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BUTTON, BUTTON . . . GREAT TRADITION
LITTLE TRADITION, WHOSE TRADITION?

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"Great, Great is the Nation, where Mahar is recognized a
brave person, whose devotion is admired in the entire
World!"

"Mogul Empire, Maratha Empire, Brahmin-English Em-
pire, all will admire the fight by the Somkul . . ."

"Even under foreign rule, Mahar has always remained
faithful to the throne. He served any empire honestly irre-
spective of praise or abuse. Although he was the servant of
foreign rule still he was always the soldier of the nation . . ."

"When people have forgotten the national spirit and are
simply praying 'Ram, Ram' it is the Mahar who is living
to maintain the 'Johar' (spirit) of the nation. Great, Great
is the Nation where Mahar is recognized for his bravery,
whose devotion is admired in the entire world!" (*Amrutnak*,
translated by D. K. Bholay, from the pamphlet by C. B.
Khairmode, 1929:1961).

With the preceding, and other words, the Mahar "national" poem
Amrutnak opens, establishing in its course, one of the "myths and
legends which explain origins and justify function and status"
(Singer 1958:194) for the Mahar community. Though first
transcribed in 1929 from oral tradition, the poem purports to deal
with a time approximately equated with 1137 (alt:1146) A.D.
The hero, Amrutnak, through his abilities and exploits, secures
for the Mahar fifty-two rights, among which are thought to be
those accounting for the reduced state of the Mahars today.
There is ambivalence in the community toward this poem and its
burden; ambivalence created by other traditions of Mahar origin
and condition. I propose to examine the process by which the
Mahar as outcastes, untouchables, have been building a tradition
which can hardly be called "a distinctive variant of *the* Great
Tradition cognate to those of the four major *varnas* of Hindu
society" (Singer, 1958:194 citing content of papers by Ingalls,

Hitchcock, Kramrisch and Lamb). Yet elements of various Great Traditions or reactions to them appear in the Mahar tradition—many of them similar to the elements cited by Cohn for another Outcaste community, the Chamar (Cohn 1959:413-21). In speaking of Mahar and their traditions, however, I adopt a Mahar position. I refuse the identification within the cultural system that will accept me only on *its* terms. By adopting this position, I find that the concept of an Indian Great Tradition has no validity for me, least of all an Indian Great Tradition cultivated by each of the four major classes (varnas), with the custody of the literary and learned traditions for all being the charge of the Brahman (1958:194). Mahar could be and were articulated with the economic, social, and political portions of this system and 'traditionalized' on terms laid down, explicated and enforced by full participants in the system. But the literature and learning of the Brahmins was not voluntarily extended to the Mahar—nor was any 'legitimate' variant of it made directly available. Brahmanical heroes were not Mahar heroes, Brahmanical triumphs not Mahar triumphs. Trapped within a system they had no part in shaping, the Mahar saw dimly what we too find difficult to perceive, i.e., that the Brahman was engaged in a gigantic 'cut and paste' job, attempting to continually revise and propagate an orthodox version of *the* Great Tradition.

It is the directing of attention to *a* Great Tradition of this sort that obscures the issue. Traditions, as I am using the term, are statements of a point of view concerning the world, the cultural system within which one operates, in short, a model of the culture as seen from a given point of view. To expect to find *a* Great Tradition in a civilization is to transfer one anthropological model, that of the relatively homogeneous, fully integrated, 'organismic' tribal culture, to the 'mechanical' world of multiple ethnic groups, regions, histories, articulated politically and literarily by those dominant in the culture. We have been, in truth, seeking not one Great Tradition, but many, all of which have been articulated by a dominant segment of the society to form a cultural system operative within India through millenia. The ". . . firm conviction among most Indians and among many scholars of Indian civilization that there is an overreaching unity and continuity of tradition in . . . diversity" (Singer, 1958:193) places the emphasis on continuity of tradition but refers implicitly

