

**Disciplining the Brahman Household:  
The moral mission of empire in the eighteenth century Maratha state**

**Rosalind O'Hanlon  
Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford**

**1. Introduction**

In very many ways, the household remains a key, but relatively neglected field of discussion for the early modern history of India. As historians in many fields have emphasised, a focus on the household brings into our view a more substantial set of social, political and material relationships than can be conveyed in the rather abstract term 'family'.<sup>1</sup> The household in India, as elsewhere in the world, was a site where things were produced as well as consumed, where property was owned within a complex set of relationships, and where division of labour between men and women, the young and the old was decided, and where access to resources was negotiated. Pre-eminently in India, with its cultural economy of hereditary occupations, the household was a place where skills of many different kinds - craft, agricultural, intellectual - were passed down between generations. In the sphere of politics, elite households occupied strategic vantage points within the structure of early modern states, and many of their senior personnel occupied important roles in local religious and judicial institutions. The political and cultural relationships between institutions of the state, local community institutions and elite households thus constituted central parts of the early modern 'public sphere'. Finally, of course, households were a primary site where social norms and social and sexual discipline were enforced and contested.

Why has this relative neglect persisted in the context of early modern India? There is now an important and innovative body of literature on gender relations and identities for this period, but this does not itself focus on the household as such.<sup>2</sup> It has been explored most extensively at the level of the Mughal patrimonial state, itself a 'household' writ large, and of the domestic lives and political relationships conducted amongst the elite women of the Mughal and Rajput royal households.<sup>3</sup> A rather smaller body of work attempts to engage with the household at the level of the locality, exploring both domestic relationships of power, and the ways in which local 'great households' themselves took leading roles in community institutions and constituted key parts of local states.<sup>4</sup> Nandita Prasad Sahai's work stands out in this setting. It provides a series of unique insights into household structures and gender norms amongst the craft communities of early modern Rajasthan. Her work stands as testimony to what the truly creative historian can do, with relatively sparse and difficult archival sources, to develop our understanding of household and local community histories 'from below' in early modern India.<sup>5</sup>

This essay takes as its focus aspects of the household in eighteenth century Maharashtra. The social history of this period in western India has naturally been strongly shaped by the state of the Maratha peshwas, the Brahman ministers to the Bhosale ruling family,

descendants of the great seventeenth century Maratha warrior leader Sivaji. The peshwas emerged during the eighteenth century as rulers in their own right, and came during the latter part of the eighteenth century to duel with the Afghans and the British East India Company to inherit the waning imperial power of the Mughal throne.<sup>6</sup> As is well known, the social policy of successive peshwa ministers came closely to reflect their Brahmanic values, particularly in the state regulation of the orders of caste, the growing social marginalisation of Dalit communities, and the stricter dharmic norms imposed on women.<sup>7</sup>

Rather than exploring the peshwa state's regulation of the social comportment and household norms of other communities, this essay turns the focus onto the disciplining of Brahman households by the Brahman rulers of the Maratha state themselves. For very many reasons, this was a key and contentious issue. The political, military and financial power that many Brahman families came to enjoy under the leadership of the peshwas had been gained by displacing the Maratha Bhosale family. The death of the Raja Shahu in 1749, and the move of the administrative centre of the peshwa's government from Satara to the expanding new city of Pune, with its dominating clusters of Brahman administrators, bankers, scholars and religious specialists, effectively eclipsed the power of the old Maratha rajas.

In this somewhat sensitive situation, many among Pune's new Brahman elites felt that it was particularly important to maintain Brahman solidarity and prestige. Brahman communities should be seen to conduct their mutual relations in a dignified and harmonious way, and to ensure that their social practices were in keeping with the ideal norms of the *dharmasāstra*. The reality, however, was that social and gender norms varied very widely across western India's many different Brahman sub-castes: Citpāvens, Karhāḍes and Devarūkhes from the Konkan littoral, the very large Deśastha community of the Deccan uplands, and migrant groupings such as the Śukla Yajurvedīs who had after the fourteenth century fall of the Yadava kingdom migrated from the Godavari valley to the northern part of the Konkan, or the Sārasavats, who had moved northwards after the fall of Goa to the Portuguese, into the southern regions of the Konkan. These Brahman communities, often competitors for local office and the *inām* lands attached to them, as well as for administrative employment with local states, engaged in frequent public disputes about their relative social rankings and reputations, and periodically suspended relations of commensality and intermarriage.<sup>8</sup> Particularly after mid-century, successive peshwa governments took it on themselves to try to harmonise these relationships, by enforcing common social and gender norms, and by encouraging Brahmans to avoid acrimonious social fissions.

As the Marathas extended their power up into central and northern India, moreover, this Brahman drive developed a distinctive, indeed imperial, sense of moral mission. Newly conquered Maratha territories such as Malwa, long a *subāh* of the Mughal empire, were clearly important new sources for Maratha revenue demand, to be administered by the cadres of Brahman accountants and revenue managers who followed in the wake of the Maratha armies.<sup>9</sup> The court of Balaji Bajirao (r. 1740-1761) also expressed great concern for the region's Brahman communities, assuming that they had for centuries lacked

proper religious guidance, and fallen away from *dharma* in their social and family conduct. In a remarkable document produced by the court in 1751, a wide range of norms and injunctions were laid down for the correct Brahman conduct in the new provinces. In this document, it was the household - its social and ritual life, the conduct of its women and children, the modes of livelihood on which it depended – that became the key site for the imposition of these more uniform Brahman norms, and for the public display of a restraint and piety in conduct appropriate to the prestige of a Brahman administrative elite. Most interestingly, these norms were not solely ‘religious’ in nature. They seem equally to have been a reflection of social class, of a drive to enforce dignity in bodily comportment, propriety in household arrangements, the right combination of sobriety and luxury in modes of consumption, and, above all, the avoidance of practices associated with menial forms of labour. The attempt to enforce these norms also offers us a series of unique insights into the Pune government’s own sense of its cultural mission as an expanding imperial state.

