

Transitions and Translations: Regional Power and Vernacular Identity in the Dakhan, 1500–1800

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The theoretical underpinnings of reductionist understandings of literary culture were seriously eroded through the 1970s, and its analysis turned largely hermeneutic. This approach has indeed produced dramatic breakthroughs in our understanding of literary creation and its forms. But I suggest that is also useful to try and connect (but not reduce) discourses – which were after all exercises in communication – with other features of the communities that formed around them. This context is, I feel, especially significant in the early modern period, when new forms of belonging increasingly centered on and created speech communities that, in short order, became “nations” or “races”; and so the Anglo-Saxon, Slavic, Teutonic, Latin, and other races took the stage. The establishment of these identities often involved the self-conscious creation and propagation of a “national” literary culture.

Sheldon Pollock has pointed out that the process of vernacularization began with “the conscious decisions of writers to reshape the boundaries of their cultural universe by renouncing the larger world for a smaller place... New local ways of making culture – with their wholly historical and factitious local identities – and, concomitantly, ordering society and polity came into being, replacing the older translocalism.”¹ Implicit in this formulation is that agency resides in the author, the communicator whose choice of medium demarcates its sphere of intelligibility. But the communicator's choice may not be unconstrained: language is ever-changing and he or she risks miscommunication or non-communication.² In this look at literary change, I shall therefore attempt to widen the range of linguistic materials studied beyond those that were avowedly literary. Second, Pollock's formulation implicitly suggests that the process of vernacularization was somehow irreversible. This was certainly so in the West: the generally reactionary Congress of Vienna (1814–15) did not negotiate in Latin. But in South Asia, an effort at reviving the old cosmopolitan language of Sanskrit was actually made in the late seventeenth century. I shall examine the

paradoxical fate of this effort through the eighteenth century.

But still, how is the author's choice made? Given how deeply the grammatical structures of many languages are marked by hierarchies of power that shape the forms of appropriate utterance, could the choice of medium have been unconnected with the power of patronage? Other questions also arise: how were the communicants visualized by the communicators? How were they changed by that communication? What energized the pre-formative processes that, like contours of the earth, channeled the rivulets that flowed into the larger historic speech communities of the early modern period? And finally, how did some of these communities become the dialects with armies that we called official languages in the century gone by?³ I shall approach these questions by attempting – so far as my skills permit – to delineate the main features of the polyglot milieu that was the matrix of these processes in South Asia.

A Co-evolution of Identity and Language?

A significant body of regional studies exists in the field of early modern language. The beginnings of the Telugu in Andhra have been examined by Cynthia Talbot in *Pre-Colonial India in Practice*; she notes astutely how the find-spots of Telugu inscriptions mirror the political power of the Kakatiya dynasty, which used this language to assert its authority vis-à-vis the Kannada-preferring Calukyas of Kalyani.⁴ In Maharashtra the spread of Marathi inscriptions was associated with the Kakatiyas' contemporaries and rivals, the Yadavas of Devagiri.⁵ In “Recovering Babel” Sanjay Subrahmanyam notes, among other things, the unacknowledged dialogue across linguistic boundaries among Persian histories, Tamil and Telugu narratives, and Tamil folk epics.⁶ Looking at Mughal north India, Shantanu Phukan recently proposed a demanding agenda: that “adamantly heteroglot” literary communities should be approached by looking at “an entire literary area with its multiple

literary voices and the manner in which these interacted with each other.”⁷ He goes on to suggest that embedding eastern Hindi dialects in Persian or Persianate Urdu texts was a choice that aristocratic men of letters made to invoke intimate domains of affection and loss.⁸

This line of thought diverges from the major current among historians who have looked at the phenomenon of polyglossia and hybridization. As Phukan points out, most scholars, influenced by the idea of popular language as the primitive core of nationhood, have tended to identify language choice in terms of its teleological contribution to some as yet inchoate integrative project.⁹ In 1978 Richard Eaton published an important contribution to the study of the social role of Dakhani Hindi and argued that its adoption by the Sufi lineages he studied was instrumental in the spread of Islam beyond the Persianate elite in the city of Bijapur.¹⁰ A similar integrationist analysis of the Mughal decision to adopt Persian as its administrative and literary language was proposed by Muzaffar Alam, who wrote in 1998: “The non-sectarian and liberal feature of Persian made it an ideal forum through which the Mughals could effectively negotiate the diversities of the Indian society. The culture and ethos of the language matched with their vision of an over-arching empire.”¹¹

The evidence that Alam provides for this is, however, a select anthology of ecumenical statements in Persian. These would be available to someone who had learned the language, but that evidence does not address the issue of how Persian was viewed by the millions who did not know it, and certainly could not read the liberal scholars he cites. Alam, after all, describes how even the liberal Persian syllabus was ultimately imposed by imperial fiat under Akbar, and most students simply wanted to learn enough to qualify for government employment. By implication, though, the adoption of Persian had in fact excluded many. Hence, Alam continues, when the empire was challenged by regionally based ethnicities, the Mughals came to realize that “the increasing cultural affirmation of the region expressed in its linguistic diversity had to be accommodated in more meaningful ways. They recognized the need to culturally integrate and accommodate with, and not simply dominate, the regions. This could be illustrated from the interest they showed in Hindavi.”¹² Implicitly, therefore, Alam admits that the choice of Persian over some Hindavi language did exclude the numerous users of those regional tongues, who then had to be conciliated. In his 2003 revision of this essay, he ends by noting that the coup de grace for Indo-Persian came when “Persian, the language of power par excellence, was divorced from power” by the British government of India.¹³

