception of the social world of the *shudra-atishudra* cultivator. Cultivators, Brahmans, and British officials, along with a host of other rural groups, are caught up in a social process that reproduces the conditions of *shudra-atishudra* exposure to death. Though Brahmans exert a dominant influence as the mediators of nearly every ritual, material, and legal transaction, they occupy spaces made possible by the colonial

state: the courtroom, the collector's office, the village school. Presuming the immediacy of rural life to its powers of perception, the colonial state remains blind to the actuality of *shudra-atishudra* existence, mediated as it is by Brahmanical knowledge. In calling into question the benevolence, neutrality, and wisdom of colonial governance, Phule delivers an indictment of colonialism as powerful as one from a nationalist position. He also refocuses attention on the critical task of transforming *shudra-atishudra* consciousness by revealing reality to be a social totality mediated by Brahmanical craft.

Religion, Self-Emancipation, and the Limits of an Ethics of *Satyashodh*

In *Gulamgiri* and *Shetkaryacha Asud*, Phule criticizes Brahmanical and colonial forms of knowledge in order to explain the formation of the consciousness of a subaltern collectivity. Deliberate transformation of consciousness and conduct became a more explicit preoccupation of his work with the Satyashodhak Samaj. The Samaj became an outlet for Phule's message, demanding that its members and supporters begin to reorient their lives toward the cultivation of *satyashodh*. It is this aspect of Phule's work that would seem to represent the culmination of his intellectual purpose—after all, this essay has argued that his writings actually sought to change conditions of everyday life through changing practices of thought. Yet, it was in fact his entrance into the domain of ethical self-fashioning that produced the most intractable contradictions among descriptive, critical, and normative modes of thought; between reason and revelation; between consciousness and conduct; and between individual and community. Although Phule exhorted his peers to discover and live out *satya* for themselves—to practice not just *satyashodh* but a *satyashodh dharma*—he also felt it necessary to give *satya* a determinate form if it were to become a form of conduct.

At various points in his writings, Phule moves from a descriptive register to a prescriptive one, attempting to set out in a positive fashion the principles by which he and his fellows will conduct themselves. For example, he ends *Gulamgiri* with a series of promises. He vows to treat as brothers those who oppose Brahmanical texts and to write for the benefit of all people; to uphold the God-given right of all people to enjoy the benefits of his creation equally; and to socialize and exchange with those *shudra-atishudras* who follow God, follow the principles of right conduct prescribed here, and work industriously.[28] Most important is the fact that he makes an open and public promise to change his own behavior. In this fashion, Phule sought to offer a set of clearly articulated principles that would help himself and others live their lives in accordance with a transcendental or God-given *satya*; however, as this essay has explored, Phule made *satyashodh*—the *search after* truth—into the basis for the transformation of subaltern consciousness. This practice is largely negative in its active deconstruction of the mediation of objective reality. It is this oscillation in Phule's thought between a positive prescription for right conduct and a negative demand for intellectual openness that betrays the uncertainty of Phule's final text, a religious manual of sorts titled *Sarvajanik Satya Dharmapustak*.

The *SSDP* is composed to stand alongside the Bible, the Koran, and most significant, the Vedas; however, it is also intended to be singular in its deconstruction of the *dharmapustak* form. Phule, in an especially historicist mood, states, "Amongst those religious books that have been written, there is not one that resembles universal truth [*sarvajanik satya*] from beginning to end. Because each of them has been written according to an occasion by a biased individual, its creed does not have the same benefit for all of humankind."[29] Recalling his own arguments about the construction of sacred texts, Phule here encourages the reader to approach any *dharmapustak*, including his own, with a degree of skepticism. Along these lines, he reserves some praise for the Bible and the Koran because they had been translated into multiple vernaculars, allowing individuals to openly and actively engage with them. Whereas the secret defiencies (*gom*) of the Vedas had been concealed from view, the Bible and the Koran were laid open to common scrutiny. Speaking of the difference of the Vedas, Phule notes,