## **2. Discipline and Brahman resistance in the Peshwa state**

Within the Maratha heartlands of the Deccan and the Konkan, successive peshwa governments sought to bring the social conduct of different Brahman communities into line with dharmic norms. Marriage formed a particular focus for concern. In June 1744, Balaji Bajirao’s government issued orders to prevent Śukla Yajurvedī Brahmans from giving their daughters in marriage to their sister’s sons, a South Indian practice into which they had fallen into during the centuries of Portuguese rule, and which was argued to be contrary to proper dharmic norms.<sup>10</sup> Great concern was taken to promote the dharmic ideal of marriage as *kanyādān*, the ‘gift of a girl’, and to disallow marriages which were alleged to have been forced, or which violated the rules against marriage with a member of the same *gotra* or *pravara*.<sup>11</sup> Peshwa governments found themselves repeatedly having to take action against Brahman communities in the localities who took bride-price at the marriage of their daughters, or who had failed to get them married before the age of eight or nine. In 1798, the court of Bajirao II (r. 1795-1818) sent out letters to state officials across eight different talukas in the Konkan and regions around Pune, instructing them to put a stop to Brahman families found exacting bride-price for their daughters, or keeping them unmarried after the age of nine years.<sup>12</sup>

The effect seems to have been not just to discourage bride-price, but inflate the price that the families of prospective grooms could demand of a bride’s family. Bapu Balavant Dani, a Deśastha Brahman from Saswad outside Pune, wrote a very revealing letter inviting his close relative to the forthcoming marriage of his daughter Bhimabai. He disclosed the date set for the wedding, and related with some satisfaction that the groom found for the girl came from a very prosperous family, who enjoyed exclusive rights, in perpetuity, to the office of Kulkarni in four different villages. But the pre-marriage negotiations with the groom’s father had apparently contained some surprises.

We went to meet the gentleman to get to know him better, and we had a talk. He asked for a dowry of two hundred rupees. We replied and said very clearly that we were poor people, and if you take us into your family, there is only the girl and our family’s disposition to consider. He asked us, “So what will you give to the bride and the groom?” We replied “We will give cloth for a turban and a shawl to the groom, and a sari to the bride – that is as much as we can afford”. He said, “You come here wanting to arrange the marriage, and so we want to know what benefit in

goods there will be for us". So we understood that these days it is not possible to get a groom in a good position, who has forty or fifty *khandis* of grain and rice coming in every year, *inām* lands where two hundred mango trees grow, and who draws the wealth of hereditary office in four villages, without a dowry.<sup>13</sup>

With this realization, Bapu Balavant continued, he had signaled his consent, and the two parties had proceeded to discuss the practicalities of transporting family guests to the wedding. It is not surprising that such families of moderate means should have been taken aback, and perhaps disquieted, at the commercialization of marriage which appeared to flow from the efforts of successive peshwa governments to enforce the 'dharmic' model of *kanyādān*. The 'gift of a girl' clearly entailed many other gifts to be made at the same time.

Concerns such as these were not the only possible source of difficulty facing the peshwa governments as they strove to impose tighter Brahmanic norms on their own caste-fellows, and to suppress dissensions between them. Deśastha communities in long-established centres of learning, such as the riverside shrine towns of Paithan, Nasik and Tryambak, were home to *dharmasabhā* assemblies of learned pandits who had for many centuries brought their expertise to bear on the proper interpretation of *dharmasāstra*.<sup>14</sup> These communities very clearly resented the drive of the peshwa governments to centralize the interpretation, as well as the administration, of justice in religious matters at the peshwa court in Pune. Brahmans in these towns gave their backing to their caste-fellows when the latter found themselves the targets of discipline and even campaigns for dispossession from Pune. The Śukla Yajurvedīs of the Konkan did not only incur penalties for their irregular marriage practices in the 1740s. At the same time, their local Citpāvan rivals suggested that they were not really Brahmans at all, but inferior ritualists, and appealed to the Pune court to deprive them of their priestly livings. At this assault, Brahman pandits from Tryambak and Nasik came out in their strong support, forcing the local Citpāvans to back down and their allies in Pune to back down. The Pune government continued its unsuccessful campaign against the Śukla Yajurvedīs through into the 1770s, when again its attempt to deprive the community of its ritual offices failed.<sup>15</sup>

On other occasions, it was the Paithan Brahman community that defied the Pune court. For over a decade from the early 1770s, the government of Nana Phadnis struggled to discipline pandits and their relatives from the town. The Paithan *dharmasabhā* had been approached by a Brahman son of the town, Narahari Ranalekar, who had been captured by the Afghans after the great Maratha defeat at Panipat in 1761. Narahari had lived as a Muslim for over a decade, but in 1772 made his way home, where the scholars of the *dharmasabhā* acceded to his request to be given appropriate penance and taken back into caste. The Pune court disagreed with their verdict, asserting that such a Brahman could never be purified. It put pressure on them to retract the verdict, ordering Narahari's wife to divorce him, imposing severe penances on some, depriving others of their lands, and threatening to out-caste all those who failed to comply. But many held out until the mid-1780s or longer, having secured the support of authorities in neighbouring states.<sup>16</sup> On other occasions too, the Pune government strained to control the social conduct of these older regional communities. Only after prolonged negotiation were the Brahmans of