Let me develop this important observation. Another aspect of language choice is that language and accent, like other hard-to-acquire identity markers, can be used

not merely to *include* but also to *exclude*. Consider, for example, the role of English in twentieth-century India: retained because it belongs to no one geographically bounded ethnicity, it has worked as a language of power and the marker of the power-elite. This use of English is challenged, however, by the nationalist idea of authenticity residing in the “mother tongue”: the resulting compromise has usually been to impose a vernacular on the poor while reserving the choice of English to the affluent and powerful.¹⁴ Mughal India was unaffected by nationalism and the monolingual ideal that has often accompanied it. Insofar as power was to be centralized in the hands of the ruling family and its associates, the language of power should not tie the emerging imperial state to any specific ethnicity. The major threat to Akbar could come from his Turki kin at Kabul and the Turkic Uzbeks who loomed behind them, which ruled out Turkish. Then again, Akbar was a ruler with expansive ambitions: the regional connotations of northern Hindavi or its southern equivalent, Dakhani, would have tied the empire too closely to regional elites who, in turn, were identified with the regimes that he had just superseded or was still subverting. It is noteworthy that these weaker powers had increasingly sought to embed themselves in the emerging regional tongues.¹⁵ I now turn to a region where this process was active.

Language Competition in Western India

The Marathi language is attested from at least the eighth century CE, but its major efflorescence coincided with the rule of the Yadavas of Devagiri in the thirteenth century. This culminated in the famous *Jnyanesvari* (or *Dnyanesvari*, completed in 1290). As Tulpule and Feldhaus observe, “Such great literary achievements were made in this period that it has come to be known as the ‘Golden Age’ in the history of the Marathi language. This period saw the rise and development of the Varkaris and the Mahanubhavas, the two sects that produced the bulk of Old and Middle Marathi literature.”¹⁶

The Yadavas were supplanted in 1318 by governors sent from Delhi, who in turn set up the Bahmani sultanate from c.1350. The sultanate disintegrated at the end of the fifteenth century, being succeeded by the Nizam Shahis in western Maharashtra. Important works of Middle Marathi literature continued to be produced. Furthermore, Marathi remained the language of administration and government at the local level, where hereditary officials maintained their grip on authority. As Chatrapati Sivaji's minister, Krishnaji Ananta Sabhasad, wrote in 1694, “Lands held by the Idalshahi, Nizamshahi, Mughalai were conquered [by Sivaji]. In those lands, the farmers had been until then completely in the hands of the hereditary headmen, accountants and district officers.”¹⁷ These officials maintained records (and probably spoke) in a variant of Middle Marathi modified

by a significant infusion (as we shall see below) of Persian and Arabic loan-words.

Elsewhere, I have argued that the centralizing authority of early modern states in the peninsula operated significantly through the exploitation of extant fissures and cleavages in local society.¹⁸ One of these points of entry was via the adjudication of local disputes, as Andre Wink pointed out in his path-breaking book almost two decades ago.¹⁹ These conflicts were most often settled at assemblies – *gotsabba*, *majlis*, etc. – essentially according to the “common sense” of the country. These judicial processes, in turn, generated a discourse of entitlement by inheritance and the *bakhar* (historical narrative) was therefore well adapted to discourses of ethnic pride and the consequent claims to regional dominance by autochthonous landholders. A growing body of research suggests the importance of such gentry communities in the politics of early modern India. Muzaffar Alam pointed this out in 1986: in resistance to the Mughal empire, “the rebels and ‘disturbers’ had been identified in terms of either their class, namely, *zamindars*, or their caste, clan and region.”²⁰ Furthermore, in a polyglot milieu, familiarity is signaled by using common speech inaccessible to others; exclusion or dominance by using an official language of power (in contemporary north India, this pattern is exhibited in the use of regional language or dialect versus English). Regional names reflected dominant ethnic communities: Kolvan, Marathwada, Jhalawad, Kathiawad, Baiswada, Gondwana, Hadauti, Mhairwada, Rohilkhand, Bundelkhand. It will be evident that I am moving towards a speech-community definition of ethnicity, while admitting such additional limiting markers as the evidence sustains.²¹ But my use of ethnicity is not spatially bounded in the way that “nationality” is assumed to be. In fact, ethnicities in hierarchical societies cannot escape ranking, and are often formed by the intrusion of plebeian or elite minorities into areas where they were previously unknown.²²

Was Dakhani also taking shape as the language of an incipient southern “Turk” ethnicity? The sixteenth century saw the sultanates of southern India increasingly thrown back on local resources by the rise of Portuguese power in the Indian Ocean and the Mughal empire in north India. The cores of three long-lived sultanates were centered in different language zones: the Adil Shahi in the Kannada-speaking area, the Nizam Shahi in west Maharashtra, and the Qutb Shahi in Andhra. The same period saw a rise in the patronage of Dakhani as well as the use of regional languages like Marathi and Telugu. Richard Eaton noted the turn to Dakhani composition among some Sufi *pirs* from the late fifteenth century onward. He suggested that part of the reason for its adoption was that

it was evidently the only vernacular of Bijapur with which both Muslims and Hindus – at least those integrated with the city – were familiar ... Dakhani could reach more people than could the elitist Persian language. Of course, the use of Marathi or Kannada would have reached many more than even Dakhani. But Dakhani had the advantage of being written in the Perso-Arabic script, which would permit, when necessary, the easy importation of Islamic vocabulary.²³

Was the choice as strictly functional as Eaton suggests? The idea that literacy should build towards the ability to read the Koran, and therefore start with the Arabic script, was widespread in the Islamic world. But the obstacles to rendering Marathi or Kannada into the Perso-Arabic script are no more serious than those encountered in rendering Turkish, Panjabi, Swahili, Malay, or indeed Dakhani into it. Furthermore, because oral transmission initiated by lectors reading aloud would be a major form of propagation, the phonetic corruption of Arabic religious terms would creep in regardless of the language of composition. As the simple technical explanation is insufficient, I would suggest that Dakhani may have been the only vernacular that the Sufis knew, and that they saw no need to go beyond the circle of Dakhani-knowing plebeians (which would include the women and retainers of their Persian-knowing patrons). Hence they needed no rustic languages. As Eaton pointed out, at their most activist they were no more than passive proselytizers or reformers of the established community;²⁴ unlike, say, the ferociously proselytizing Jesuits, who not only learned local vernaculars worldwide but also took steps to bring them into the world of print.