28. Phule, *Gulamgiri*, 145.

29. Phule, *Sarvajanik Satya Dharmapustak*, 362.

> If the Creator had made the Vedas for the benefit of all humankind, he would have written them in all the languages of the world, and accordingly, it would not have occurred that they would only be available in Sanskrit for the direct use and enjoyment of the Brahmans and only indirectly for the rest of humankind by word of mouth. Based on this state of things, there is no way to determine what is true and what is false in the Vedas of the Brahmans as opposed to the truth of the universal God. (415)

Because texts are objects of human construction, their significance is disclosed only in human apprehension and experience. So, for Phule, it makes all the difference whether a *dharmapustak* is made available by direct or indirect means. Again, he points to the mediated quality of any object of thought, this time in the service of a demand for intellectual openness.

In emphasizing the dangers of the secrecy of sacred knowledge, Phule picks up on the peculiar power of a text that is said to be manifested through divine agency, one containing truths that are revealed to humans yet remain impervious to human construction. Through his critique of the *dharmapustak*, he suggests that the opening up of a revealed text to all eyes constitutes an acknowledgment of its human construction, and through a process of critical examination, its truths actually become more powerful in guiding the reader's conduct. God himself may have a privileged understanding of truth, but no human could claim to have distilled and inscribed its meaning in written form for all people in all times and in all places. This claim is one among several that work in *SSDP* to level out all distinctions within the human realm in the face of the absolute supremacy of an all-knowing creative force. The latter is repeatedly designated to be the one who created (*nirmikane*, *nirmankarta*) all of humankind along with the sun, planets, and celestial bodies in the vast, unending emptiness of space. Unlike in prior works, where Phule makes use of naming, description, and classification to produce a binary opposition between *shudra-atishudra* and Brahman, here he enforces a rigorous logic of equality by referring to either men and women together (*stri-purush*) or humankind (*manav prani*) as his primary subject.

Such a starkly conceived cosmological frame is critical for *SSDP*'s primary argument, which is that all humans have equal right to physical and psychic well-being—and the knowledge required to enjoy this right—because all humans have been created in the same fashion by a universal supreme force. Phule suggests that such a force has no concrete form, but rather exists as an unseen point or limit (*thang*) at which all human attempts to grasp divinity fall short. In its most radical form, this argument would make God and God-given right into a kind of empty signifier, standing in for the limits of a human capacity to know, understand, and control the world. The point of invoking this unknowable creative force would not be to erect a new idol in place of old ones, but in a perverse replaying of Chiplunkar's criticisms about the emptiness of *satyashodh dharma*, to create a completely open field for knowledge production by setting an absolute limit on the potential for such knowledge to attain total veracity. Within such a scheme, the development of informed consciousness, and in turn, the cultivation of right conduct, would resemble an unending process of searching after, but failing to find truth in, its determinate, objective form.

If the exposition in *SSDP* of a relationship among truth, God, and human equality represents the culmination of Phule's exploration of the effects of a radical practice of *satyashodh*, it also represents the limits of *satyashodh*. Most immediately, one cannot help but recognize that the doctrine of *sarvajanik satya* restages and translates a Protestant Christian doctrine of universal humanism that had since the late eighteenth century been hitched to a two-pronged project of conversion and emancipation at both ends of the British Empire. The most cynical reading of *SSDP*, and indeed of Phule's total life and work, would suggest that he is as much engaged in a project of disseminating a Christian message for a Marathi audience as in one of emancipating lower-caste peoples. Despite his repeated injunctions against investing one's beliefs in any one faith, Phule's *sarvajanik satya* never loses its Christian overtones. Moreover, he constantly privileges the enlightened wisdom, charity, and benevolence of his American and British interlocutors, characterizing them at times as men of truth (*satyapurush*) whose example should be followed. Recalling Chiplunkar's critique of Phule,

I would argue that Phule aims to retain an openness and even an emptiness in his exposition of the content of *satya*, yet because his conceptual tools were so deeply indebted to his education and intellectual environment, this emptiness at many points comes to be filled by a pseudo-Christian ideal of paternal benevolence and brotherly love within a universal family of man.