Nasik and Tryambak willing, in 1751, to accept Pune directions on the priority to be observed in the reciting of Vedic hymns by Brahmans of different sects.<sup>17</sup>

There were other difficulties too. Precise contemporary evidence is difficult to pin down. However, there seems much to suggest that Brahman communities based in the Deccan not only resented the attempts at centralization from Pune, but questioned the purity and prestige of the Citpāvan community itself. The peshwa Bajirao I (r. 1720-1740) took as one of his gurus a descendant of the famous sixteenth century 'living god' Morya Gosavi of Cincvad, who was said to have attempted to raise the status of Citpāvans by declaring them fit to dine with Deśasthas.<sup>18</sup> In his 1820 survey, the Orientalist Walter Hamilton described the attitude of the Deśastha Brahmans of Nasik – whose resistance to Pune discipline was described above – to the recently deposed peshwa Bajirao II's Citpāvan caste-fellows:

Although his family is Brahminical, yet not being of the highest order, the purer classes of Brahmans refused to eat with them; and at Nassuck, a place of Pilgrimage near the source of the Godavery, he was not allowed to descend by the same flight of steps used by the holy priests.<sup>19</sup>

Writing in the 1870s, the social reformer Gopal Hari Deshmukh described the prejudices that early eighteenth century Citpāvan migrants up into the Deccan had encountered in and around Pune. They earned their livings as cooks and attendants, and found it difficult to obtain respectable work until the mid-century, when Balaji Bajirao brought a large body of Citpāvan boys up to Pune and trained them in the skills of record-keeping.<sup>20</sup> For much of the later part of the century, the peshwa court fought a running battle to suppress puranic manuscript texts, and the popular performances through which they were transmitted, which mocked the Citpāvan community for their supposed menial origins.<sup>21</sup>

### **3. The moral mission of empire: Maratha Brahmans in Malwa**

It was in this context of periodic Brahman intransigence, therefore, that the Pune government of Balaji Bajirao appears to have staged its most ambitious attempts at moral mission. Its focus lay not in the Maratha homelands themselves, but in their territories to the north, particularly in Malwa. As noted above, its ambition lay in the fact that it was directed not so much at discrete areas of social practice such as dharmic marriage, but rather at a comprehensive reformation of every aspect of local Brahman household conduct. The campaign, set out in the remarkable document examined below, reflected both a determination to enforce dharmic norms in religious practice, and a set of status anxieties about the forms of sociability, dress, comportment and consumption that were evident amongst Malwa's Brahman families, and which were judged quite inappropriate to the proper social dignity and prestige of a Brahman.

There may also have been a further, and imperial, dimension to the direction of this reforming campaign and the document in which it was set out. As we shall see, what is remarkable about it is its tone of absolute authority and abrupt command in setting out the new models of conduct to which Malwa Brahman households were expected to conform. A number of assumptions may have guided the Pune scholars and jurists who drew up the document. It is difficult not to see reflected in it a consciousness of the great, indeed subcontinent-wide authority in matters of *dharmasāstra* that Brahmans

from the Maratha country had come to enjoy over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly from their base in the city of Banaras, where many Maratha scholar families had made their home and developed a wide reputation for their depth of learning.<sup>22</sup> The early decades of the eighteenth century were also a time when Maratha Brahmans fanned out from Banaras to the Rajput courts, their reputations as intellectuals, literary men, teachers and experts in complex ritual creating considerable demand for their services as Rajput rulers themselves sought to reinvent Hindu royal ceremonial.<sup>23</sup>

As the Marathas extended their political and military horizons northwards to Malwa and beyond to Delhi, therefore, their sense of the meaning and possibilities of a Maratha empire may have been much richer than scholars have conventionally assumed. This is an area yet to receive detailed scholarly exploration, but the sense of moral mission evident here certainly has an imperial, and imperious, tone to it. Its implication was that a Maratha empire under the Pune leadership of Balaji Bajirao had a vital cultural responsibility to fulfil in the benighted regions of central India that had so long lain under Mughal rule. It offered a revived understanding of the principles of the *dharmasāstra*. It also provided long overdue guidance for Brahman families and households who had not only fallen away from propriety in religious practice, but lost their sense of the social dignity and decorum with which all Brahmans should conduct themselves, as befitting their status as the embodiments of religious merit and exemplars of moral accomplishment and social worth.

In addressing the household, moreover, the authors of the document may have had a further set of assumptions in mind. It was to be expected that the household would stand at the centre of any drive to encourage conformity with dharmic norms, since it was the household setting that did most to shape the daily conduct of men and women, and their adherence to the many ritual proprieties incumbent on Brahmans in the most mundane of activities. But the household had a further significance for the intellectual cultural of Maratha Brahmans in early modern India. As suggested elsewhere, it was above all within the household that their traditions of scholarship had flourished, intellectual resources in books and manuscripts accumulated, expertise in particular fields sharpened and passed down from fathers to sons, pupils drawn from across India to live and study within the most prestigious of them, and marriage relationships contracted between them that further consolidated their strengths. If the household, the incubator and seed bed of Brahman scholarly accomplishment, was not protected from improper practices and the influence of the ignorant and the plebeian, what hope could there be for the future of Brahman intellectual prestige in the region?<sup>24</sup>

There may have been a further assumption, also imperial in nature, underlying the sense of Maratha Brahman moral mission in Malwa. As described below, the model of conduct held out to the region's Brahman families was undoubtedly very restrictive in nature, and the language used brooked no debate. Yet the model also suggested something potentially very attractive. It suggested social association with the new administrative elite of Maratha Brahmans that had consolidated itself in the region during the decade of the 1740s, in order to ensure efficient collection of the revenues of this productive

province. If older and plebeian customary practices could be set aside, there was the promise, at least, of social and family connections with the new elite, of participation in the religious prestige which Maratha Brahmans commanded, and, possibly, a share in the lucrative new offices that the Maratha administration brought with it.