The Dakhani language then became an aspect of a dominant urban elite, and was perceived as such. Thus the famous Marathi *bhakta* poet, Tukaram, in depicting the modern age of decay (*kaliyuga*), points to the use of *avindhavani* – “the speech of those who have unpierced ears,” i.e., Muslims – by even Brahmans as one of its features.²⁵ In the 1650s, Jayarama Pindye claimed to compose freely in twelve languages including *daksinatya yavani*.²⁶ *Yavana* was by then a common term for Muslim, and Jayarama clearly recognized that the southern or *daksinatya yavanas* had a language distinct from Persian, which he simply termed *yavani*.

The Dakhani language thus became expressive of a regional religious identity. The sixteenth-century *bhakta* poet Eknath’s “Hindu-Turk *samvad*” illustrates among other things the power-relation involved. The “Turk” is actually a Muslim who gets into a wrangle with a Brahman. The Muslim speaks something close to Dakhani with many Arabic loan-words, while the Brahman does not choose to display his knowledge of Sanskrit although he quotes a Sanskrit *sloka*. He uses a Marathi

very close to Eknath's own but shares significant vocabulary with his antagonist. For example, after the "Turk" has used the Bali-Vamana legend to attack Hindu belief, the Brahman replies, "*Bali kbudaca kbasa banda*" (Bali was a favored slave of the Lord). The case-marker is Marathi but three out of four words are Persian. He then goes on to assimilate the story of Adam and Eve with that of Rama and Sita, Ravana being identified with Satan.²⁷

So Dakhani, like Urdu in north India, was a language of the urban centers and the elite. It was perhaps an errant aspiration to urbanity that led Tukaram's sinful *kali-yugina* Brahman to pop a *pan-vida* into his mouth and then use *avindba* speech.²⁸ Furthermore, as already mentioned, over time central authority developed a more intrusive presence in the localities. In such a setting, official languages and the power to prescribe them would impact deeply upon the formation of speech communities. Superiors are truly such only in the presence of inferiors; elites, only if they dominate over subalterns.

So the court officials that ambitious leaders of gentry clusters invoked, resisted, and emulated were (particularly after the fall of Vijayanagara), Persianized rather than Sanskritized. It was important for local potentates, proprietors of all sorts, and even humble peasant plaintiffs to get some understanding of officialese and polite usage. But on the other hand, the strength of the gentry lay in local followings and extended kin networks. These would be reinforced, as we shall see in the case of the Chatrapatis Sivaji and Sambhaji, by the invocation of a shared ethnic rootedness – in a sense, an expanded sense of kinship whereby all speakers of a given language were akin. Superiority would then be signaled by the use of a higher register indicating access to but not assimilation into a "high" language. Total assimilation to the glorious imperial court was dangerous, if tempting.²⁹ So the "high" languages of the royal courts gradually infiltrated the various regional tongues, and multiple linguistic registers had to be mastered by great and small alike. This changed the way they spoke.

Indeed, if we take even a cursory look at the volume of records, orders, summons, and warnings surviving through the troubled sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it seems likely that the form of written document that a commoner would most frequently hear or see would be an official document such as a *zahirnama*, *katba*, *mucalka*, *dospatra*, *hakikata*, *takidpatra*, *izarpata*, *dastak*, *karina*, or *mahzar*. How common an understanding of the structure and function of such documents became is shown by the fact that the immensely popular Eknath (1533–99) and Tukaram (1608–50) both composed devotional poems that played upon these formats. For example, Eknath wrote an *arz* beginning:

*Arzdast arzdar
bandgi bandenavaz*

*Alekam salam
Sabebance sevesi
bande sarirakar
Jivaci sekdar
Budhaji karkun
Prgane Sarirabad
Kille Kayapuri Sarkar Sabebanci ajna gheun svar jahlon
Ton pargane mazkuri yeun sarkar kam suru karavayas laglo
ton pargane majkurce jamadar Dambhaji sete*

[A petition from the slave to the cherisher of slaves, on whom be peace: the writer has the form of the Body, which is bailiff-custodian of Life, together with the clerk who is its Intellect, situated in the subdivision of the Living (follows)]

Having received the Lord's command at the Fort of the Body, I set off for the aforementioned subdivision and began conducting government business. The tax-farmer of the subdivision is Dambhaji ...]

