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Engaging Bhakti as/in Translation: An Outline of a Methodological Approach to Analyse Ranade's Views about the "Saints and Prophets of Maharashtra"

Rinku Lamba[1]

Abstract: The analysis in this article suggests that M G Ranade's reflections in his essay about the 'Saints and Prophets of Maharashtra' are significant because they offer a site to unravel shifts from a premodern to a modern conception of moral order on the Indian subcontinent, in the context of the encounter with colonialism. For its role in allowing such unravelling, and for the way it permits attention to hitherto neglected dimensions of Ranade's comparison between bhakti and the Protestant Reformation, this article argues for the value of investigating Ranade's reflections through the framework of *translation*. While doing the above, the article also seeks to gesture toward methodological issues involved in the study of ideas and clusters of concepts that bear transtemporal resonance and relevance.

INTRODUCTION

Charles Taylor's scholarship about the social imaginary of the modern West points toward understanding Western modernity in terms of a vision of moral order that was at first 'just an idea in the minds of some influential thinkers,' but that later mutated into a social imaginary (background understandings) of large groups of people, and 'eventually whole societies' (Taylor 2004: 2). These background understandings anchored certain 'social forms'

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[1] I gratefully acknowledge the opportunity to present a very early version of this paper at a virtual conference on the theme *From Universalism to Ethnopathos – Religious Knowledge in the Colonial Encounter between India and Germany*, organised by Isabella Schwaderer at the University of Erfurt in January 2021. I am thankful for helpful comments I received from participants of that conference. Isabella subsequently offered prescient comments on a revised draft, which helped greatly in shaping the arguments of this article, and I am very thankful to her for that. I thank the editors of this journal profusely for their patience, comments, and for the very kind guidance they offered at important stages in the production of this article. Finally, I am very grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their forthright and pointed criticisms; their comments have played a most crucial role in helping me sharpen the claims advanced in this article.

that came to characterise Western modernity: 'the market economy, the public sphere, and the self-governing people, among others'. (Taylor 2004: 2). Taylor's scholarship in this regard is important for many reasons. First, it illustrates what Taylor calls a 'cultural' approach to comprehend modernity (idem 1995). Taylor himself endorses this approach in comparison to an 'acultural' understanding whereby modernity is presented as a phenomenon linked mainly to material changes in society such as can be replicated in different parts of the world wherever similar material changes are ushered (idem 2004: 2). Further, and consistent with ideas about multiple and alternative modernities, Taylor's work inspires interrogations of the contents of the social imaginaries that sustain modernity in other jurisdictions, including India. Such interrogations will entail studies of doctrines, symbols and embodied practices, all of which, according to Taylor, are sites for comprehending the vision of moral order that constitutes a social imaginary (ibid.).

The discussions in this article are part of a research project pertaining to political ideas in modern India through which I seek to contribute to the emerging scholarship about the vision of moral order that has mutated into the social imaginary constituting Indian modernity. Admittedly, such a task requires work by a whole community of scholars, and I cannot pretend to provide some overarching answer to questions about what constitutes that vision of moral order. The scholarship of Sudipta Kaviraj and Rajeev Bhargava helpfully sheds light on *how* to study notions like religion, secularity, toleration and state power. Through the use of devices like translation, and of conceptual spaces, Kaviraj and Bhargava respectively demonstrate how to engage the conceptual resources of precolonial, colonial and postcolonial epochs to comprehend aspects of an Indian modernity (Kaviraj 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2014 & 2016; Bhargava 2001, 2014, 2015 & 2016). Drawing on their work, and in consonance with the aims of the aforementioned research project, in this article, I take up a study of the social and political thought of an important modern Indian thinker named Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842–1901).

Ranade was a prominent Indian social reformer with a complex disposition toward imperialism and colonialism.[2] Ranade was exposed to the best fare

[2] According to Ambedkar, 'it would be difficult to find in the history of India any man who could come up to Ranade in the width of his learning, the breadth of his wisdom and the length of his vision. […] His whole life is nothing but a relentless campaign for social reform' (Ambedkar

provided by the system of western education in colonial India and excelled in it. Despite holding a string of colonial appointments, Ranade, along with Dadabhai Naoroji, was at the forefront in advancing a critique of the economic exploitation wrought by colonial rule. Importantly, the encounter with colonialism, and the forms of racial domination accompanying it, led Ranade to reflect critically on Indian socio-religious practices. For him, the experience of humiliation generated by colonialism illuminated the forms of degradation permitted by many Hindu social practices. He asks: 'Is our own conscience clear in these matters? How do we treat members of the depressed classes – our own countrymen – even in these days?' (Ranade quoted in: Sharma 2002: 157). In fact, as I have pointed out in previously published work, for Ranade, the social, economic and political aspects of freedom were very closely interlinked. Consider, for example, the following statements:

> You cannot have a good social system when you find yourself low in the scale of political rights, nor can you exercise political rights and privileges unless your social system is based on reason and justice. You cannot have a good economical system when your social arrangements are imperfect. If your religious ideals are low and grovelling, you cannot succeed in social, economical or political spheres. This interdependence is not an accident but is the law of our nature. […] It is a mistaken view which divorces considerations, political from social and economical, and no man can be said to realize his duty in one aspect who neglects his duties in the other directions (Ranade 1915: 192).

Ranade, thus, became engrossed in debates about social reform in colonial India and also founded the Indian National Social Conference in 1887 in the image of a pan-Indian social reform organisation. His was a key voice in the

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1943: 23). Coming from Ambedkar, this can be seen as high praise, because for him the task of social reform was a most valuable and urgent one. 'It is on his role as a social reformer that this title to being a Great Man rests' (ibid.: 22). Even as Ambedkar lauds Ranade's role as a reformer, he laments that Ranade did not prioritise 'mass contact', 'propaganda' and 'concerted action' owing to which liberal ideas did not get sufficiently communicated to the masses (ibid.). I mention all this with the clarification that an evaluation of the accuracy of Ambedkar's assessment of Ranade is beyond the scope of this essay. A final remark here: In the text of this address Ambedkar says he wants to compare Ranade with Jyotiba Phule (ibid.: 4), since he sees them both as social reformers. But he neither develops the comparison nor provides any suggestions for speculation about the content of that comparison.

debates over the Age of Consent Bill that sought to raise the age of consent for married Hindu girls to twelve; the bill to enable that was enacted in 1891. In his interventions during the debates surrounding this issue, he endorsed state intervention in social and religious reform. I have argued in previously published work that his reflections in this regard permit very insightful analytical distinctions between state power and colonial power and contain resources to resist postcolonial theorists' attempts to fuse state- and colonial power. Further, I suggested that engaging Ranade's views about reform are key for tracing the emergence of liberalism in India, especially with regard to the role of the state for instituting impartial rule to protect the liberty of all persons (Lamba 2011). There I also noted Ranade's interest in the conceptual resources of the bhakti (Hindi/Sanskrit: *bhakti*, 'devotion/love/worship') tradition, and especially the Warkari tradition, and remarked how any persuasive comprehensive account of Ranade's political perspective would have to reckon with his creative attempt to bring to bear the conceptual resources of Indian ideas and practices alongside West-inspired ones (ibid.: 243).