#### 4. The *yādī dharmasthāpanā*: reforming Brahman households

Maratha armies had been carrying out raids into Malwa since the last years of the seventeenth century, but it was under Bajirao I from 1723 that Maratha armies entered the province to collect their customary demand for *cauth* or one-quarter of the agrarian revenue due to the state. By 1730, the leading Maratha Sardars Shinde, Holkar and Pavar had all established their headquarters in central India, and a further decade of warfare saw the consolidation of Maratha strength in the region, and a Mughal agreement in 1741 to cede Malwa itself. The Marathas then set about displacing Malwa's major zamindars, and inserting their own local *kamāvisdārs* or revenue collectors, many of them Citpāvan Brahmans from brought up from the Deccan and Konkan for the purpose. By mid-century, this new provincial administration was largely in place.<sup>25</sup> The *kamāvisdārs* were key figures in the new local administration: Gordon records that some 50 new *kamāvisdārs* were brought into the system between 1740 and 1755.<sup>26</sup> Aside from revenue collection, they took on responsibility for a wide range of other social and judicial matters.<sup>27</sup>

At about this time, and now perhaps with a clearer sense of local Brahman social practices in the region, Balaji Bajirao's court in Pune sent out in 1751 a *yādī* or listed items of instruction to *kamāvisdārs* in the province, setting out approved and forbidden practices for the region's Brahmans. It was entitled *Yādī dharmasthāpanā śāstrapramāṇa vedapurūṣādnyāpramāṇa nānā dharmā pravrvtta hota nānā sthālī*, 'Items of instruction to establish dharma according to the śāstra and the orders of the Vedas, different dharmas being current in different places'.<sup>28</sup> It is not clear who wrote the document, but the timing of its issue may be significant. As noted above, the Maratha state's centre of administration had shifted decisively from Satara to Pune, after the death of Raja Shahu in 1749. At this time, the great Pune jurist Ramasastrī Prabhune was just emerging as an influential member of the Pune *śāstrimaṇḍal*, the council of scholars and legislators responsible for administration of justice in the peshwa state. Trained in Banaras himself, Ramasastrī had been working in the Pune administration since the late 1730s. He became a member of the *śāstrimaṇḍal* in 1751, and its chief in 1759, a position he held with great distinction until his death in 1789.<sup>29</sup> We cannot know whether Ramasastrī had a direct hand in producing the *yādī*. However, his background and his ascent give us some sense of the Brahman juridical resources now coming to bear at the Pune court of this period, and perhaps beginning to shape the cultural dimension of the Maratha empire.

A copy of this *yādī* has survived in the papers of the Dvivedi or Dube family, servants of the Pavar ruling family in their territories of Dhar in Malwa. A letter from Yasvantrao Pavar (r. 1735-1761), addressed to the *kamāvisdārs* of particular *parganas* in Dhar, accompanied the *yādī*:

In past times there was the rule of the yavana, and so many of the proper customs of the Brahmins fell into disuse. So, with a view to reviving the Vedic practices proper to Brahmins, the pant pradhān [Balaji Bajirao] has given an order to Madhu Bhaṭ Dvivedī of Dhār concerning restoring their customs to that of Vedic Brahmins. He has set out separately in this *yādī* the customs that Brahmins are to follow. Bringing to mind the rightness of their own dharma, and without making any excuses, he or his agents in the province must see to it that custom is practiced according to this *yādī*.<sup>30</sup>

In 48 separate items, the *yādī* laid down norms to be followed by all Brahmins, covering every aspect of domestic, ritual and social life.

This document is very revealing in its prescriptions. As might be expected, they are targeted very largely at the conduct of the household. However, it is not only the household as an inner domain where family conventions and norms of behaviour are addressed. The household appears here very much also in its outward aspects, as the public showcase for the dharmic dignity and authority of Brahmins, laying out their proper public relationships with other Brahmins as well as with menial communities whose customs and forms of livelihood Brahmins are urged to abjure. Perhaps most interestingly, the models of behaviour set out in the *yādī* are not simply religious in content, but also reveal a strong class dimension, a drive to purge from these Malwa Brahmin communities the rustic styles of life, livelihood, comportment, dress and popular entertainment that were evidently then their practice. The *yādī* specifically emphasized that the customary practices of Brahmin households then current were to be discontinued, and Brahmins to move to the more refined, dignified and socially separated norms laid out in the *yādī*. The heading of the *yādī*, with its reference to ‘different dharmas being current in different places’ allowed that some local variation in practice was acceptable, and indeed in accordance with the *dharmasāstra*. However, most of the instructions referred to ‘the Brahmin *jātī*’, *samastha brāhmaṇāhī*, ‘all Brahmins together’, or *sakal brāhmaṇ jātī*, ‘all of the Brahmin caste’.

Analysis of the 48 different instructions (see Appendix) shows that they address a number of different areas of social and household practice. In keeping with the wider anxiety of the peshwa court, noted above, to foster solidarity and harmonious relations between Brahmin communities, many of the instructions encourage Brahmin families to come together with one another as widely and frequently as possible, even as they held themselves apart from other social groups. This is in matters of hospitality, feasting and the sharing of family celebrations (nos. 3, 20, 22, 33, 47) and in matters of religious instruction, where Brahmins were urged to look only to respectable scholars and priests such as themselves, rather than to dubious wandering holy men, bogus yogis or fake ascetics with matted locks (nos. 1, 9, 31, 48).