This poem ingeniously mimics the structure and tone of reports from touring subordinates to central ministers, down to descriptions of malfeasance and accounts of the writer's efforts to remedy the situation as a parable for the frail human body beset by evil desires and impending death. So affairs of the *pargana* (body) on which Budhaji (the consciousness) is reporting are represented as being in disorder, with Kamaji (Desire) as the *mabajan* (head of the merchants), covetousness as the (female) *despandina* (hereditary registrar) and Krodhaji (Rage) as the *nayakvadi* (chief of police), etc. Then Jarasandha, a mace-bearer, brings news that Death in the form of a Brahman auditor (Yamaji Pant) is about to take charge. At this terror the *pargana* almost empties of life; Kesganv (Hair-ville) turns white; Kanganv (the Earvilles) close their gates; Nakapur (Noseham) begins to run, Gandapur (Anuston) begins to flow,³⁰ and so on. It ends:

*Eka Janardanaka banda
bandgi roshan hoye he arzdast.*³¹

Read as Hindustani, which the genitive case-marker "ka" suggests, it means: "Eka (Eknath) is (solely) the slave of Janardana. So that this servitude may be illuminated [by the divine presence] this petition is in the hand." Janardana of course refers to Krishna; but Eknath's guru was also named Janardana and is said to have been a fort commandant under the Nizam Shahi sultans of Ahmadnagar.

The devotional poets may of course have wished to display their linguistic virtuosity as well as devotion; but an example of how deeply these official processes imprinted ordinary Marathi can be seen from a deposition by one Babaji Krishna Kulkarni in 1650 (with Perso-Arabic derivatives highlighted):

*arz kela ki aple kulkarnapanaci nivad karkirdi Malik
Ambar Sabeb jala bota tenhepramane aple vadile khat bote
javari aple vadile babhat jaleyavar darmiyane Ataji Tan-*

*prabhu apla varisdar Marbateyace nivadiyasi kusur karun ghetla bota.*³²

[Submitted a petition that a decision on our hereditary village accountant's office was made in the administration of Malik Ambar Saheb, and our father had exercised the office in conformity with that decision. Then after our father's demise Ataji Tanprabhu our co-heir got a fraudulent decision in his favor from the Marhata administration.]

Languages were marked by a tension between hybridization and identity. The resulting mixed idiom, with an interesting infusion of Sanskrit *tatsamas* (loan words) is found, for example, in Sivaji's letter to Dadaji Naras Prabhu, *deshpande* of the Rohida valley, where the major appeal is to a territorial rootedness in the valley as well as putative wider subcontinental identity (again, Perso-Arabic is highlighted):

*shabasi bemangiri tumbi va ambi karit nabi Srirohidesvara tumce kboriyatil adi kuladeva tumca dongarmatha patharavar sendrilagat svayambhu abe tyani ambas yas dilbe va pudbe sarva manoratha Hindvi svarajya karun puravinar abe tyas bavas haval hou naye kbamakha sangava.*³³

[You and I are not being disloyal to the Shah. Srirohidesvara, the original presiding deity of your valley, exists in self-created form next to the *sendri* tree on the plateau at the crest of your mountain: he has given me success and will in future fulfill the desire of creating a Hindavi kingdom. So say to the Bava (addressee's father): "Do not be unnecessarily downcast."]

But while such local knowledge and identity could be valuable to the head of a small principality, a subcontinental imperial system could benefit from a high language that favored no specific ethnicity – the role played by Persian in the Mughal Empire. In later years, Sivaji and his son and successor Sambhaji seem to have considered the possibility of Sanskrit playing such a role. Thus the *Rajavyavaharakosa* – a thesaurus of official usage – was prepared shortly after Sivaji's coronation as Chatrapati. This has sometimes been presented as an effort at the triumphant return of Sanskrit with the end of Muslim rule. S. B. Varnekar, for example, claims that the author was commissioned to write this text in order to save the language of the gods (*devabhāsa*).³⁴ The text itself is much more modest: "Having completely uprooted the barbarians (*mleccha*), by the best of kings a learned man was appointed ... to replace the overvalued Yavana words (*atyartham yavanavacanair*) with educated speech (*vibudhabhasam*)."³⁵ There is, for a period, a significant change in register in official documents, with a new prominence given to Sanskritic terminology, even though Marathi remained the official language. I shall return to this theme later in this essay.

The early emergence of regional vernaculars had been associated to some degree with the translation, or more

precisely adaptation, of Sanskrit works: the most famous example in early Marathi literature is the *Jnyanesvari/Dnyanesvari* of 1290. The sixteenth-century scholar Eknath also composed some major transcriptions, paralleling the slightly later work of Tulsidas in north India. We may get some insights into the polyglot milieu of a seventeenth-century court via the *Radhamadbavavilasacampu*.³⁶ Its author, Jayarama Pindye, exemplifies the multiple skills possessed by the seventeenth-century literatus. He clearly had some training in the Sanskrit poetic tradition and quotes both Bhamaha and Bhoja at the outset and acknowledges the *Amarakosa*. But he accords a high status to the various vernaculars, and there are few indications of language hierarchy in his text. The text presents itself as narrating the literary feats of the poet Jayarama Pindye at the court of Sahaji Bhonsle in Karnataka when the latter was an Adil Shahi general, carving out a new domain in the remains of the Vijayanagara empire.³⁷ Jayarama states that Sahaji himself listened to the play of twelve languages that it contained.³⁸ The text opens with a prose introduction discussing the opinions of different literary critics on the poet's choice of his theme, and then follow five cantos on what I would judge conventional themes: waterfrolics, the flowery bed, the description of the heroine from head to toe, the six seasons, and so on.