In a broad sense, this article seeks to continue the earlier theoretical engagement with the social and political thought of Ranade. More specifically, however, it takes up the task of critically analysing Ranade's engagement with the conceptual resources of bhakti poet-saints, especially though not only the saints associated with the bhakti tradition in western India. I focus on Ranade's essay titled "The Saints and Prophets of Maharashtra", which was first published in 1895 as a stand-alone piece in the *Sarvajanik Sabha Quarterly* (Deshpande 2007: 128). The discussion in this article entails a close study of Ranade's engagement with the 'saints and prophets of Maharashtra' for probing conceptual moves through which the term 'religion' acquires sense in a period that was fraught with social and political change. Given that, and also because it was published independently in the first instance and can thus endure pointed attention, I focus almost solely on this essay of Ranade's in this article.[3]

[3] For a good discussion of this essay of Ranade's in the context of the text titled *The rise of the Maratha power* where it was also published in 1900, see Deshpande (2007: 126–150).

A reading of the essay reveals crucial and puzzling aspects of Ranade's engagement with the bhakti tradition.[4] The consolidation of the nation of Maharashtra, and a discussion of the significant impact of the Maharashtrian bhakti tradition for that consolidation, is doubtless one of Ranade's concerns. But, arguably, Ranade expects the substance of his reflections to also pertain to the Indian nation more generally, not least when he acknowledges the India-wide legacy of the bhakti saints and prophets—consider, for example, the numerous references he makes to the fifteenth-century poet-saint Kabir in the aforementioned essay. He comments on the tradition not only with reference to 'Maharashtra' but also, given important allusions to Kabir, to the Indian subcontinent more generally. However, with respect to positing the implications of bhakti in Maharashtra as relevant for the emergent Indian nation more generally, Ranade seems to be toeing a line that Deshpande identifies as a feature of Indian nationalist imaginations (ibid.: 135). She illustrates this in the Marathi context by mentioning how 'Marathi historians were unanimous in invoking the "uniqueness" of the Maratha experience in the subcontinent's history and citing its importance as a lesson for those in the colonial situation' (ibid.). Ranade's essay on the saints and prophets of Maharashtra, then, is meant not just a sub-nationally relevant articulation but is preoccupied with making interventions deemed relevant for India as a whole. There is a proto-national vision at work here.[5] It is in this context that I find it pertinent to focus on what Ranade identifies as noteworthy distinctive features of the tradition of saints and prophets when he compares it to the phenomenon of the Protestant Reformation.

While attributing the nation's 'spiritual excellence' to the saints and prophets, Ranade classifies their disposition as marked by 'intense spirituality,' a 'spirit of self-surrender', and a 'quiet resignation to the will of god' (Ranade 1900: 169, 172). He says the saints and prophets 'came out well in their struggles with their foreign rulers' (ibid.: 171). And he attributes the reestablishment in Maharashtra 'of a united native power in the place of

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[4] Unless otherwise indicated, all allusions to Ranade's text in this article refer to the pagination of the article on "The saints and prophets" in the collection of his essays titled *The rise of the Maratha power* (1900).

[5] I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for asking if Ranade's views can be called 'proto-national' and, if yes, then how 'truly' they 'encompass[ed] subcontinental diversity'. Responding to this query helped me to sharpen my claims in this article.

foreign domination' to the religious and political legacy of the traditions of the saints and prophets. Ranade states that 'a stronger backbone and more resisting power are needed in the times in which we live […]' (ibid: 170). But he goes on to say that 'in an account of the saints and prophets as they flourished more than two hundred years ago, we cannot afford to interpolate our own wants and wishes' (ibid.).

Evidently, Ranade is reluctant to impose the requirements of his own time in his engagement with the nature of interventions made by the prophets and saints who lived in another historical time period. He wants to avoid both anachronism and presentism. And yet Ranade's essay on the saints and prophets of Maharashtra can end up being interpreted as an account of bhakti that corresponds to modern Indian nationalists' 'wants and wishes'. At the very least this is the conclusion that others who have studied Ranade's interventions about bhakti suggest. I have in mind particularly the analyses of Prachi Deshpande and John Stratton Hawley.

But, is there any other analytically pertinent way to consider some of the puzzling aspects of Ranade's reflections about the saints and prophets of Maharashtra, beyond some of the extant interpretations of Ranade in this regard? What it is that Ranade can be interpreted to be doing when, (i) against his own wishes, he compares the Reformation in Europe with the bhakti tradition in India (entailing a comparison across two distinctive social imaginaries); (ii) engages the putatively old and the new in the Indian subcontinent itself (again, thinking across two plausibly distinctive imaginaries), and (iii) recalls bhakti and employs it, at least as per the accounts of Deshpande and Hawley, for contemporary nation-building purposes? My claim in this article is that it would be fruitful to interpret Ranade's engagement with the heritage of the bhakti saints and prophets via, first and foremost, a frame of *translation* for enabling historical understandings of conceptual and political change, and shifts in social imaginary.

Scholars have commented on the significance of Ranade's reflections about bhakti with respect to (a) the concept of Maharashtra Dharma (Deshpande 2007) and (b) comparisons of the bhakti tradition with the Protestant Reformation in Europe (Hawley 2015). Neither discussion, however, is driven by a motivation to undertake what James Farr calls 'historical thinking about politics' (Farr 1989: 37). Nor is it the express interest of either to undertake

an exercise in conceptual history or explore shifts in social imaginary. In the course of her rich analysis of the attempts to build a Marathi nation, Deshpande engages Ranade's views and comments on the reshaping of bhakti and a loss of its earlier lustre; but, as this article will demonstrate, there is more to be discerned in Ranade's perspective, and the framework of translation is very enabling in that respect. Hawley's primary interest is in reading Ranade's engagement with the saints and prophets of Maharashtra for locating how the notion of bhakti as a *movement* acquired traction. And like Deshpande, he too analyses aspects of the comparison that Ranade generates in his essay between the phenomenon of the Protestant Reformation in Europe and that of the tradition of bhakti on the subcontinent. However, neither Deshpande nor Hawley acknowledges or attaches importance to Ranade's calm articulation of a key difference between the monotheism associated with the Protestant Reformation and that which Ranade considers to be characteristic of the subcontinent. Nor is it their intention to analyse what that difference can bode for the way the notion of religion assumed meaning and coherence enough to constitute aspects of an emergent Indian modern social imaginary. My aim in the above comments about Deshpande and Hawley is neither to chastise their accounts for not working within the rubric of translation, nor to undermine the richness of their respective contributions; admittedly, distinctive scholarly interests drive their respective engagements with bhakti. But what I do want to say is that there remain important aspects of Ranade's treatment of the tradition of the saints and prophets in Maharashtra (which indeed he compares with the tradition as it has played out in other parts of India) that can endure further analytical attention, and that is what this article seeks to demonstrate.

Indeed, the main claim of this article is that Ranade's interventions with respect to the saints and prophets of Maharashtra may be best interpreted as valuable sites for witnessing an enactment of translation. I want to demonstrate how translation, as a conceptual framework, permits discernment of the way a new script for a normative ordering of society emerges in the presence, or even within the contexts of a withering, but nonetheless powerful, pre-existing vision of moral order. In fact, the boldest thesis advanced in this article is that Ranade's essay on the saints and prophets of Maharashtra embodies a method for the study of conceptual and political change, and any

engagement with it that does not articulate and explain this fully is guilty of neglecting an important dimension of this text. Accordingly, this article approaches Ranade's engagement with bhakti, particularly his comparison of the Protestant Reformation with the tradition of bhakti through the framework of translation. The convergences Ranade notes—and especially the divergences—are treated as among the key sites where translations of ideas across cultural contexts (both within the same jurisdiction, across different time periods, and across different cultural contexts in the same period, or across different jurisdictions in different time periods) came to be enacted. Attention to these enactments, I will show, makes it possible to discern changes, improvisations, resistances and retentions with respect to ideas and social practices, which in turn can make it possible to map shifts in the moral order in India from a premodern to a modern one. And, Ranade's views on bhakti are treated as a key site because he is among modern India's stalwart social reformers.