Even more suggestive are the moves Phule makes with regard to *satya* when raising the issue of conduct. He means to provide the means to not only discover truth but also to implement it in one's own daily affairs; in doing so, he moves from a relatively open-ended exposition of searching after truth toward prescribing fixed rules of conduct. In the section of *SSDP* titled "Satya," Phule in fact enumerates thirty-three rules that define those who behave in accordance with truth (*satyavartan*). They include not only prescriptions for carrying out *satyashodh*, such as not preventing another person from following a certain religion, but also rules for everyday life, including rules against killing, setting fire to goods, and stealing from another through lies or force. In addition, they include mandates for conducting oneself within a universal human family of equals such as the following: "Our Creator has made all of humankind. Amongst them, each woman who takes one man for her husband, and each man who takes one woman for his wife, and so all men and women who together happily conduct themselves as brothers and sisters, are those who behave in accordance with truth" (428). Such a rule normatively joins a Christian conception of human equality with a heterosexist logic of marriage and reproduction in order to give some shape to the new *shudra-atishudra* community that Phule and his circle sought to produce.

Similar problems arise in Phule's engagement of the category of *dharma* and its troubling proximity to the very questions of conduct that he wishes to resolve in the *SSDP*. For Phule, *dharma* serves as a productive site for reconfiguring received ways of understanding both a sacral ordering of human affairs and an ethic of conduct. In the section titled "Dharma," Phule rejects the conventional definition of *dharma* as one's occupation and station of life, determined at birth according to one's caste. With rhetorical verve, he asks, "If a washerman makes his living by washing everyone else's clothes, isn't it also the case that we sometimes take our own clothes home to wash? So then washing another's clothes for wages is an occupation, but who would ever call it a *dharma*? Accordingly, if a Brahman enters into another person's service and washes clothes for a living, then do you call him a washerman? And will this become the *dharma* of the Brahman washerman?" (388). He takes such contradictions and ambiguities to be indicative of the polyvalent character of *dharma*, a characteristic that has made it into an effective instrument of Brahmanical exploitation of lower-caste labor. In actuality, he goes on to say, because the plenitude of God's creation belongs to all men and women, the way in which one should conduct oneself is encapsulated by the principle of fraternity (*bahin-bhavandpana*). In addition, he links this principle to the feeling of gratitude inspired by a mother's act of breast-feeding her child as well as to that oft-quoted Christian proverb: "Do unto others as you would have done to you."[30] So again, Phule joins a deconstructive inquiry into the vocabulary of sacred knowledge with a more positive, predetermined, and largely inherited prescription for right conduct.

In sum, this essay began with a statement of the potential fruits of supplementing a pure intellectual-historical study of ideology with an investigation of the making of subaltern consciousness through a deliberate practice of critical thought. Its ending, however, brings us back to the insights of intellectual history. Although a full reflection on the promise of Jotirao Phule's thought required an examination of the ways in which it may have exceeded the conditions of its emergence, we cannot help but acknowledge that the realization of this thought again confronts the fact of inheritance. This is as much to say that his attempt to enact an insurgency out of a state of subalternity produced manifold contradictions between an

30. In the Marathi: "Jase mansani tumhanshi vartave mhanun tumchi ichchha aahey tasech tumhihi tyanshi varta."

inchoate, insurrectionary form of thought—*satya* and *satyashodh*—and the conceptional tools (e.g., Puranic text, colonial ethnography, *dharmapustak*) that were available to him in his own time. Furthermore, Phule encountered limits not just within a subaltern consciousness-in-formation, but also within his tools for making sense of such a consciousness, pressing him to ask how they could be reconfigured for new purposes. In the end, such an effort may best serve as an excellent demonstration of the subalternity of intellectual practice itself. ıllıı

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