The sixth canto, however, presents something altogether new. It reverts to prose and describes how the assembly of connoisseurs was amazed by the cantos and asked the reader who the author was. The answer is that he is associated with a maharaja; the audience then asks who that latter is, which occasions several ingeniously crafted lines in praise of the Bhonsle king.³⁹ Next the arrival of the poet, who comes from Maharashtra to Sahaji's court, is described. Entering, Jayarama takes his appointed place and makes an offering of twelve coconuts. The king is intrigued and asked why: the poet responds that they symbolize the twelve languages in which he composes: "Sanskrit, Prakrit, Gopacaliya, Gurjara, Vaktara, Dhundhar, Panjab, Hindusthan, Baggul, Yavani, Daksinatya Yavani, Karnataka."⁴⁰ I have to postpone a complete analysis of these language names, which would have to be accompanied by an analysis of the actual poems presented (occasionally under different language-names) in the eleventh canto. Briefly, however, I suggest that *Prakrit* refers to Marathi, which may suggest a link to classical Prakrit and the understanding that it was a literary language with a grammatical traditions of its own, and *Gopacaliya* to Braj or Gwaleri. (Gwalier has obviously the same meaning as Gopacal, the land of the cowherds [*gval-* or *goval-*] or perhaps the Cowherd, i.e., Krishna.) *Vaktara* is clearly Bundeli: the name may refer to the accoutrements of war, or it may be a Sanskritization of *bhasa* (*vaktra* as mouth, by extension, speech or *bhasa/bhakha*). *Dhundhar* refers to northern

Rajasthani, and *Hindusthan* is what is subsequently labeled Rekhta. *Baggul* is northwestern Marathi or Ahirani. (The Baghul *vamsa* ruled in the eponymous province of Baglana to the 1640s. In 1596 they invited the Southern poet Rudrakavi to compose a Sanskrit family history in twenty cantos.)⁴¹ *Yavani* is Persian, and *Daksinatya* (southern) *Yavani* is Dakhani. (*Panjab* and *Karnatak* are self-evident.) Clearly, as suggested above, Dakhani was viewed as the tongue of a regional ethnicity that happened to share a broader religious identity with the northern Yavanas, but was nonetheless distinct from their tongue.

The next canto represents a literary competition in which various learned men of the court challenge each other with lines from verses that have to be completed in conformity with meter and meaning. Then a canto occasioned by the appearance of Sahaji armed and accoutered and so on. Then, interestingly, Sahaji asks the poet to respond extempore to themes (*samasya*) in the vernaculars. Jayarama agrees if the contest is conducted in the presence of the young prince. The jealous vernacular poets see this as an opportunity, and rush to offer difficult themes. Jayarama utters a *sloka* saying that the Sanskrit lion advances roaring to seize the unattainable bright and bashful word, while the others sit concealed in the many-branched languages like monkeys (*sakhamrga*).⁴² This angers the *bhasa* poets who resolved to set him the most difficult lines when they get the chance. Jayarama then exhibits his virtuosity at another session by completing verses using lines thrown him in different Hindavi languages. The first is clearly in Bundeli and the theme heroic. It celebrates the conquest of Karnatak by Sahaji, and ends with an ingenious play on *ber* (wild fruit) and *bairi* (enemy) to boast that the womenfolk of his enemies were forced to flee into the woodlands.

*bajat karnatak bhajan karnatak batanmen kangde batak
setanmen
balamki bat lakhen barbar bavarisi bairanki vadhu phire
bairanki banme*

[Conquering Karnatak cleaving the Karnatakis, the Kangdas who recoiled from the spears – and the exiled wives of the enemy roam in the jungles where the wild fruit grows.]

This is then followed by an amorous image of Krishna (Kanha) in Braj, then a heroic verse in Khari Boli, with a pun on *firang* (sword), *firangi* (Portuguese?), and *phir rang gayo hai*. (Roughly translated, the couplet suggests that Portuguese women lose color or blench when Sahaji takes up his sword.) These feats pleased the worthy, but now both the Sanskrit and vernacular poets present were offended. A linguistically interesting poem is labeled “Rekhta” and written in the feminine voice:

*akal curai meri kamakal pithare ne mahabali maharaja dilgir
kare hai*

*jilbe sa duniye ke ganim sab kati kadbe jake sat sattar bazar
svar kbare hai ...*

[My small wit is stolen [I am infatuated] by the great lord, the mighty maharaja has made me heavy-hearted.

He who slays all enemies, in whose service seven and seventy thousand horsemen stand ready.]

One of the more striking aspects of the *Campu* is the prominence given to Bundeli. One is strongly tempted to link this with Kolff's work on the Bondiliyas, and that of Subrahmanyam on their role as auxiliaries of the Mughals in southern India.⁴³ The Mughal connection is explicitly suggested in a verse addressed to Narayana (Vishnu) by his envoy after surveying the earth:

*tum soye rabo sirsindhu maha
aru uttar dachan rachan ko
it Sahju hai ut Sahijaha.*

[Continue to repose in the sea of milk:
the north and south are protected
here is Sahju and there is Sahijaha.]

Did ethnic gentry power determine the panoply of languages on display? Marathi is introduced very late in the sequence of poems, and then at the request of the court jester (*vidusaka*), and the response is punning verse on the defeat of Mir Jumla, the capture of the fort of Gutti, and eating shit. (Later more heroic Marathi verse is introduced, including a series of poems exhibiting different meters in the same language, and significantly concluding with a series of Marathi *dohas*.) In poem 30 Durg Thakur asks the poet to compose in Marathi: “*kavi thor yas bhasa apra*” (Poet, great is this our language). Poem 31 then renders the theme of the wives of Sahaji's enemies hiding in the forest and seeking to conceal themselves among the Bhil women.

In 1618, several decades prior to the composition of Jayarama's poem, Thomas Stevens, S.J., in order to popularize his rendering of Christian doctrines into Marathi/Konkani, introduced several verses in praise of the Marathi language into the first chapter of his work, and wrote it in the traditional *ovi* meter. The language is declared to be the diamond and turquoise among gems, the peacock among birds, the *kalpataru* (fabulous wish-granting tree) among trees, the noblest of tongues, the Sunday and Monday among days, etc.⁴⁴ I would suggest that this prefatory material was inserted in order to mobilize embryonic language-pride to reinforce the acceptance of the text.