There was also, as might be expected, a substantial focus on correctness of ritual performance. Brahmins are enjoined to perform all of their daily and periodic rites with the proper Vedic mantras, taking care to maintain their ritual purity, and with appropriate priests in attendance. Here, the instructions extended beyond the performance of rites themselves, to cover correctness throughout the highly ritualised modes of daily life seen as appropriate to a Brahmin household, in washing, cooking, eating, dressing, conducting

social relations with other families, the education of boys and observing the order of caste (nos. 1, 2, 5-10, 15-17, 19-23, 25-28, 31-33, 35-48).

Yet the instructions clearly set out to secure Brahman dignity and prestige through much more than ritual or religious correctness. What is remarkable about them is their very detailed focus on restraint and propriety in bodily comportment, forms of dress and personal ornamentation, sociability and entertainment particularly during marriages, the control of children and the conduct of relations between families. The instructions suggest a vivid picture of the current practices condemned in the instructions: the wearing of rustic or coarsely-fashioned bodily ornaments, women's blouses that lacked modesty, the taking of bride-price for women, wedding parties that involved gambling and music, gangs of noisy children and house-to-house visits across the neighbourhood to receive gifts of food (nos. 8, 16, 35, 39, 40, 419, 10, 21, 22). Such plebeian practices were to be discontinued, and replaced with new styles of composed and serious behaviour.

Just as important as propriety in social and bodily conduct was the distancing of Brahmans from the world of physical labour. A number of the instructions enjoin Brahmans not to engage in bodily work of different kinds, including spinning and the grinding and pounding of grain. Where bodily labour was undertaken, it was important to do it in ways that maintained bodily decorum. Water pots could be carried, but on the shoulder or hip, not on the head. Particularly to be avoided were ways of carrying burdens associated with menial or plebeian service, such as portering work in which the weight was borne using cords around the forehead (nos. 2, 13, 14, 19, 29).

Throughout the *yādī*, there was a sustained focus on the conduct of Brahman women: in matters of dress, ornamentation, domestic work, marriage both in its social and its emotional aspects, the raising of children and the norms appropriate to widow (nos. 3, 4, 10, 11, 12, 26, 28, 30, 34, 42). Here again, these instructions blended together class concerns, with a drive to get Brahmans to adhere to more stringent norms of dharmic respectability: insisting on a low age of marriage for girls, the ideal of *kanyādān* at marriage, the model of the deferential *pativratā* wife at home, and rigid models of bodily and social asceticism for widows.

The last of the orders, it is worth noting, invoked the authority of Kamalākarabhaṭṭa, the leading seventeenth century scholar of the eminent Bhatta family of Maratha Brahman scholars in Banaras. It laid down his *Śūdrakamalākara* as the guide that Brahmans should follow in their work as priestly officiants for Sudras, emphasising that the latter should receive their rituals in line with this text, and not according to the Vedic rituals to which Brahmans were entitled (no. 48). For the Brahman audiences to which the *yādī* was addressed, the reference to Kamalākarabhaṭṭa further emphasized the prestige of Malwa's new Maratha Brahman elite, with their links to this commanding Banaras authority in the field of learning.

## 5. Conclusion

It is difficult, in our present state of knowledge, to know how far this attempt at an empire of culture amongst Malwa Brahmans met with success. The decade after 1751

absorbed the military energies of Balaji Bajirao himself and of the leading Maratha Sardars, as the Marathas themselves became kingmakers in Delhi. In 1761, they suffered their devastating defeat at the hands of the Afghan Ahmad Shah Abdali on the field of Panipat. These were years of persistent financial crises for the Maratha armies in northern India. Their demands for cash to pay their troops are likely to have dominated the lives of the *kamāvisdār* revenue collectors in central India, and may well have pushed many matters of social and household regulation into the background. In addition, Maratha dominance in Dhar and other regions of Malwa always remained uneven, and subject to negotiation with the small armed lineages who continued to exercise a large degree of control over revenue collection on the ground.<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless, the *yādī* does convey something of the Pune court's remarkable sense of its imperial mission in north India, and that mission's cultural focus on the household. In it, it is possible to see, more clearly perhaps than in the records of the complex and contested history of Brahman identity at home, what it was that Pune's leading scholars and jurists thought it was that really made a Brahman, and what it was that threatened to erode and destroy a Brahman's proper place in the world. Being a Brahman, for these arbiters, certainly depended on birth, family and community belonging, and adherence to ritual norms. But being a Brahman was also shaped by what were essentially class-related questions of social style, bodily comportment, forms of sociability and consumption, and distance from the world of menial labour. 'Dharma' for the correctly regulated Brahman household, also turned out to be about the kind of bangles and toe rings its women wore, and how they carried the family water-pot in public. If ritual pollution could threaten a Brahman's public standing, so too could affronts to its bodily dignity and the enjoyment of forms of sociability deemed to be plebeian in character.

From the perspective of gender and colonial social relations too, these developments also seem significant. On the whole, scholars have assumed that it was the particular history of colonialism that brought women, the family and the household to the forefront in the nineteenth century battles over the moral worth of India's civilizational values. What this research suggests is that in some social milieux in western India at least, the colonial state inherited frameworks for such debates rather than creating them anew, even if the issues contested were new and distinctively colonial. These elements of continuity should not, in the end, surprise us. For all imperial enterprises with a strong cultural dimension, the household, site of so many relations of power, comes unavoidably to centre-stage.