to one tradition, the Brahmanical, as a standard, and assumes that this tradition is *ipso facto* the expression of *the* cultural system. (Singer 1964:112) Had not changed his position, though he admits this a major problem. All other traditions are perceived from the standpoint of this one tradition as variants. Let us assume, for argument, that the Mahar tradition is correct on one point—that the Brahman has struggled since the inception of the Aryans in India to maintain a dominant position within the system. To do so, he has managed successfully to convince inquirers, within and without the system, that what they are circling round blindfolded is really one animal, despite the conviction of one observer that he has heard the bray of a donkey, of another that the beast has feathers, and of a third that the tail was long and sinuous. With blindfolds off, the inquirers discuss the variations exhibited by the 'beast,' (Singer, 1964:112). Perhaps we should examine the conflicts of interpretation within the Indian cultural system which we accept as one, for clues to other systems and 'Great Traditions.' Lamb (1959:231-39) has pointed to one such probable 'great tradition' i.e., the denial of Brahman supremacy in religious affairs, adoption of non-Brahmanical religions, acceptance of new, non-Vedic deities, all of which suggest another structuring of the cultural system. D. D. Kosambi (1962:12-36) stresses these themes and elaborates on the persistent Aryan-non Aryan antagonism emerging in the new gods and the concept of Bhakti. All these themes characterize Mahar tradition.

I assume then that in Mahar tradition we find continuation of themes which represent a Great Tradition parallel to the Brahmanical Great Tradition; equality is opposed to inequality; individual ability is opposed to merger of the individual in the group; emotionalism is opposed to ritualism; escape *from* the system is opposed to movement *within* the system, at every point antithesis. Like the Brahmanical Great Tradition, this tradition is also All-India in scope, with many variants or (perhaps one should say) fragments. In many cases, the different traditions use the same elements, but the critical point is that these elements are structured in different ways. The world model which emerges with such re-structuring differs sharply from that inhering in the Brahmanical Great Tradition. One historical example may be

given, e.g., the position of the Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu within the Brahmanical tradition versus the Buddha as a founder and most recent of a long line of Buddhas within the Buddhist tradition. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the Mahars make use of elements of the Brahmanical tradition—or that I cite as non-Brahmanical elements which have commonly been accepted as being part of the Great Tradition.

The Elements of Mahar Tradition

Mahar origins extend into the traditional mists of time. On cultural and physical bases, Irawati Karve distinguishes at least two regional groups of this “most numerous of the untouchable castes of Maharashtra.” Variations within the community in number of subdivisions, and in skin color are common throughout all regions but the lack of involvement with agriculture and the relative looseness in sub-caste structure cause Karve to distinguish Eastern and Western segments of the Mahar as a total pre-Buddhist community.

Three themes enter into Mahar traditions of origin, however. Each theme places the Mahar as a community *outside* the Brahmanical system and its traditions. Here we can only enumerate and briefly illustrate these themes.

- 1) The *misconstrual of intent* theme: A cow bore five sons, each of whom was human. The last son was somewhat darker, ill-shapen, and avoided by his brothers. He stayed always with her, helping while the other boys ventured farther afield. Eventually, the mother was dying. Each boy was asked “how will you show reverence to your mother when she has died?” One of the boys announced he would perform *shradha* (ancestral sacrifice) in her memory forever; another that he would see to proper disposal of the remains; a third that he would comfort her last hours; the fourth that he would bring her delicacies until she expired. The fifth was silent, and his mother (the cow) looked expectantly at him. “Mother,” he said, “You have fed and nurtured me to youth; I will eat you, and let you continue to nurture me, and keep you with me always.” For this he was reviled, shunned, and called “mother-eater,” a term later to become the term “Mahar.” Despite the purity of intent, the Mahar was barred from the company of his peers.