But a return to Sanskrit is also visible at the close of the seventeenth century, perhaps reflecting the new ambitions of regional satraps in the wide vistas opened by the evident collapse of the Mughals. Consider the career of the *Vivekacintamani*, an encyclopedic Virashaiva Kannada prose text of the thirteenth or fourteenth century translated into Marathi *ovi* verse in 1604. Portions of the Kannada text were then rendered into Tamil later that

century and into Sanskrit c. 1725. The Sanskrit translation was by Nirvanamantri, minister at the court of the Keladi *nayaka*, Somashekhara.⁴⁵ Sanskrit scholarship was active and innovative at this time. Multiple sources of patronage had also opened up: most notably, the Mughal emperor himself.⁴⁶ Sheldon Pollock has described how the Imperial court generated unparalleled cross-cultural interactions from the sixteenth century onward.⁴⁷ Great expectations were current among the literati. A widely circulated *sloka* attributed to the great Sanskrit scholar Jagannatha ran:

*dillisvaro va jagadisvaro va manorathan purayitum samarthah
anyair nrupalair babu diyamanam sakaya va syallavanaya va
syat*

[(My) desires can be fulfilled by either the lord of Delhi or the lord of the world

What is an abundant gift for other kings will merely supply me vegetables or just the salt to flavor them.]⁴⁸

Pollock also suggests that some of Jagannatha's Sanskrit verse was modeled on the well-established Persian theme of a lamentation over the unattainable beloved.⁴⁹ The northern Bhonsle kingdom established by Sahuji's son Sivaji seems, in the last years of Sivaji, and more vigorously under Sambhaji, to have aimed at a reinstatement of Sanskrit as a language of history and even of diplomacy. We have the well-known *Sivabharata*,⁵⁰ as well as several lesser-known Sanskrit *kavyas*. Sivaji patronized the important *Rajanyavaharakosa*, a thesaurus of Sanskrit official terms. There was also a certain effort to correspond with the Rajput courts of Rajasthan in Sanskrit.⁵¹ In part, this may have been a counter to the increasingly Islamic tone of Aurangzeb after 1678. In the last years of Sivaji's reign, and throughout that of Sambhaji, titles were Sanskritized to a considerable degree and we find significantly more Sanskrit words in official documents. This continued with the succession of Rajaram (1689) and the desperate guerilla struggle of the ensuing years, when every ideological appeal was thrown into the scales, with routine use of *jihad* by the Mughals, and appeals such as this from the Maratha ruler: "svamice rajya mhanaje deva-brhamanaci bhumi. Ya rajyaci abhivreddhi vHAVI ani Maharashtra dharmaha ra-hava."⁵² (That the Lord [Rajaram] holds this kingdom is equivalent to the Gods and Brahmans holding it. This kingdom must be sustained and the dharma pertinent to Maharashtra survive.)

We also have a return to a stronger emphasis under Rajaram and Tarabai on the ethnic Maratha character of the kingdom. In a letter – likely one of many sent in the desperate year 1690 – Rajaram wrote to Bajji Sarjerao Jedhe, "he Marasta rajya abe?" (this is a Maratha kingdom).⁵³ Writing in 1693, the experienced minister Krishnaji Ananta Sabhasad nostalgically read ethnic assertion into Sivaji's coronation as *Chatrapati* in 1674. "In this epoch all the great kings have been barbarian (*mlec-*

cha); now a Marast *padshah* became *chatrapati*. This was no ordinary event."⁵⁴ In fact, the copious contemporary documentation surviving from that event suggests that it was designed to be much more pan-Indian and Sanskritic than Marathi in character. But by the beginning of the eighteenth century, *Maharashtradharm* was invoked in various contexts, without requiring further definition.

It is interesting that the *Peshwas* who took effective control of the Maratha state in the early eighteenth century, while lavishly patronizing the traditions of Sanskrit learning, did not promote it seriously in the sphere of government and diplomacy. Some Sanskrit correspondence continued, as for example in a letter sent with two emissaries to Jodhpur in 1736. But the text is a word-for-word translation of a Marathi official text with all the conventions of that genre. It also bears a great formal resemblance to Rajasthani letters in the same collection. I surmise that scribes all three languages were modeling themselves on well-established Persian epistolary convention. The letter ends with the conventional "Why should I write much?" in Sanskrit.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, back in Maharashtra, the language of the administrative documents of the era reflects, if anything, the strong legacy of sultanate/Mughal statecraft and eighteenth-century Hindustani usage. When foreign authorities were to be impressed it was done by incorporating large amounts of Persian. So for example around 1775, the minister Nana Phadnis wrote to the king of England on behalf of the infant *peshwa* explaining recent events in the kingdom (Persian words are printed in bold):

*Tyas Madhavraosabeh vaikunthavasi jaliyavar kiblegab
Narayanarao Sabeh daulat karu lagle. Te vakhti Raghunatharao gharantila biradar yani daga karun apla daulat
karavi ha irada kela kiblegab yans phamd karun marile.
Hi gosta Hinduce mahzabat babut na-munasab...*⁵⁶

[Then after the noble Madhavrao took up his heavenly abode, the auspicious and noble Narayanrao began to rule. At that time, Raghunathrao, a close relative, decided to take over the kingdom by treachery and killed the auspicious one by a devious stratagem. According to Hindu orthodoxy, this action is deeply impermissible ...]