The article is divided into three sections. The first section contains an overview of some of the extant scholarship on Ranade's engagement with bhakti, especially the views of Prachi Deshpande and Jack Hawley. The main aim is to demonstrate how certain questions pertaining to Ranade's interventions on bhakti still remain unaddressed, particularly with a view to considering how those interventions are a site for translation through which conceptual and political change can be discerned. Moreover, neither Hawley nor Deshpande register Ranade's enlisting of a difference in forms of monotheism associated with the culture of the Protestant Reformation and those that characterise the religio-cultural landscape of the subcontinent. The first section concludes by gesturing toward the need for considering Ranade's reflections within the rubric of translation. The second section is devoted to spelling out how this article engages the theme of translation, particularly with respect to capturing the kind of conceptual and political changes that took place (i) during the Indian encounter with colonialism; (ii) in the comparison between bhakti and the Protestant Reformation; but also (iii) in the way Ranade recalls bhakti for purposes of his own times. The aim of this section is not only to spell out methodological points related to translation but also to demonstrate how the device of translation allows some important features of Ranade's engagement with bhakti to come into sharp relief, in

ways that do not get discussed by Deshpande or by Hawley.[6] What I want to claim is that something about studying social change—involving exchanges between the putatively old and the putatively new, and tracing shifts in the meaning of concepts for studying politics in a historically informed way—in the context of encounters with different social imaginaries is facilitated by the device of translation. The section draws on the views of Kaviraj and Stewart, and spells out what I classify as *translation as equivalence*. The aim of the discussion here is both to demonstrate the fittingness of structuring the approach to Ranade's views about bhakti under the rubric of translation, and to generate an outline of what that approach can entail. I also demonstrate how translation as equivalence allows the discernment of shifts from a premodern to a modern sensibility, with respect to the new conceptual space for turning caste inequalities into socially, rather than religiously, sanctioned matters, and for the new legitimacy for ideas about the legislative reform of the social order. The third section considers how to understand conceptual and political change when efforts to establish equivalence reach a dead end. Here I note the conceptual and analytical importance of moments where divergence, rather than convergence, is registered, and highlight the need to probe it, because focus on divergence can make it possible to discern the preexisting rival and/or opposing notions at work in a period that is otherwise witnessing conceptual and political change. I highlight the place of bricolage (cf. Leslie 1970) as a mode through which to continue to consider the nature of exchanges between entities that have registered the end of convergent or equivalent exchange. I highlight the importance of Ranade's observations about the inclusive variant of monotheism in India and discuss how its divergence from the European mode of monotheism sheds light on extant stable notions on the subcontinent for engaging diversity in an inclusive manner. Finally, I offer some remarks about the insights that can be gleaned from interpretations of Ranade's work for unravelling the modern vision of moral order in India. In particular, I consider the place within that vision for religion, and also note how older inclusive stances toward religious heterogeneity seemed to have fought it out to stay in the modern vision of moral order to shape emergent modern background understandings pertaining to the

[6] I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify how my account of Ranade's reflections differs from the ones offered by Deshpande and Hawley.

accommodation of religious diversity. I also offer some observations about the way bhakti has percolated into the social imaginary of modern India. I conclude the article with brief remarks to affirm the salience of approaching studies of conceptual and political change through the rubric of translation.

BHAKTI AS IDEOLOGY, AS A GROUND FOR INTERCULTURAL COMPARISON, AND FOR THE IMAGINATION OF NATION: AN ANALYSIS OF RANADE'S VIEWS AS ADVANCED BY DESHPANDE AND HAWLEY

Let me begin by reciting the main points observable in the discussions about Ranade's engagement with the saints and prophets of Maharashtra as envisaged by Deshpande and Hawley. Doing so will not only permit discerning the distinctive focus of this article but also enable a fulsome portrayal of the details of Ranade's reflections in his essay on the saints and prophets.

Prachi Deshpande (2007) offers valuable insights about Ranade's participation in a discourse about Maharashtra Dharma. She notes how Ranade 'interpreted' bhakti 'as a vibrant and peculiar set of religious values and practices that had developed in the medieval period in Maharashtra through a blending of traditional Hinduism and the monotheism of Islam' (ibid.: 129). For thinkers like Ranade, this aspect of Maharashtra's past was 'distinctive' in 'its rejection of Brahmanical values and tenets; the contribution of poets, men and women, from different caste groups, including Muslims; and the establishment of devotional spirituality as superior to the ritual-driven traditions of Hinduism' (ibid.). The kind of 'popular participation' bhakti demonstrated, and the way it 'denied the importance of caste difference' all led, and Deshpande quotes Ranade directly now, to making 'the nation more humane, at the same time more prone to hold together by mutual toleration' (Ranade quoted in: ibid.: 129).

Deshpande also notes, as does Hawley in his brief and thoughtful analysis of Ranade less than a decade later (Hawley 2015: 30), the association that Ranade makes between the tradition of bhakti and a prevalent 'combination of religious and political unity' on the subcontinent (Deshpande 2007: 129). That combination generated feelings of membership within a coherent political community consisting, as Ranade put it, of 'all classes' (ibid.). Deshpande mentions how Ranade likened these feelings to 'patriotism' (ibid.). Further, Deshpande

discusses, as does Hawley, Ranade's comparison of the 'Bhakti movement' 'as similar to the European Reformation of the sixteenth century' and how Ranade argued that 'in both places [...] a heterodox spirit of religious devotion had protested against the excesses of a corrupt, ritualistic priesthood, breathing new life into the religion and the nation. Ranade also, interestingly, slipped between region and nation in his discussion of the Marathas' (ibid: 130).

For Deshpande, interpretations of the Maratha past such as those offered by Ranade 'threw up different perspectives of religion, region, and nation[7] (ibid.: 133). One outcome was the 'overdetermination of a complex and diverse set of spiritual interventions' like bhakti 'into a generalized and politicized ideology of religious community' (ibid.). Further, 'poets like Tukaram and Ramdas, especially the latter, were too often reduced to overt political stances—advocating either the rejection or the maintenance of caste identity and nationalism—which obfuscated their complex contributions to the devotional and philosophical tradition as a whole' (ibid.).

Finally, Deshpande states that in the "connections" made by figures like Ranade

> between Bhakti poetry and the Maratha struggle, religion became less a matter of spiritual contemplation and everyday practice and more the expression of the political philosophy of the Marathas. Moreover, the Marathas were understood not in terms of state power but as an undifferentiated population, a people. Bhakti now became a variant of a modern Hindu religion, not so much a spiritual worldview or an expression of ritual difference and belief, but the glue that held together an enumerated political 'Hindu' community. This community could be plural, inclusive, and tolerant, as put forward in the writings of Ranade and Bhagvat, but it was still conceived of in political 'patriotic' terms (ibid.: 133–134).

Deshpande's appraisal of the 'connection' between bhakti poetry and the Maratha struggle is two-pronged. First, the sense of bhakti got distorted from something predominantly 'spiritual', 'devotional' and 'philosophical' into something 'political' (ideological). To impose the terminologies of translation on Deshpande's analysis, bhakti in its translated form acquired the sense of

[7] Rosalind O'Hanlon argues that 'social groups at all levels in society' in colonial Maharashtra were invested politically in constructions of the Maratha past (1983: 7).

a 'generalised and politicised ideology of religious community' in contrast to having referred earlier to something 'complex', 'diverse' and 'spiritual.' Second, intriguingly, 'politicisation' and distortion of social forms like bhakti can be compatible with inclusive, plural and tolerant visions for an enumerated community. But Deshpande could elaborate more on what exactly inspires these pluralistic inclinations. Is it the case that more spiritually inclined 'translations' of bhakti can generate pluralism-seeking enumerated communities in the image of what Rajeev Bhargava calls 'patchwork' solutions to the encounter with modernity (Bhargava 2001)? Or is there some way in which, notwithstanding a reliance on enumerated techniques of rule (such as that of the census), some modern state forms are able to transform the uses of those techniques to generate plural and inclusive orders different from the ones usually associated with the homogenising forms of the modern nation-state? My point in raising these questions is to demonstrate that some engagement with the thematic of translation could sharpen the insights in Deshpande's thought-provoking claim about the combination of enumerated polities and pluralism.