2) The second theme draws on Brahmanical sources. We may call this theme the *deliberate Brahman reversal*. As a theme, it may have roots beyond the nineteenth century; we have only been able to establish it precisely as current in fully developed form for the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Briefly, and in the terms of Shivram Janba Kamble and Gopal Baba Walangkar, Mahar precursors of Babasaheb Ambedkar in the "Untouchable uplift" movements:

"3000 years ago some people came to India who were known as Aryans. They came in groups, conquered, and were kings. No doubt they were kings but in order to keep their rule some of the cunning people developed the plan of untouchability.

From that time castes were developed; there was fighting among the conquered people themselves. Anarya, Dasyu, Rakshas, Daitya were names given to the non-Aryan people. But these are really only two: Arya/Deva and Anarya/Daitya . . .

God has not made these rules found in the Puranas' stories. No doubt that the Aryas and Anaryas had different ways of living, thought, and religion. When they took slaves, then some of our people would live with them and become known as Sudra and Adisudra. The latest names given are Dom, Nama Sudra, Panchama; in Madras Pariyas, in Bombay Mahar.

[Mahar from terms = "enemy"; greatest enemy of Aryas was Anarya, applied to their descendants, the Mahar.] Our forefathers were brave, they were religious. But those who wrote the Puranas have transformed them (ancestors) into the Daityas of the struggle between the Devas and Daityas. These Daityas were kings. [But they were defeated through adherence to virtue and rules they did not make, while the Aryas used deception, guile, etc.]

All the Daityas-Baliraja, Banasur, Hiranyakasyap, Prah-lad, Ravana were generous to the 'Devas'—but the Puranas twisted the story and all are considered 'evil.'" (Navalkar, H. N.: 1930. Speech of SJK in 1903, Saswad).

Herein (and in other examples not cited) we have the theme of misunderstood intent once more, and the additional deliberate reversal of 'facts' by the Brahmans. They, the Aryas, forcibly abducted us into *their* system; forced us to hear the misrepresentation of facts (and convinced some, it must be said), and cut us off from our heritage—but we have never accepted their system nor been an integral part of it—or so the theme continues to state.

Amrutnak, in more individual terms, restates the thermal pattern: representative of a 'free' people, Amrutnak voluntarily takes service with a ruler. Leaving his childhood occupation as a cowherd, he becomes a noted warrior and protector of the King's interests. His loyalty is unquestioned. His finest hour is attained with the rescue of the Queen, who has been lost during a battle. Before seeking her, he presents to the King, in full court, a small box. (The box is to be significant at a later time.) Amrutnak succeeds in finding the Queen, returns her to the court and praise is lavished upon him. But some of the courtiers raise doubts in the King's mind—after all, Amrutnak and the Queen were together, alone, for a long period, and Amrutnak was a handsome, virile hero. But loyalty above all is stressed in this story; the little box which Amrutnak left with the King *before* departing on his mission contained his 'virility.' Amrutnak had foreseen the problem and *voluntarily* castrated himself.

What could be his reward? Amrutnak asks nothing for himself—only fifty-two rights for his people.

“Thinking wholeheartedly about the good and welfare of the Mahar community, Amrut wanted his word from the King to look after the whole Mahar community with sympathy and help all financially and otherwise, from henceforth. Amrut requested 52 rights for the Mahar community which he had written down on paper in that small box in clear words.”

But just as faithfulness to the mother-cow later becomes distorted into an unclean act, so the granting of rights, when Amrutnak and the non-Brahman King are no longer around to defend them, becomes an act condemning the Mahars of the future. In the system which absorbs them, the rights become chains,

binding them to specific occupations, specific relations with non-Mahars, and stripping voluntariness from any act.

3) Finally, we have the double theme given prominence by Babsaheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, in his book, *The Untouchables: Who Were They?* Broadening from the Mahar base, Ambedkar again stresses the external nature of the untouchables as a group. He continues the stress on the deliberate and evil designs of the Brahmins and their followers in respect to the formation of this group. And he adds a new theme, one we shall call the *suppressed Buddhists* theme. Ambedkar does not go back to the incursion of the Aryans; for him, the bulk of the untouchables derive from the suppression of Brahmanical opponents of all classes during the resurgence of Brahmanism. According to Ambedkar (1948:-155), "untouchability was born sometime about 400 A.D. It is born out of the struggle for supremacy between Buddhism and Brahmanism which has so completely moulded the history of India . . ."