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## APPENDIX

Yādī dharmasthāpanā śāstrapramāṇa vedapurūṣādnyāpramāṇa nānā dharma pravṛtta hota nānā sthālī.<sup>32</sup>

(Items of instruction to establish dharma according to the śāstra and the orders of the Vedas, different dharmas being current in different places)

1. All of the life stage rituals are to be performed with proper respect to lineage, family, kin subdivision and other set procedure, with proper bathing and attention to daily ritual obligations. Former usages are to be discontinued.
2. The Brahman caste must not keep spinning wheels in their houses. Women should not spin thread, and should leave off their former customs.
3. Brides should not hang garlands made of almonds and dried dates around their necks which are made by the cobbler. They should make them themselves at home. The Brahman caste should observe fast every eleventh and twelfth day of the month. They should then offer a pleasing feast to other Brahmans on the 13<sup>th</sup> day.<sup>33</sup>
4. Married women must stick to bangles of glass appropriate for married women, and should not wear bangles of wood or lac.
5. No widow must sit and eat in a row of Brahman wives sitting down to eat.
6. No married woman must sit in a row of widows to eat.
7. If a widow still has a topknot of hair, she may not offer puja to Viṣṇu. She must give up her topknot and shave her head completely.
8. During Brahman marriages, the husband and wife should not wear slippers when they perform Vedic sacred rites.
9. For the sacred rituals of the wedding ceremony, and for the sixteen samskāras, Brahmans must bathe and clothe themselves in newly cleansed pure garments. They must perform the *sandhyā* and *brahmayagna* rites, make pleasing oblations and then sit down to their meal. They must give up their former practices.
10. The Brahman caste should not allow a delay after a betrothal. The betrothal and marriage should happen at the same time.
11. Married Brahman women should wear the *coḷī* blouse, and should stop wearing the *kācoḷī* blouse.<sup>34</sup>
12. Married Brahman women should wear silver ornaments on their toes. They should throw away the brass ornaments they wear in shape of a scorpion.<sup>35</sup>
13. When Brahmans and women carry water pots, they must carry them on their shoulders or their hips. They should not carry water pots on their heads.
14. The Brahman caste should not do grinding and pounding.
15. The Brahman caste should not give gifts of cooked sweets.
16. Only that person who has been invited to a Brahman's house to eat, should go. They should not take a lot of kids with them.
17. No widow should be allowed to sit in a row of Brahmans dining, or in a row of married Brahman women dining.
18. The Brahman caste should not use *jivahāḷī*.<sup>36</sup>
19. Brahman women who are quarrelsome and use bad words may not wear the wedding necklace. All of their rituals must be done with Vedic mantras.

20. On the occasion of sacred ceremonies, all Brahmans must invite to dinner as many other Brahmans as they can afford.
21. During such feasts, all Brahmins appointed for cooking must first purify themselves very thoroughly. Then they can do all their cooking and serve cooked food of papad, chutney etc.
22. At all Brahman weddings, both bride and groom should wear garlands of flowers only round their heads. They must not wear garlands made in the homes of cobblers.
23. All Brahman castes should administer rites to the dead as stipulated in the śāstra.
24. No woman of a Brahman caste should wear garments of a rose colour.<sup>37</sup>
25. When a Brahman dies, his wife should shave her head on the first or the tenth day. Then only will she be purified.
26. Brahman women should wash themselves fully dressed, and then wash their clothes regularly before putting them on. They should wash the blouse, the sari and the silk clothing worn for purity.
27. Brahmans must conduct their marriages and other life cycle rituals with proper respect to lineage and Vedic affiliation.
28. For a Brahman girl who is a widow, as soon as she has had her first menstruation, her head must be shaved, she must take off her ornaments, blouse and sari, and wear a single folded garment only.
29. Married Brahman women must not tie cords around their heads.<sup>38</sup>
30. Married Brahman women must wear golden ornaments on their necks and heads, as much as they can afford. They must not wear silver ornaments on their heads.<sup>39</sup>
31. All Brahmans must take their Vedic mantras from other Brahmans. They should not accept religious instruction or commands from wandering holy men, false yogis or ascetics with matted locks. Brahmans should avoid such people. Brahmans must receive their instruction from other Brahmans.
32. A Brahman's sacred thread should not be made by the spinning wheel. The thread should be made by hand, and while putting it on, mantras should be said.
33. Brahmans should perform their ablutions, then do puja. The water should not be brought by Sudras.<sup>40</sup>
34. All Brahman women must wear the full sari with a tuck. They must throw out their old waist cloths.<sup>41</sup>
35. Brahmans must not touch each other while eating. Married women must not touch each other.
36. All members of Brahman castes must be married between the ages of 7 and 10 years old.
37. When a Brahman is to be married, the family should go to the bride's village, set up a pavilion, make offerings to the gods, and perform the marriage ceremony.
38. All Brahmans must get married with the appropriate Brahman rites.
39. Brahman castes must not ask for money for their daughters when marrying them.<sup>42</sup>
40. Brahman castes should not amuse themselves with gambling during weddings.
41. During a Brahman wedding, the bride and groom must not go from house to house taking food. This applies also to Brahman children.
42. When Brahman women cook at home, they must wear appropriate clothing to ensure that they are pure.

43. The person who is cooking in a Brahman household for sacred life cycle rituals must be in a state of fasting. Or give him some small snack only and he should not eat more than that.
44. All Brahman boys must study the Vedas.
45. Any Brahman who does not refrain from bad conduct must be thrown out of caste. He must be given an appropriate penance and so purified.
46. When a Brahman's father dies, a Brahman learned in the Vedas must be called to perform the funeral rights, and then only invited to share food.
47. When a Brahman's father has died, all those Brahmans who have been invited to the ceremony must be invited to share food.
48. When a Brahman performs marriages and other rituals at the houses of Sudra menials, they should conduct them according to the procedure set out in the Sudrakamalakara. They should not conduct them with Vedic rituals.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular Sumit Guha's important recent discussion of the key relationships between kin, caste, household and state in India over the longue duree: Sumit Guha, *Beyond Caste: Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present*, Leiden: Brill, 2013, pp. 117-141. See also Indrani Chatterjee, 'Introduction', in *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia*, ed. Indrani Chatterjee, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004, pp. 3-45; Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in colonial India: the making of empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006;

<sup>2</sup> For a short survey, see Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Introduction', in *At the Edges of Empire: Essays in the Social and Intellectual History of India*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2014, pp. 7-13.