Deshpande's conclusions are both thoughtful and persuasive. But they could be refined further through more fine-tuned observation of Ranade's recalling of the saints and prophets of Maharashtra, as well as a more nuanced understanding of bhakti itself. Deshpande's observations above can contribute to showing how, historically speaking, a distinction has arisen between the domains of the 'spiritual' and the 'political-ideological'. And it can be interrogated if this distinction culminates in Ashis Nandy's marking of Indian modernity as grounded in a distinction between 'religion as faith' and 'religion as ideology' (Nandy 1988). To be sure, Deshpande does not rule out that ideological formations can be inclusive, pluralist and tolerant. Still, it is also noted that communities shaped by enumeration techniques of rule come to be characterised by a consciousness of the strength of their numbers and can, unsurprisingly, shift away from articulations of politics that are more homogenising than pluralism-friendly (Kaviraj 2014: 257).

But, (i) Deshpande's understanding of bhakti as spiritual, devotional and philosophical appears a little sanguine and rides roughshod over comprehensions of bhakti as a site for both inclusivity and exclusion (cf. Keune 2021). Furthermore, (ii) Deshpande's account bypasses any analysis of how Ranade,

in the course of a comparison between the European Reformation and the subcontinental bhakti tradition, notes an important dissimilarity between the Reformation and bhakti as an analogous Indian site for articulations of matters religious. Finally, (iii): Deshpande's analysis can endure being construed through a framework of *translation*—for the way it traces changes in the meaning (and functions) of bhakti from a precolonial to a colonial modern context thereby, laudably, considering conceptual change *and* political change in an appropriately interconnected manner (cf. Farr 1989). However, it neither expressly discusses translation as a methodological device for comprehending change nor offers illustrative analysis for mapping the complex processes involved in translation. Nor does it elaborate how to account for distortions—which, speaking more impartially, really, are changes in meaning related to conceptual repertoires of an epoch—that occur when conceptual and political change is underway.

Hawley's treatment of Ranade's reflections on the saints and prophets of Maharashtra also attracts the comments listed in (ii) and (iii) above. Hawley's interest in Ranade's views is related to tracing significant interventions that contributed to the *modern* construal of bhakti as a *movement* (as opposed to a *network,* which is Hawley's endorsed way for interpreting the phenomenon of bhakti). In this regard, Hawley's conclusion is that Ranade's discussion of bhakti did not presuppose the different bhakti movements in India as related to a 'single thrust' (Hawley 2015: 31). Although Hawley cites *Rise of the Maratha Power* as the text through which he engages Ranade's views on the bhakti saints, Hawley's analysis is understandably centred mainly on the essay about the saints and prophets of Maharashtra. Hawley notes that while Ranade 'is comfortable with an idiom that speaks in terms of movements, he does not trace out a bhakti movement that would encompass all of India' nor does he use the term movement (ibid.: 29). From here Hawley goes on to comment on Ranade's 'drawing out' of 'parallels between what Ranade called bhakti's "reforms" and – note the term – the Protestant Reformation in Europe' (ibid.). Ranade's 'overriding comparison between the religious and cultural histories of India and Europe' includes such commonalities as arguments against the dominance of Sanskrit and Latin, the protest against what Ranade calls 'the thraldom of scholastic learning'; the sense of 'common humanity that emerged on the pilgrimage from all parts of Maharashtra to Pandharpur and

the sense of shared human dignity that led to the Protestant reformers' rejection of clerical privilege in distributing the Eucharist' (ibid.: 29–30).

Further, Hawley describes accurately how Ranade

> also analogized polytheistic worship in India to the image and saint worship of the Roman Catholic Church, and depicted the bhakti reformers' deep allegiance to their own 'favourite form of the divine incarnation' as an instinct for true monotheism, just the sort of thing that had inspired the activities of the Protestant reformers, especially the strictest among them. Here and elsewhere was a manliness – he did not shrink from the word – that caused religion and politics to march together as two sides of a single movement, in India no less than in the early modern Europe (ibid.: 30).

Ranade, says Hawley, describes not only the saints and prophets of Maharashtra but is also well aware of a '"similar movement [that] manifested itself much about the same time" in northern and eastern India – he mentioned Nanak, Chaitanya, Ramanand, Kabir, Tulsidas, Surdas, Jayadev, and Ravidas in referring to it' (ibid.).

But, as Hawley observes, for Ranade the religious movement of Maharashtra was unique in comparison to the one in other parts of the subcontinent such that it enabled Maharashtra 'in a way no other nation in India was prepared, to take the lead in re-establishing a united native power in the place of foreign domination' (Ranade quoted in: ibid.: 30). And Hawley argues that the yoke of foreign domination that the bhakti saints helped Maharashtra struggle against was what Ranade called '"the Mahommedan yoke" that had spread across India in the wake of successive invasions by "Afghans, Gilchis, Turks, Usbegs, and Moghuls"' (Hawley 2015: 30). What is very interesting, but remains uncommented in Hawley's cataloguing of the normative vision Ranade attributed to the tradition of the saints and prophets, is that Ranade judged this tradition to offer even 'a plan of reconciliation with the Mahomedans'[8] (Ranade quoted in: ibid.: 31).

[8] I will discuss the significance of this in the parts of the article that follow. Other features Ranade attributed to the tradition of the saints and prophets, catalogued by Hawley, included: 'a stress on vernacular usage, a protest against the "the old spirit of caste exclusiveness", an elevation of "the Shudra classes;" an attention to the status of women, a suspicion of "rites

Why does Ranade engage in a comparison of Bhakti and the Protestant Reformation?[9]

A question could arise about the reasons for Ranade's comparison of the bhakti tradition with events in sixteenth-century Europe. Hawley's analysis adduces one reason for Ranade's comparative exercise. And it is that a comparison with Europe facilitated analogies 'that could be located *in between* religious communities in various parts of India itself' (Hawley 2015: 31; emphasis mine). For Hawley, 'Ranade saw analogies between what had been experience in Maharashtra and what had happened elsewhere in India, but they were not part of a single thrust […] what brought them parallel to one another was at least as much their synchronicity with what was happening in Europe as the force of the analogies that could be located in between religious communities in various parts of India itself' (ibid.). Still, and very correctly, Hawley does not overlook the way Ranade's reflections simultaneously also comprehend a 'pan-Indian bhakti'. To demonstrate this, Hawley draws on Ranade's perception that pan-Indian bhakti had a 'shared tendency to contemplate the "bright side of divine Providence,"' which 'came in to focus by virtue of its contrast with the darker proclivities of "the Shemitic religions" that ruled the day in Europe and elsewhere – their "awe and trembling" before "a judge who punished more frequently than He rewarded"' (ibid.: 32). This was different, says Ranade, in the case of the 'religions of Greece or Rome or of India. God with us has always been regarded more as a father and a mother, a brother and a friend, than a judge and a chastiser and a ruler. Not that he does not judge, or rule, but He judges, rules and chastises with the love of a father or mother, ever ready to receive the repentant prodigal son back into his arms' (Ranade 1900: 166).