All these themes emerge as one continuous and reiterated tradition:

"We are your enemies. We have never accepted your system, though you tried to make us part of it. We have fought for equality in many ways, and you twist our purest thoughts and deeds. You have turned into chains what once were earned rewards."

These people are real, and they existed in real time and place. How could this Tradition be kept alive, be realized in action during the periods when no antagonists of the system were around for them to join? In fact, it may be argued, Mahars carried out their duties in the system, participated in religious activities commonly called Hindu. Were there any traditions 'going' in Maharashtra which could be simultaneously 'in' the system, yet offer escape from it? Not only in Maharashtra, one might note, but in India generally such traditions existed, enclosed in the concept of Bhakti. Recall the stress on the religiosity, the purity, the selflessness of the Mahar in the previously discussed themes. Bhakti was their answer, and in Maharashtra, a Bhakti tradition with constant undercurrents of anti-Brahmanism was strong:

“ . . . it was against the exclusive spirit of this (Brahman) caste domination that the saints and prophets struggled most manfully to protest. They asserted the dignity of the human soul as residing in it quite independently of the accidents of its birth and social rank. The circumstances of their own birth and education naturally predisposed some of these preachers to take up such a position . . . nearly half of them were of castes other than Brahmans, and some of very low castes indeed. Many of the Brahman reformers also had some stain in their inherited purity which led or forced them to rebel against all artificial restraints. Dnyan-dev and his brothers and sister Muktabai were born to their father after he had retired from the world, and become a Sanyasi monk.

[His spiritual guide, Ramanand, learned that Dnyan-dev had not had his wife's consent to this action, and sent him back to live with her. When his children were born, the Brahmans would not perform the initiation rites for them. Despite their lack of caste status, the children and Dnyan-dev continued to be revered] . . .

Another saint, Malopant, was married to a low caste girl, whose caste was not discovered until after the marriage, and the husband did not abandon her, but only held no intercourse with her, and, when on her death, he performed her death-rites as usual, a miracle was displayed which satisfied his worst enemies, that Malopant and his Mahar wife were both holy by nature.” (Ranade, M. G. 1961:67).

Ranade continues, citing among others Eknath, who fed a Mahar and was outcasted. After allowing himself to be taken to a river for purification, a miracle took place which showed that the feeding of one Mahar was productive of more merit than the feeding of 100 Brahmans. Another widely believed miracle is attributed to Dnyan-dev, Eknath and Nagnath: when the Brahmans refused to officiate on shradha ceremonies at their places because they had breached caste regulations, the fathers of the Brahmans were made to descend to earth and reproach their sons for their exclusiveness.

One could continue, as does Ranade, for several pages. The burden of the argument is simple: Bhakti and its stress on direct relations with a deity and deification of saint, from whatever community he might have come, was the natural path for a community attempting to escape from an ideological system incompatible with *their* system—their Great Tradition. *Their* saints, within the Bhakti of Maharashtra, were the 'tainted ones'; their gods and goddesses (Vitthal/Vithoba; Khandhoba; Mariai, etc.) were the unorthodox deities, equated by the Brahmins with Sanskritic deities, but only with difficulty. Into this pattern the Mahanubhav sect, strongly supported by Eastern Mahars, fits well. A Krishna-bhakti sect, founded in the eleventh century, it early eschewed all caste, the validity of the Vedas, image worship, the system of *ashramas* (stages of life), and polydeism (see Ranade, R. D. 1961 :20-21). Among Western Mahar, rejection of images was not so complete, but the concept of *irrelevance* of image to true devotion was present. All the Saints focussed on a specific deity but in visiting the shrines of deities other than their own, they saw in the images exhibited there (as did other worshippers likewise) the form of their own deity, so it is told.