On the other hand, the Marathi language was tenaciously retained, even though Persian was, at the time, the major language of diplomacy in South and West Asia. This contrasts with the Mughal abandonment of Turkish after Babur (d. 1530). The Marathi language, much changed by loanwords, was still retained even as Mahadaji Sinde secured from his protégé, the Mughal emperor Shah Alam, the title of "plenipotentiary deputy" for the *Peshwa* and governed from Delhi in the latter's name. It is significant, therefore, that unlike the Sanskrit *Sivabharata/Sivacarita*, when a verse history of the *peshwai* was composed around 1772, it was in Mara-

thi in the *ovi* meter, though evidently written by a Sanskrit-knowing literatus, deeply immersed in the traditions of the *purana* and *kavya* literature.⁵⁷ Clearly, that linguistic identity had assumed a new significance in the politics of South Asia. This new significance of Marathi was also in evidence twenty years later when the English East India Company stripped the southern branch of Sahaji Bhonsle's descendants of the last fig leaf of sovereign authority that remained to them in Thanjavur. Sarfoji Bhonsle read the writing on the wall and added some of his own. The great patron of Sanskrit learning and Karnataka music had a long narrative history of the family written and carved on the walls of the Sri Brihadisvarasvami temple in their former capital. Surrounded with examples of literary Sanskrit and Tamil epigraphs, the last "Choladesadhipati Srimant Rajsri Maharaja Kshatrapati Sarfoji Raje Saheb" (Overlord of the Chola country, the glorious great king sovereign monarch, the worthy king Sarfoji) had his personal [secretary], Baburaya, compose and inscribe a family history in unadorned Marathi prose.⁵⁸

This text stands at the very cusp of the time when power and patronage in one of the great centers of Indian learning was slipping from the Bhonsle court to the "new men" rising in the port cities under colonial auspices. Does Sarfoji's choice of language offer us a hint of the connection between the worlds of language politics before and after the colonial deluge? I hope I have demonstrated that this question is worth asking.

NOTES

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¹Sheldon Pollock, "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History," *Public Culture* 12 (2000), 592.

²Pollock has, of course, already warned us against unthinkingly adopting "a conceptual style that typically reduces language to power and precludes even asking what may be different about their interaction in the past." Sheldon Pollock, "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular," *Journal of Asian Studies* 57 (1998), 32.

³The oft-cited and much-critiqued work of Benedict Anderson on print capitalism and its structuring effects may be cited as an example of such analysis on a macro-scale.

⁴Cynthia Talbot, *Pre-Colonial India in Practice: Society, Region and Identity in Medieval Andhra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 34–7.

⁵A. S. Altekar, "The Yadavas of Seunadesa," part 8 in *The Early History of the Deccan* (1960; repr. ed. Ghulam Yazdani [Delhi: Oriental Book Co., 1982]), 569–71.

⁶Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Recovering Babel," in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, ed. Daud Ali (Delhi: Oxford University Press 1999), 280–321.

⁷Shantanu Phukan, "'Through Throats Where Many Rivers Meet': The Ecology of Hindi in the World of Persian," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 38:1 (2001), 33–58.

⁸I venture to suggest that the rustic speech of the unlettered wet-nurses and attendants in the women's quarters might recall to aristocratic men a blissful period when they were cocooned in deferential affection – a period that ended with their induction into a world of slaps from tutors and snubs from grandees (if nothing worse).

⁹This instability is highlighted by Sheldon Pollock when he condemns a *History of French Literature* as "teleological to the core and unhistorical except in its brute linearity." Pollock, "Introduction," in *Literary Cultures in History*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 11 (hereafter cited as *LCIH*).

¹⁰Richard M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur 1300–1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 91–4, 135–74. By the late eighteenth century we have a poet complaining in five languages that only Shiva patronized Tamil, that Coastal Muslims rejected him, saying, "Arabi bat tumko malum nai nikal ja" (You do not know Arabic! Get out!). Cited in Indira V. Peterson, "Speaking in Tongues: The Cultural Discourses of Literary Multilingualism in Eighteenth-Century India" (paper presented at Columbia University, 2 December 2003).

¹¹Muzaffar Alam, "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics," *Modern Asian Studies* 32:2 (1998), 349.

¹²Alam, "Pursuit of Persian," 349, and the revised version of this paper, "Persian in Pre-colonial Hindustan," in *LCIH*, 162–3.

¹³Alam, "Persian in Pre-colonial Hindustan," 188.

¹⁴As Harish Trivedi elegantly puts it, "India remains a nation effectively without a national language, but at least – and perhaps precisely for that reason – it remains a nation." Harish Trivedi, "The Progress of Hindi," in *LCIH*, 981.

¹⁵Noted by Alam, "Persian in Pre-colonial Hindustan," 157–8.

¹⁶S. G. Tulpule and Anne Feldhaus, *A Dictionary of Old Marathi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), xi.

¹⁷Cited in Bhimrao Kulkarni, ed., *Sabhasad Bakhar* (Pune: Anmol Prakashan, 1987), 25.

¹⁸Sumit Guha, "Indigenous Historical Traditions and Colonial Histories: The Maratha Case" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, San Francisco, 3–6 January 2002).

¹⁹Andre Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India* (1985; Indian ed., Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1986).

²⁰Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab 1707–1748* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 2 and n. 2.

²¹Max Weber is still important for this concept: "Ethnic membership differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In our sense, ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere." Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, trans. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), vol. 1, 389–90. A few years ago, D.

H. A. Kolff suggested that identities such as “Afghan” or “Rajput” were “soldier's identities” rather than “ethnic or genealogical denotations,” but the evidence advanced for this sweeping statement is scanty. Furthermore, even by his own account, leaders had ethnic identities which were then donned and doffed by their followers as expedient. See D. H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 56–8.