But there is another important, and somewhat obvious, historical reason that can account for Ranade's comparison between bhakti and the Protestant Reformation in Europe. It has to do with the normative power of a Protestant (and missionary) gaze with respect to the category of religion in the subcontinent during the encounter with colonialism (and orientalism)

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and ceremonies, and of pilgrimages and fasts, and of learning and contemplation" in comparison with "the higher excellence of worship by means of love and faith"' (Hawley 2015: 31).

(O'Hanlon 2002: 50–87, 97, 194).[10] Ranade is certainly responding to this gaze, and in fact, it is in this context that he asserts a difference of Indian forms of monotheism with respect to the one that underpins 'Shemitic religions' (ibid.: 166) and phenomena like the Protestant Reformation. Arguably, this historical-context-based reason for the comparison is quite weighty. Politically speaking, it entails a more express acknowledgment of conceptual and political exchanges occurring within the context of a colonial encounter.

If this is a weighty reason for Ranade's engagement with the Protestant Reformation in Europe, and I would argue it is, then there is another important portion in Ranade's essay on the prophets and saints of Maharashtra that deserves attention. It is Ranade's assertion of a difference between monotheism as conceptualised in India and the one associated with Western Europe and the Reformation. However, curiously, it is a part of Ranade's essay that escapes the attention of Deshpande, Hawley, and even Jon Keune (2021), who too discusses Ranade's perspective on bhakti in his recent book.

More attention to the contents of Ranade's reflections with regard to bhakti is thus required to address the scholarly neglect of his observation about the divergence of the meanings of monotheism in the two jurisdictions. Capturing this dimension of Ranade's reflections can, arguably, be enabled by close attention to the enactments of translation therein (I will elaborate on this more in the discussion that follows), which occurs rather symmetrically and seamlessly for the most part of Ranade's essay but then suddenly pauses when it seems that something untranslatable is encountered. Registering the untranslatability—in terms of the jarring dissonance between the religious traditions of western Europe and subcontinental India—can, I will show, serve as a site for understanding conceptual and political change, both formally and substantively.

[10] O'Hanlon offers a discussion of the conceptual resources such as those of ekāntika dharma on the subcontinent that facilitated a positive reception of monotheism for figures like Jyotiba Phule, who was a contemporary of Ranade (2002: 194). See also Mitter (1987). For reflections on a 'monotheistic imperative' see Basu (2012).

TRANSLATION AS EQUIVALENCE AND INSIGHTS FROM RANADE'S USE OF IT

I now turn to demonstrate how that the register of *translation as equivalence* (Stewart 2001: 160–163) allows a comprehensive engagement with Ranade's reflections in his essay about the saints and prophets of Maharashtra. Let me provide a fuller account of it and of the way it allows us to discern processes of conceptual and political change.

First, a note on the term translation, in the context of social, political and conceptual change, is essential here. What I want to claim is that something about studying social change—involving exchanges between the putatively old and the putatively new, and tracing shifts to study politics in a historically informed way—in the context of encounters with different social imaginaries is facilitated by the device of translation. My use of it is influenced, among others, by Sudipta Kaviraj's enunciation of it in the context of his discussion of multiple modernities (Kaviraj 2002 & 2005b; cf. also Stewart 2001). Kaviraj develops Gadamer's insights about the way historical consciousness is always 'effective-historical' (Gadamer quoted in: Kaviraj 2005b: 516) to point to how

> a particular interpretation of a text or cultural object remains active *through its effects*, that is, the effect of a particular historical reading is not really erased when it is replaced by a succeeding interpretation. The subsequent reading, which is really different from the previous one, works on the material of the earlier reading, and is still determined by the first as its pre-condition […] the effectuality of the earlier reading is never really effaced (Kaviraj 2005b: 516).

The point of the quotation above is to note that when some social practices and ideas hold over time, or are recalled over time, then older meanings about them can play a key role in the development and articulation of new meanings.[11] He says that just as it is not possible in literary translations to

[11] Kaviraj clarifies that the term 'new' can have two senses. First is the possibility of something being 'utterly new' without 'precursors or precedents in earlier history' (Kaviraj 2005b: 517). In a second sense many new, and even 'modern' practices, 'are really transformed ways of doing the same general thing' (ibid.; emphasis mine). While Kaviraj's reflections pertain to complicating the novelty of some modern phenomena, I think their broader implications can extend to thinking about shifts in meaning in other epochs too, and allow consideration of the

'turn off the connotative effectivity of the receiving language to ensure transfer of meanings from the language to the text', so too, in considering changes and developments in the meaning of ideas and practices, 'the social effectiveness of the prior practices are never entirely neutralised by the reception of new ways of doing things' (ibid.: 519).

Turning directly to Ranade's essay again, in the course of his comparison and/or translation, Ranade notes similarities in phenomena associated with the Marathi poet saints and the Protestant Reformation in Europe. As seen earlier, for Ranade both cases displayed a discernible preference for expressions of religiosity in languages other than the classical ones, such as Latin and Sanskrit. Both celebrated a certain sameness among persons, and rejected status privileges that came from caste in one instance, and from the enjoyment of sacramental authority over laypeople in another. And both denounced the emphasis on celibacy and renunciation of the life of a householder. In all these sections of the text, Ranade's exercise approximates what I will call *translation as equivalence* (TE). Translation here refers to a necessary form of engagement that must occur between entities for understanding or approximating one another in the context of something comparable, like shared features.

Translation as equivalence (cf. Stewart 2001: 160–163) is demonstrable in the way Ranade receives notions of liberty associated with developments that mark the modern western social imaginary, and translates them into something comprehensible through reference to the imaginaries that sustain/ed the perspectives of bhakti. For Ranade 'what Protestantism did for Western Europe in the matter of civil liberty was accomplished on a smaller scale in Western India. The impulse was felt in art, in religion, in the growth of vernacular literature, in communal freedom of life, in an increase of self-reliance and toleration […]'[12] (Ranade 1900: 11). I think it is helpful to read these comparative reflections of Ranade's through the frame of translation as equivalence. TE certainly contains the potential to avoid something like 'cognitive dissonance' during colonial encounters where civilizational discourses may lead the colonised

way older 'meanings and habits' 'affect and modify' or, as mentioned above, 'transform ways of doing the same general thing' (ibid.: 517–518).

[12] I draw on this section of *The rise of the Maratha power* because it connects straightforwardly and coherently with Ranade's reflections on the bhakti tradition.

to be faced with novel conceptions of freedom and equality associated with the modern West. TE is an attempt to demonstrate the proximity between two different albeit comparable phenomena connected to distinctive social imaginaries in contexts like the aforementioned ones.

The spirited comparison continues, and Ranade registers analogies and equivalences between what he stipulates as Indian and European variants of reform. Ranade says:

> The fact was that, like the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the sixteenth century, there was Religious, Social, and Literary Revival and Reformation in India, but notably in the Deccan in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This Religious Revival was not Brahmanical in its orthodoxy; it was heterodox in its spirit of protest against forms and ceremonies and class distinctions based on birth, and ethical in its preference of a pure heart, and of the law of love, to all other acquired merits and good works. This Religious Revival was the work also of the people, of the masses, and not of the classes (ibid.: 9–10).

It must be noted that Ranade's construction of the religious revival associated with bhakti, and especially its non-brahminical orientation, and its critique of caste and class, may not be entirely accurate, from a historical point of view. Contemporary scholarship on bhakti reveals the way the discourses of bhakti, which were critical of caste, contained resources to re-entrench caste hierarchies (cf. Novetzke 2011; Keune 2021). However, as Tony Stewart points out, exercises of translation along lines that establish equivalence among entities are not to be confused with exchanges in which thorough and precise doctrinal knowledge is required.[13] As Stewart puts it: 'Doctrine seems often to have had little bearing in these situations, but that in no way should imply that doctrine was not present; it was simply used and understood differently than is the academic norm today' (Stewart 2001: 261). It is an attempt to make the understanding fit with what is encountered; the process of understanding becomes an 'extended act of "translation"' (ibid.: 263).