Bhakti, in its various forms, takes the adherent, conceptually, out of the every-day confines of the socio-economic system in which he operates. Yet it does not always bring real escape from that system, and for centuries the Mahar dwelt in this half-world; physically in, mentally out. (cf. Irawati Karve 1962:13-29; also Deleury 1960.) We have little information on Mahar between the eleventh century and the 1857 Revolt in India, but in that span of time there is no reason to assume that they meekly accepted their place as dictated by the Brahmanical tradition. If the Amrutnak story is historical in any respect, we begin to feel that Mahar were faithful *allies* of ruling powers, be they Mogul, non-Brahman or finally, English. While I have not been able to determine when and how the British began to recruit Mahar into the army, it is certain that after the 1857 Revolt, the Mahar Regiments were among the most loyal. From our reading of Mahar tradition, it is not only what we would expect, but necessary to the preservation of an out-system tradition.

In the late 1880's, revivalism in Hindu India began attacks on caste and on certain aspects of the Brahmanical Great Tra-

dition. A Buddhist revival also took place quietly, beginning in Ceylon. Both of these are pertinent to the problem posed here. As our type case for persistence of a distinct, non-Brahmanical Great Tradition, the Mahar suddenly found themselves in harmony with some other segments of the society. In Maharashtra their themes, the themes of Bhakti, militancy, anti-Vedism, equality etc., began to emerge in organizational form. Most significantly, men of low caste and men of no caste (Mahars and others) began to be heard throughout Maharashtra. In 1873, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule organized the Satya Shodak Samaj (Society for the Advancement of Truth), including in its principles the following:

1. There is only one God. He is omnipresent and we are all his children.
2. All men have equal rights to worship God. Just as a Child does not require middle men or agents to communicate with his mother, we do not require the middle men or agents of Bhats, Brahmins or priests to worship God.
3. Caste does not determine the value of man. It is his ability and character that determines his value.
4. No scripture is inspired or written by God.
5. God never reincarnates.
6. Reincarnation, rituals, physical torture to attain *Moksha* (release) and such things are hoaxes arising out of ignorance. (Ghorpade 1962.)

It would seem that these principles, coupled with the actual putting of them into practice by the Samajists, would have attracted many Mahars. Again, we have no information. It is probable, however, that the Samaj was a training ground and a precursor to the mobilization of Mahar and other Untouchables which finally took place in the 1920's. The relevance to our argument is precisely in the fact of organization. For until this time, the Mahar were adherents of a *tradition* in opposition to the Great Tradition but they now began to become physically part of a *system* in opposition to the Brahmanical system. Nevertheless, the development of that system through such socio-

religious groupings as the Brahmo Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission, etc., in India was, from Mahar viewpoint, stunted, blocked and diverted by the entrance onto the scene of Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. The emergence of leaders from among the Mahar, particularly Shivram Jamba Kamble and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who began to combine previous Mahar traditional themes into one Great Tradition statement, further maintained distance. The "adherence to outsiders" could not be stressed more strongly than in the following statement by S. J. Kamble and others in 1930:

"In view of the fact that Mr. Gandhi, Dictator of the Indian National Congress has declared a civil disobedience movement before doing his utmost to secure temple entry for the 'depressed' classes and the complete removal of 'untouchability,' it has been decided to organize the Indian National Anti-Revolutionary Party . . .

The Party will regard British rule as absolutely necessary until the complete removal of untouchability and the overthrow of the school of Chaturvarna." (Extract from the Bombay Chronicle, 2-4-30 in Navalkar 1930.)