<sup>3</sup> See in particular Stephen P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India, 1639-1739*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991; John Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 59-78; Munis Faruqi, *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 66-133; Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Ramya Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Mughal Queen: Heroic Past in Indian History, c. 1500-1900*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Perlin, 'Of White Whale and Countrymen in the Eighteenth-century Maratha Deccan. Extended Class Relations, rights and the Problem of Rural Autonomy Under the Old Regime', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1977-8, pp. 170-237; Sumit Guha, 'The Family Feud as a Political Resource in Eighteenth Century India' in *Unfamiliar Relations*, ed. Indrani Chatterjee, pp. 74-94; Irina Glushkova and Rajendra Vora, eds., *Home, Family and Kinship in Maharashtra*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999; Dilbagh Singh, 'Regulating the Domestic: Notes on the Pre-colonial State and the Family', *Studies in History*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2003, pp. 69-86. For the scholar-households of Maratha Brahmans, see Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple: Banaras scholar households and the Brahman 'ecumene' of Mughal India', *South Asian History and Culture*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2011, pp. 381-416.

<sup>5</sup> Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest: The State, Society and Artisans in Early Modern Rajasthan*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006; 'The "Other" Culture: Craft Societies and Widow Marriage in Early Modern India', *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 36-58; 'Some Were Larger Than Their Communities: A Potter's Family, Community and Justice in Early Modern Rajasthan', *Studies in History*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2009, pp. 39-68.

<sup>6</sup> Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas 1600-1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; Andre Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India. Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-century Maratha Svarajya*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; Richard M. Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan, 1300-1761: Eight Indian Lives*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Sumit Guha, 'An Indian Penal Regime: Maharashtra in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, vol. 147, May 1995, pp. 101-126; V.S. Kadam, 'The institution of marriage and position of women in eighteenth century Maharashtra', *The Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1988, pp. 341-370; N.K. Wagle, 'The government, the jāti and the individual: rights, discipline and control in the Pune Kotwal Papers, 1766-94', *Contributions to Indian sociology*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2000, pp. 321-360; Hiroshi Fukuzawa, 'The State and the Caste System (Jati)' in *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and States*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 91-113; Hiroyuki Kotani, ed., *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, Delhi: Manohar, 1997; Hiroyuki Kotani, 'Structure of the Caste in Seventeenth-to-Nineteenth Century Western India: The Rural Caste in the Deccan and the Urban Caste in Coastal Gujarat', in *Western India in Historical Transition*, ed. Hiroyuki Kotani, Delhi: Manohar, 2002, pp. 63-85.

<sup>8</sup> Rosalind O'Hanlon and Christopher Minkowski, 'What makes people who they are? Pandit networks and the problem of livelihoods in early modern western India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2008, pp. 381-416; Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Contested conjunctures: Brahman

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<sup>9</sup> Stewart Gordon, ‘The Slow Conquest’ in *Marathas, Marauders and State Formation in Eighteenth-century India*, ed., Stewart Gordon, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp.23-63.

<sup>10</sup> Ganesh Chimnaji Vad and Bapu Purushottam Joshi, *Selections from the Satara Rajas’ and the Peshwas’ Diaries*, vol. V: Bajirao II, Bombay: Poona Deccan Vernacular Translation Society, 1908, Part 2, no. 317 of Jamadilaval 22 (22 June 1744).

<sup>11</sup> G.S. Sardesai, ed., *Selections from the Peshwa Daftar: The Social and Religious Matters under the Peshwas (1727-1797)*, Bombay: Government Central Press, 1934, vol. 43, no. 52 of 16 June 1780; no. 53 of 19 November 1780, pp. 46-49; no. 55 of 13 March 1782, p. 50; no 60, undated, pp. 52-53.

<sup>12</sup> Vad and Joshi, *Selections*, vol. 2, no. 123, 18 September 1760; vol. 5 Pt 2, no. 241 of 1798-9, pp. 259-60.

<sup>13</sup> R.V. Otūrkar, *Peśve-kālīn sāmājik va ārthik patravayavahāra*, Pune: Bhārat Itihās Samśodhak Maṇḍal 1950, no. 146, p. 107. This letter is undated, but is probably of the late eighteenth century. For the cost of dowries, see also N.G. Cāpekar, ‘Ciplunkar yānce jamākarca’, *Bhārat Itihās Samśodhak Maṇḍal Traimāsik*, vol. 4, 1925-6, p. 127.

<sup>14</sup> For these assemblies, see Rosalind O’Hanlon, ‘Narratives of Penance and Purification in Western India, c.1650-1850’, *Journal of Hindu Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2009, pp. 65-69.

<sup>15</sup> O’Hanlon, ‘Contested Conjunctures, pp. 785-6, and Rosalind O’Hanlon, ‘Gods in the Courtroom: History, Sacred Space and Proprietary Rights in India’, in *At the Edges of Empire*, pp. 286-9..