[13] To make an orthogonal observation, it is for similar reasons that Jyotiba Phule's 'speculative, radical reinterpretation of classical Hindu scriptures', while 'partly appropriating colonial orientalist arguments' (Kaviraj 2002: 119), functions as an important site for discerning the emergence of a modern moral order in which older religion-based hierarchies could now be, with default precision, subjected to rational, and I would add social, critique.

Furthermore, instead of a focus on the practical and historical efficacy of Ranade's ideas, or on a simplistic reduction of his ideas to a caste- and gender-related positioning,[14] the methodological space opened by the rubric of TE allows engagement with the conceptual and political innovations that Ranade pursued and enabled. Let me illustrate with the following example. Ranade says that the 'result of all this elevated teaching' of the saints and prophets was reflected in 'the fact that caste exclusiveness now finds no place in the religious sphere, and it is relegated solely to the social concerns of men, and even there its restrictiveness is much relaxed' (Ranade 1900: 155). The exercise of establishing equivalence with a phenomenon from sixteenth-century Europe that is connected to the emergence of civil liberty there allows Ranade to, among other things, free the caste question from a 'religious sphere' to one focused on 'the social concerns of men'. In doing this, Ranade is able to participate discursively in the production of a division

[14] For a very thoughtful rejoinder to critiques of Ranade cast along gender- and caste-based lines see Aparna Devare (2019: 216–219). See especially her comments when she considers Ranade's perspective alongside that of his contemporary Bal Gangadhar Tilak's: 'While I am not trying to "defend" Ranade for some of his actions, I believe some significant differences between Ranade and Tilak get flattened out when solely viewed through the prism of Brahminical patriarchy. Moreover, a gendered reading of Ranade will focus on the patriarchal nature of his relationship with his wife and the overall male upper-caste mindset towards women that places certain limits on them (which is in itself useful and necessary). But how does one account for the variation in responses such as Tilak's hyper-masculinity versus Ranade's more sensitive one that stressed on bhakti via the Marathi bhakti traditions? Ranade's stress on compassion, self-abnegation and fellow-feeling for others, which he recovers through the language of bhakti, does point to an alternative masculinity that is more inclusive, open and just in contrast to the strands of hyper-masculinity emerging in the nationalist movement' (ibid.: 218–219). I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to address the caste- and gender-dimensions of Ranade's views. For a more general reflection on the search for parity between ideas, ideals and the extent to which they are achieved, it might be salutary to recall Ambedkar's words too. Consider the following remarks he made: 'How much did Ranade achieve in the field in which he played so dominant a part? In a certain sense the question is not very important. Achievement is never the true measure of greatness. "Alas," as Carlyle said, "we know very well that ideals can never be completely embodied in practice. Ideals must ever lie a very great way off; and we will right thankfully content ourselves with any not intolerable approximation thereto!" Let no man, as Schiller says, too querulously "measure by a scale of perfection the meagre product of reality" in this poor world of ours. We will esteem him no wise man; we will esteem him a sickly discontented foolish man. And yet Ranade's record of achievement was not altogether bare' (Ambedkar 1943: 47). This quotation is very helpful also for the openness it allows for studying ideas about ideals, and for studies of shifts in ideas pertaining to them, in scholarship about conceptual and political change.

between the social/cultural and the religious in a way that is akin to what Kaviraj notes about Vivekananda's views about caste. Vivekananda, according to Kaviraj, 'distinguished social practices like caste and patriarchy from the philosophical beliefs of Hindusim' and so 'it was not difficult for him to continue crusading against caste inequality while defending Hindu culture against Christian and rationalistic criticisms' (Kaviraj 2002: 131). Putting caste into the social domain entailed creating room for the consolidation of a modern moral order in which the reorganisation of society along rational lines, via state intervention, can come to be seen as justified. Such emergent understandings contrast starkly with premodern conceptions of state power and of the appropriate nature of relationship between the domain of rule and that of the social. As Kaviraj has persuasively demonstrated, the reorganisation of society through the state was an alien idea in premodern India, where questions about the fate of a caste order were external to the state, given the principled marginality of premodern state power with respect to legislating social orders.[15] Legally driven social change is a new possibility—it just did not exist in the conceptual repertoire of the premodern period, because that period was sustained by a different vision of moral order.

Consider another instance, this one related to the value Ranade attached to setting aside 'distinctions based on birth' (Ranade 1900: 10), and his intervention to put the issue of legitimation of caste-based hierarchical orders into the 'social' rather than 'religious' domain. Such valuation can be better understood as connected to the constitution and emergence of a new moral order in India in which social conventions could be questioned and reformed—by the state, no less—in the direction of ideals like civil liberty, and in ways that allowed some hierarchies to be viewed as questionable and unreasonable, again because of the move in the direction of a different conceptual repertoire.

What can drive exchanges of equivalence? If, as seems to have been the case, the extant concepts and linguistic structures in Ranade's immediate context were insufficient for articulating notions like civil liberty, which had come to acquire currency given the encounter with the West through colonialism, then Ranade's choice (forced though it may have been because of the imperatives around toeing a monotheist line) to draw a comparison of

[15] See Kaviraj (2005a) for an excellent discussion of the distinction between premodern and modern state power in the Indian context. See also Kaviraj 2014.

bhakti with the Protestant Reformation is prudent for it let him engage with a historical phenomenon that possessed illuminative worth. Whether or not the Reformation is related to civil liberty, Ranade foists the connection. And by positing the Reformation comparable—equivalent—to bhakti, Ranade advances the notion of civil liberty as accessible, and even intimate, to lifeworlds resonant with bhakti. In exercises of equivalence, the attempt is not so much to 'borrow' an idea as it is to find the closest equivalent terms to 'approximate the ideas' that an actor wants to 'express' (Stewart 2001: 273).

Finally, the establishment of equivalence is to be understood as entailing a presupposition that 'two conceptual worlds are seen to address similar problems in similar ways, *without ever proposing that they are identical*; to express one in terms of the other – the quintessential metaphoric step – remains an act of translation, not an assertion of identity or some mysterious change of allegiance on the part of the author' (ibid: 284; emphasis mine). It entails an exploration of the other to illuminate aspects of one's own self (ibid: 287). And it is a kind of 'accommodation' of, not 'conversion' to, another approximate but not identical conceptual lexicon that might eventually even allow for some appropriation to take place (ibid: 276). In the case of Ranade, his broad association of the Protestant Reformation with civil liberty, and his claim that what the Reformation achieved for people in Europe was achieved in India by the saints and prophets, paves the way not for identification or imitation of the West but for something like an Indian liberalism to gain foothold, which Ranade was definitely instrumental in ushering in.[16] Notice, however, that an acknowledgement of the presence of liberal elements in Ranade's social and political thought, especially with respect to faith in the indispensability of the instrumentalities of the state for providing political conditions suitable for securing the liberty of persons, may not be coterminous with calling Ranade a liberal.

[16] See Lamba (2011) for arguments about how the political thought of Phule and Ranade generated conceptual space for the endorsement of liberal institutions in an emergent modern India.