²²So, for example, writing from Senji (Jinji) in the 1690s, hundreds of miles from significant concentrations of Marathi speakers, Chatrapati Rajaram could still say, “This is a Maratha kingdom.” Cited in Setumadhavarao Pagdi, *Hindvi Svarajya ani Mogal* (Pune: Venus Prakashan, 1966), 17.

²³Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, 141.

²⁴Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, 133.

²⁵R. R. Gosavi, ed., *Srisakalasantagatha* (Pune: Sarathi Press, 2000), vol. 2, 1023.

²⁶Jayarama Pindye, *Radhamadhavavilasacampu*, ed. V. K. Rajwade (Pune: Varda Books reprint, 1996), 227.

²⁷Gosavi, *Sakalasantagatha*, vol. 2, 583–6.

²⁸Gosavi, *Sakalasantagatha*, vol. 2, 1023.

²⁹Close assimilation with the Mughal court led to the demise of the long-established Baghul kingdom in north Maharashtra. See Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India c.1200-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 62–80.

³⁰This refers to dysentery.

³¹Gosavi, *Sakalasantagatha*, vol. 2, 527–8.

³²S. N. Joshi and G. H. Khare, eds., *Sivacaritrasahitya* (Pune: Bharata Itihasa Samshodhaka Mandala 1930), vol. 3, 22.

³³V. K. Rajwade, *Marathyanca Itihasanca Sadhanen* (Dhule, 1912), part 15, 272.

³⁴S. B. Varnekar, “Shivaji's Patronage to Sanskrit Learning,” in *Cbhatrapti Shivaji Coronation Tercentenary Commemoration Volume*, ed. B. K. Apte (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1974–5), 85.

³⁵K. N. Sane has printed the *Rajavyavaharakosa*, and cites the *sloka* in his epilogue to it; *Sivacaritrapradipa* (Pune: Bharata Itihasa Samshodhaka Mandala 1925), 144–77.

³⁶Pindye, *Radhamadhavavilasacampu*.

³⁷To be exact, the poems are reported in the text as composed on various occasions at the court of Sahaji Bhonsle, who is praised in every part of the text. But there may be interpolations as well: the Marathi poem “Bhujangaprayaga” goes on to praise Sivaji, “who will wage war against four patshahs” (*Radhamadhavavilasacampu*, text, 267).

³⁸“dvadasabhasalalita Shahanaresvarane akarnile,” *Radhamadhavavilasacampu* text, 3.

³⁹*Radhamadhavavilasacampu*, text, 226.

⁴⁰*Radhamadhavavilasacampu*, text, 227.

⁴¹Rudrakavi, *Rasbraudbhavamsamahakavya*, ed. C. D. Dalal (Baroda: Gaikwad Oriental Series V, 1917).

⁴²*Radhamadhavavilasacampu*, text, 245.

⁴³Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, 120–58; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Friday's Child: How Tej Singh became Tecinkurajan,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 36:1 (1999): 69–113.

⁴⁴Joseph L. Saldanha, ed., *The Christian Puranna of Father Thomas Stephens* (Mangalore: Simon Alvares, 1907), 7.

⁴⁵Pandita Avlikara, ed., *Sbrinijumashivayogi krita Vivekacin-tamani* (Dharwad: Karnataka University; Pune: Pune University, 1963). The modern edition of this work was itself a statement in the cultural politics of Nehruvian India: it was being edited and jointly published by state universities in Dharwad and Pune just as violent demonstrations erupted over the allocation of Belgaum district to Karnataka rather than Maharashtra.

⁴⁶This had begun with Akbar: see M. Athar Ali, “Translation of Sanskrit Works at Akbar's Court,” in *Akbar and His Age*, ed. Iqtidar Alam Khan (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1999), 171–80.

⁴⁷Sheldon Pollock, “New Intellectuals in Seventeenth-Century India,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 38:1 (2001), 20.

⁴⁸The proverbial nature this *sloka* came to acquire is shown by Ramacandra Pant's quotation of its first two words when composing the introduction to the *Ajnapatra* in 1717. S. N. Banhatti, the editor of the text, was able trace the allusion. S. N. Banhatti, ed., *Ajnapatra* (Pune and Nagpur: Suvicar Prakashana Mandala, 1986), 58, 121.

⁴⁹Pollock, “New Intellectuals,” 20.

⁵⁰Parmananda, *Sivabharata* (Pune: Anandasrama Press, 1930). For an English translation see James W. Laine and S. S. Bahulkar, trans., *The Epic of Shivaji* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2001).

⁵¹Akshayakirti Vyasa and G. H. Khare, “Udepurcy Vyasa gharanayakadila kahi patren,” *Bharata Itihasa Samsodhaka Mandala Traimasika* 33 (1952–3), 80.

⁵²Pagdi, *Hindvi Svaraj ani Mogal*, 17.

⁵³Rajwade, *Marathyanca Itihasanca Sadhanen*, part 15, 377–8.

⁵⁴Cited in Kulkarni, *Sabhasad Bakhar*, 76.

⁵⁵Vyasa and Khare, “Udepurcy Vyasa gharanayakadila kahi patren,” 80.

⁵⁶Cited in M. T. Patwardhan, introduction to *Farsi-Marathi Kosa*, 2nd ed. (Pune: Varda Books, 1996), 6.

⁵⁷Narendra Wagle and A. R. Kulkarni, ed. and trans., *Val-labha's Parasrama caritra* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1976).

⁵⁸T. Sambamurti Row, transcribed and ed., *The Marathi Historical Inscription at the Sri Brihadeeswaraswami Temple at Tanjore* (Tanjore: Sri Krishna Vilasa Press, 1907), passim and 119.