<sup>16</sup> Sardesai, *Selections*, vol. 43, no. 25 of 24 August 1772, p. 25; no. 107, undated, p. 92; no. 140 of 1772, p. 111; Ganesh Chimnaji Vad and Kashinath Balkrishna Marathe, *Selections from the Satara Rajas’ and the Peshwas’ Diaries*, vol. 8, Savai Madhavrao Peshwa, Part 3, Poona: Deccan Vernacular Translation Society, 1911, no. 1133 of Safar 26 (1785-6), p. 281 and no. 1136 of Jilhej 27 (1785-6), p. 282.

<sup>17</sup> Sardesai, *Selections*, vol. 43, no. 24, p. 24, undated; no. 69 of 1751, p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence W. Preston, *The Devs of Cincvad: A Lineage and the State in Maharashtra*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.; Irawati Karve, ‘Ethnic Affinities of the Chitpavans’, Pt II, *Journal of the University of Bombay (History, Economics and Sociology)*, vol. 2, July 1933, p. 133.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Hamilton, *A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of Hindostan*, London: John Murray, 1820, vol. 1, p. 197.

<sup>20</sup> Gopāl Harī Deśmukh, *Aitihāsik Gośtī*, Part 2, no. 33, cited in R.B. Guṇjīkar, *Sarasvatīmaṇḍal*, Bombay: Nirṇayasāgar Press, 1884, pp. 112-113.

<sup>21</sup> Rosalind O’Hanlon, ‘Performance in a world of paper: puranic histories and social communication in early modern India’, *Past and Present*, vol. 219, no. 1, 2013, pp. 87-126.

<sup>22</sup> Rosalind O’Hanlon, ‘Letters Home: Banaras pandits and the Maratha regions in early modern India’, *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2010, 201-240.

<sup>23</sup> Monika Horstmann, *Visions of Kingship in the Twilight of Mughal rule*, Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> O’Hanlon, ‘Speaking from Siva’s Temple’.

<sup>25</sup> Gordon, ‘The Slow Conquest’, pp. 42-51.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>27</sup> Gordon, *The Marathas 1600-1818*, pp. 142-145.

<sup>28</sup> K.K. Lele, ‘The effects of Maharashtra’s culture on north India’ in *Bhārat Itihās Samśodhak Maṇḍal Traimāsik*, vol. 6, Part 2, 1926, pp. 153-155. I am extremely grateful to Sumit Guha for making a copy of this document available to me. A full translation of the original is given in the Appendix below.

<sup>29</sup> Sadāśiva Āṭhavale, *Rāmśāstrī Prabhune, caritra va patre*, Pune, Srividya Press, 1988.

<sup>30</sup> Lele, ‘The effects of Maharashtra’s culture on north India’, Appendix 2, p. 156.

<sup>31</sup> For this period in Maratha politics in north India, and particularly the financial crisis facing Maratha commanders in the field, see Sardesai, *New History of the Marathas*, pp. 419-441.

<sup>32</sup> K.K. Lele, ‘The effects of Maharashtra’s culture on north India’, in *Bhārat Itihās Samśodhak Maṇḍal Traimāsik*, vol. 6, Part 2, 1926, pp. 153-155. The separate items in the list are not individually numbered in this published version of the document. I have numbered them here for ease of reference.

<sup>33</sup> The reference here is to a *mocī* or cobbler, whose main trade in leather rendered other such articles impure.

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<sup>34</sup> The *yādī* here stipulates a front-fastening blouse, presumably for its greater modesty, than one fastening at the back.

<sup>35</sup> This must be a reference to a style of toe-ring then in vogue amongst women of the region. Silver ornaments are enjoined, rather than brass, probably as representing greater purity and dignity.

<sup>36</sup> *jivahāli* is difficult to translate. It can refer either to particularly sensitive parts of the body, or to those parts of musical instruments, such as the mouthpiece of a horn or the thread of the vina, which create sound. It is possible that the latter meaning applies here, and that what is meant is that Brahmans should not use musical instruments, particularly during prayer, as being a practice more suited to less dignified and popular forms of worship, such as those associated with Sudras and bhakti devotional practice. For this controversy, see Anand Venkatkrishnan, 'Ritual, Reflection and Religion: the Devas of Banaras', *Journal of South Asian History and Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2015, forthcoming.

<sup>37</sup> The reference here is *gulece vastra*, literally 'rose-coloured garments'. It is not quite clear why such a colour was seen as undesirable.

<sup>38</sup> The reference here is probably to the use of cords around the head for bearing loads, and has the same implication as no. 13, i.e., that Brahman women should not carry loads on their heads.

<sup>39</sup> While silver ornaments are suitable for wearing on the foot, the more honourable parts of a Brahman's body, the head and neck, require the wearing of gold ornaments. For an account of the differentiated degrees of honour attached to the body, see G. Morris Carstairs, *The Twice born: A Study of a Community of High Caste Hindus*, London: Hogarth Press, 1970, pp. 77-86.

<sup>40</sup> As Hinduism lowest recognised *varna* category, the implication is that water brought by a Sudra would thereby be contaminated.

<sup>41</sup> The implication here is that Brahman women of Dhār were accustomed to wearing a simple waist cloth, lacking the modesty and dignity of the full sari's tuck at the waist and folds of fabric covering the chest and extending over the shoulder.

<sup>42</sup> This instruction reflects the concerns about bride-price discussed above.

<sup>43</sup> The reference here is to the work of *dharmaśāstra* on the ritual entitlements of Sudras, by Kamalākaraḥṭṭa, the great seventeenth century Maratha scholar from Banaras, and scion of the famous Bhatta dynasty of scholars. For this genre of literature, see Theodore Benke, 'The *Śūdrācāraśiromaṇi* of Kṛṣṇa Śeṣa. A 16<sup>th</sup>. Manual of Dharma for Śūdras'. University of Pennsylvania PhD thesis, 2010.