WHEN EQUIVALENCE IS NOT POSSIBLE

Interestingly, however, significant points of divergence between the kinds of religiosity associated with bhakti and the Protestant Reformation in Europe begin to show up as Ranade's comparison advances. That is, some kind of *untranslatability* is encountered because the notion of monotheism as associated with Abrahamic religions clashes with another kind of monotheism understood and practiced in the subcontinent. The sense of monotheism is not 'new' on the subcontinent; in fact, it has its own distinctive and well-shared conception of it (Kaviraj 2014). The extant conception of monotheism on the subcontinent bubbles up in Ranade's point-by-point comparison of bhakti with Protestantism, and then serves to highlight a point of divergence. In these parts of the comparison Ranade, almost ineluctably, ends up underscoring an important disjuncture, before sliding back to positing symmetries and congruence between the Indian and the European experiences. I think it is precisely in these tension-ridden parts of Ranade's reflections that it becomes possible to discern emergent shifts—including resistances, improvisations and accommodations of older conceptual clusters—for a consolidation of the meanings and functions of religion integral to the new vision of moral order in modern India. I call these parts of Ranade's comparison tension-ridden because in them the pursued conformity with the western European normative standard of religion remains unachieved due to the significant moments of disjuncture and untranslatability.

One disjuncture is registered while Ranade addresses the symmetries between aspects of bhakti and the Protestant Reformation on the issues of image-worship and monotheism. Even if the poet-saints' tradition did not assume the 'iconoclastic form' adopted by some of the stricter Protestant reformers, Ranade insists that there were other markers of convergence between bhakti and the Reformation with respect to monotheism. Ranade says:

> Polytheistic worship was condemned both in theory and in practice by the saints and prophets of Maharashtra. Each of them had his distinctive favourite form of the divine incarnation, and this worship of one favourite form left no room for allegiance to other gods. Ramdas, for instance, worshipped God under the name of Rama; Tukaram, Chokhamela and Namdev under the name of

> Vithoba; Narahari Sonar and Nagnath under the name of Shiva […]. (Ranade 1900: 162–163).

Ranade even goes so far as to say that 'the supremacy of one God, one without a second, was the first article of the creed with every one of these saints, which they would not allow any body to question or challenge' (ibid.: 163). But just after announcing such perfect symmetry with monotheism of the kind that characterises Abrahamic religion, Ranade discerns something quite jarring:

> At the same time, as observed above, the iconoclastic spirit was never characteristic of this country and all the various forms in which God was worshipped were believed to merge finally into the one Supreme Providence or Brahman. This tendency of the national mind was a very old tendency. Even in Vedic times, Indra, and Varun, Marut and Rudra, while they were separately invoked at the sacrifices offered for their acceptance, were all regarded as interchangeable forms of the one and supreme Lord of creation. This same tendency explains the comparative indifference with which the saints and prophets treated the question of image worship (ibid.).

As it turns out, and possibly unbeknownst to him, Ranade's reflections touch upon a crucial distinction between two kinds of monotheism that contemporary political theorists like Rajeev Bhargava have recently underscored. Drawing on the notion of the Mosaic distinction spelt out by Jan Assmann, Bhargava distinguishes between inclusive and exclusionary forms of monotheism (Bhargava 2016). Inclusive monotheism, Bhargava points out, accepts the idea of oneness of god without hinging on demonstrating the falsity or truth of some god or gods. Exclusionary monotheism, on the other hand, is associated with an insistence on one true God and a concomitant judgment about other gods as false. Bhargava clarifies how inclusive monotheism, through practices of translatability or hyphenated conceptions of god, has allowed difference to coexist on the subcontinent without the need to perceive the presence of different other, inside or outside one's group, as an existential threat (ibid.).

Returning to Ranade's text, it is the inclination toward 'inclusive' monotheism that Ranade includes and underscores as characteristic of the approach in which God was worshipped in 'this country'. In the quote above Ranade notes how different gods 'were all regarded as interchangeable forms of the one and

supreme Lord of creation' (Ranade 1900: 163). He continues reflection on this point when he notes and applauds how such an inclination toward interchangeable forms of one god continues to be at work in notions such as those of the 'essential unity of Alla with Rama', which 'made the nation more humane, at the same time more prone to hold together by mutual toleration' (ibid.: 171–172). Admittedly, Ranade is vaunting these aspects of the perspectives of the saints and prophets, and that characterised pan-Indian bhakti too. Ranade's reflections on Kabir, Nanak and other poet-saints associated with bhakti outside Maharashtra, extend the scope his analysis about the inheritance of the visions of community advanced by those saints and prophets to the subcontinent more generally (and as mentioned earlier, Hawley also notes this pan-Indian sense of bhakti in Ranade).

If one takes the scholarship of Muzaffar Alam (2004), Sudipta Kaviraj[17] and Rajeev Bhargava seriously, as I do, then Ranade's registering of the divergence from the *model* of monotheism expressed by the religious structures of the coloniser, is more than an act of courage and reversal of gaze. The recent work of the contemporary scholars mentioned above is marked by an affirmation that an inclusive and accommodative stance toward religious diversity has been an oft-repeated stance in the subcontinent's long history.[18] In Ranade's reflections about bhakti, it becomes possible to see how an older notion, that permitted all to belong in the game,[19] asserts itself in the course of translation as equivalence.[20]

The above considerations about the assertion of difference call attention to the notion of 'bricolage' as developed by Margaret Leslie (1970). The

[17] For an illuminating and detailed account of how diversity and tolerance were worked out in ancient, medieval and colonial-modern India, without leading to a withering of religion on the subcontinent, see also Sudipta Kaviraj (2016).

[18] In fact, in *Rise of the Maratha Power* Ranade alludes to Akbar and Sawai Jaisingh in a manner that is startlingly similar to how the contemporary scholars mentioned above recall political moments when rulers chose a political morality that permitted diverse faiths a level-playing field even when they could have acted contrarily (Ranade 1900: 51).

[19] In using this phrase I am recalling Hawley's way of thinking about inclusion and belonging as worked out in a chapter titled "Bhakti, Democracy and the Study of Religion" (Hawley 2005).

[20] One is reminded of Gandhi's "all-inclusive Hinduism" here, which as Rajeev Bhargava (2015) has argued, resonates with sympathies for an inclusive monotheism. And, given this shared reference to something like an inclusive monotheism in the work of Ranade and Gandhi, I would wholeheartedly support the spirit behind the line that Aparna Devare (2019) draws from Ranade to Gandhi when it comes to thinking about religion and politics in the subcontinent.

notion helps to register how, despite reaching a point of cessation/interruption with respect to the drawing of convergences in exercises for establishing equivalence (undertaken to comprehend and respond to political, conceptual and social change), even encounters with the interruptions and divergences/differences during a comparison can serve as useful sites for considering transtemporal translations, and for studying movements in conceptual and political realms therein.

For the instance at hand, i.e., Ranade's observation about the divergence in Indian ideas and practices from the kind of monotheism associated with the Protestant Reformation, bricolage serves as an appropriate frame to steadily continue to evaluate the worth of the exchange that is afoot in Ranade's reflections. An older, resilient, and possibly stubbornly relevant concept—pertaining to a kind of openness that could anchor a diversity of faiths—rears its head in the course of Ranade's attempts to reckon with and respond to a hegemonically dominant understanding of monotheism. Ranade shows no coyness in pointing out the difference; in fact, the difference is listed in a most casual manner and taken-for-granted manner, with no attendant pomp or apology. For a contemporary reader of the text who is interested in the long history of religious diversity on the subcontinent, Ranade's comparison with Europe is one to be vaunted for what it reveals about extant background understandings with respect to religious heterogeneity. The reader is forced to reckon with the silent yet forceful intervention. It comes across as a brave act in the context of the currency of civilizational discourse in a colony whilst also demonstrating a certain honesty in Ranade's search for equivalence. Retrospectively, then, it adds some persuasive force to Ranade's comparison, and encourages engagement with it.

Most of all, however, in our example of Ranade's comparison, the breakdown of equivalence—but not of the exchange—shows an acknowledgement by Ranade of an abiding feature of Indian monotheism, its openness to multiple religions that are seen as translatable or as different paths leading up to the same place, thereby expressing a form of religious accommodation. Ranade even claims a longstanding presence of this feature — 'this tendency of the national mind was a very old tendency' and it spanned from 'vedic

times' (Ranade 1900: 163, see also 50–52).[21] But the matter of factness with which the divergence is registered leads one to speculate that this notion was integral to the background understandings of Ranade's times, a time when sweeping social changes were rife.

All of the above discussion prompts a claim, which, admittedly, can endure further clarification. But let me advance it nevertheless. I would not call it vacuous speculation, but rather something like a stretch of imagination grounded in an exercise of joining the dots. Ranade's refusal to iron out differences with the dominant model of religion in colonial India is a signal of his easy recognition of a conception of monotheism in his time. He makes no mention of it as weakened or extinct. But what does also happen is that this conception gets a fresh lease of life in being reiterated by a prominent figure. It seems to have stayed long enough to find resonance in Rabindranath Tagore's understandings of unity in diversity, and Gandhi's conception of an inclusive Hinduism alongside his idea of equal respect for all religions. This idea, that we today call inclusive monotheism, seems to have enjoyed currency even in the high noon of anti-colonial nationalism. Bhakti too seems to have travelled further on in modern India — it caught Rabindranath Tagore's fancy fulsomely, and Kshitimohan Sen's too. Contemporary secularists cleave to the fifteenth-century poet-saint Kabir as Hindu nationalism becomes more mass-based and militant (cf. Bharucha 1993). Scholars rightly remind us of the problem in construing bhakti only as an emancipatory force, but the idea of bhakti that is current is also one that, as Jack Hawley acknowledged in an interview in the daily *The Hindu*: that 'challenges communal religion' (Raman 2016). So what is the point here? It is to say that some of the ideas found in Ranade's engagement with bhakti—about inclusive monotheism, and about bhakti as a basis for integration of a community—still seem to be around, both at a popular level and as

[21] For reasons of space, I am unable to develop this point, but Ranade's reflections in this essay also contain rich insights for tracking the shifting sense of relationships between Hindus and Muslims. While some of his statements refer to the 'militant religion of Mahomedanism' (Ranade 1900: 170), there are other parts of the text where he lauds efforts for the 'reconciliation' of Hindus and Muslims in the 'mutual recognition of the unity of Alla with Rama' (ibid.: 171). Elsewhere in *Rise of the Maratha Power,* Ranade's *normative endorsement* of something like inclusive monotheism stands well demonstrated. He says only 'bigots' challenged the higher teaching of the oneness of God that exhorted people to 'identify Ram with Rahim', in the interest of both 'freedom from the bonds of formal ritualism and caste distinctions', and getting them to 'unite' 'in common love of man and faith in one God' (ibid.: 50–51).

matters of scholarly enquiry. But what is the importance of this observation? The importance lies in its basis for generating the claim that normatively charged notions like unity, coexistence, inclusion, and integration without the erasure of heterogeneity have a place in the vision of moral order that animates the modern Indian social imaginary. These notions are clustered within conceptions of secularism, democracy, state-society relationships that are fighting creeds alongside other understandings of religion-based modern political communities. It is helpful to recall Kaviraj's statement that 'the social effectiveness of the prior practices are never entirely neutralised by the reception of new ways of doing things' (Kaviraj 2005b: 519). A further claim, and admittedly I am advancing a rudimentary formulation of it, is that the category of religion is an important placeholder for determining how questions about freedom and hierarchy got worked out within the context of another important placeholder in understanding the emergent Indian modern moral order, which as Kaviraj (2005a) persuasively indicates, is the modern state and its instrumentalities.

But, furthermore, for a contemporary bricoleur inspired by Margaret Leslie, what also has to be acknowledged inevitably is the *recurrence* in the subcontinent of a cluster of concepts. The recurrent cluster I have in mind pertains to what is today being called inclusive monotheism, the contents of which would be comprehensible broadly to Ranade, Tagore and Gandhi. And this same cluster also functions as a bridge between the present and numerous instances from the past where too ideas akin to inclusive monothesim were exhorted, such that this cluster of concepts enjoys *transtemporal* worth. As such, in the case of the study of concepts and ideas in the long Indian past, there seems to be a viability, and even desirability, of asking if there may indeed be some perennial transtemporally relevant questions in ways irreducible to projections of essentialism. The discussion of this article shows one instance — Ranade's engagement with the saints of Maharashtra — of how the Indian case can bring to the fore this methodological issue. Attention to Ranade's recalling of bhakti sheds light on the positive potential of something like *bricolage*,[22] and illustrates possibilities for studying a stock

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[22] I draw on Margaret Leslie's engagement with Levi Strauss's notion of bricolage (Leslie 1970: 443) Although I am unable to develop the point here, my interest in giving attention to the

of concepts nested in transtemporal contexts without disproportionate worry about either anachronism or the presupposition that there are no perennial issues in the history of ideas (cf. Skinner 1969).[23] Thus it is that I concur with Rajeev Bhargava's suggestion (made in the context of his work on the contents of some Ashokan edicts and the nature of their link to issues in contemporary Indian secularism) about the need for caution with respect to the methodological assumption 'that ideas presuppose specific contexts and these contexts are not reproduced from time to time' (Bhargava 2014: 174). And further, I would underscore the importance of devices of translation as equivalence and bricolage for studying transhistorical concepts, such as the ones pertaining to inclusive monotheism. To be sure, the suggestions here are not fully fleshed out and remain in the form of an outline that must be developed.

But let me sum up. Right after recording observations about a distinctive national tendency to consider diverse gods as 'interchangeable forms of the one supreme Lord of creation', Ranade slides back into evaluating Indian practices in light of Orientalist and missionary lenses, especially when he engages the issue of the worship of 'stocks and stones' (Ranade 1900: 164). The pressure to conform to the gaze of those lenses is palpable again, right after he reversed it and registered the difference in Indian approaches to monotheism. In a direct response to the kinds of statement about Hinduism made by Monier-Williams, Ranade goes on to say that it would be a 'complete misunderstanding' to consider members of the bhakti tradition as 'idolaters in the objectionable sense of the word. They did not worship stocks and stones' (ibid.).

Still, what I hope will stay as a point to reckon with is how, with respect to changes emergent in encounters between the old and new, the device of

notion of bricolage is also related to developing the methodological possibilities contained within the notion of 'conceptual spaces' advanced by Rajeev Bhargava (2014).

[23] To be fair, Skinner seems to water down his opposition to the existence of perennial issues in philosophy when he concedes that, if 'sufficiently abstractly framed' it may be coherent to talk of some 'apparently perennial questions' (Skinner 1969: 52). But he immediately raises the threshold again when he says the following: 'All I wish to insist is that whenever it is claimed that the point of the historical study of such questions is that we may learn directly from the answers, it will be found that what counts as an answer will usually look, in a different culture or period, so different in itself that it can hardly be in the least useful even to go on thinking of the relevant question as being "the same" in the required sense after all. More crudely: we must learn to do our own thinking for ourselves' (ibid.).

translation can make accessible the imagination of innovative responses to political and conceptual problems by political actors—like Ranade—who were also theorising about their times.[24]

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[24] My understanding of the issues involved here is inspired by James Farr's insights for understanding conceptual change 'politically' (Farr 1989).

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