The history of Congress' struggle for independence is well known. What is significant here is that Mahar tradition sees that struggle in terms of an attempt by 'modern Aryas' to maintain supremacy over 'modern Dasyus.' In these terms, the conversion of Mahars to Buddhism in 1956, prepared from the 1940's on by B. R. Ambedkar, was the last stage of a continuing tradition of seeking escape from a Tradition and its system which could not, in their view, be changed. Maharashtrian Buddhism was still Bhakti in form, the object of Bhakti being changed to the Lord Buddha and the Bodhisattva Babasaheb Ambedkar. It is "Mahar traditional" in other respects as well: still the cry of the militant outsider who has been trapped within a system without becoming part of it. A few examples from the new oral tradition expressed in songs may be given:

An Oath:

Take an oath at Bhimraya's feet
Have no fear of death.

The wicked persecuted Bhimraya
 They are after you, to bury you.
 They have set a trap of treachery
 To ruin your character and life.

Do not waver, let the life fall
 Let your blood boil, do not fear
 Hasten to the feet of Bhimraya

The cruel and wicked and rogues
 Blocked your path of happiness
 Attack them now!
 And shatter the fortress of 'chaturvarnya.'

Lord Buddha protects you
 Bhimraya loves you
 Lay down your life for Dharma
 Do not miss this opportunity,
 The Golden opportunity.

Face Death with a smile,
 Embrace it for the sake of truth.

Nava Buddha's, keep your promise:

Nava Buddhas, keep your Bhima's promises
 And keep away from vices.

Bury your old traditions
 Otherwise they will bury you in eternal ignorance
 So take Diksha of future ideas and thoughts

Take this sword of words
 And spread Buddhism all over the world
 And convert the whole of humanity
 To a Dharma of equality

There is poverty and inequality on our life
 Lord Buddha will save us from them
 Let us go to Bhimraya, to Lord Buddha

All our life we are sorrowful, poor and unable
 Now our Dharma is great, society is warm and kind
 Let us not refrain from duty, face the death.

It is your duty to spread Dharma
 Bhima spent his life to search that Dharma
 He brought that revolutionary Dharm and took us to Buddha.

Lord Buddha, Incarnate:

Bhimrao is Lord Buddha incarnate
 He won the battles with his words
 At his very sight, enemies tremble
 Their words falter
 None dares to step forward
 He taught lessons to fools
 He changed the course of history
 It is fortune of the down-trodden, that he was born
 He wrote the constitution of Bharat
 He lead his people to Lord Buddha
 We pay homage to you, Buddha incarnate
 We are not orphans, Bhim is our Savior
 For us he will reincarnate
 And will shatter false religion
 He dazzled those in power and position
 He brightened the fortune of Bharat
 He is our mother, we are his children
 The great Pundits surrendered to you
 You annihilated the Hindu Dharma
 We hurry now to take your path
 Let us take an oath of Baba
 Let us not break it
 Waste not this valuable time.

To a former Mahar (Maharashtrian Buddhist) there is no ambiguity in the references within the songs: the "wicked" who persecuted Bhimraya (Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar) are the Brahmans, more generally the Hindus; the fortress of 'chaturvarnya' is, literally the Four Varna system, the caste system. In the second song, the reference to "burying old traditions" is quite literally meant as a call to abandon designation as Mahar, cease wor-

shipping Hindu images, and to opt out of the Brahmanical Great Tradition and its social system. For Buddhism is seen as a distinct, separate system and is considered so in origin by the New Buddhists. From the perspective of the more educated convert, Buddhism began as a new system, intended to supplant the Brahmanical system; it was taken over by Brahmins, who then proceeded to merge it into *their* Great Tradition as an unorthodox sect but still allowable as a part of the Great Tradition. To the New Buddhist, there is no difficulty in understanding the statement, literally, that they chose to leave one system and enter another, without leaving India, Maharashtra, or any specific locality. The militant tone of these, and other songs, emphasizes the Mahar heritage of bravery, loyalty, refusal to be absorbed. A *voluntary* choice has been made, and dimly the outlines of the new system in which they are embedded begins to be discerned.

Conclusion

The emphasis above has been placed on the problem of tradition in Indian civilization, with the former Mahar, now Maharashtra Buddhist, taken to exemplify a tradition which is neither Little nor Great in the sense of Robert Redfield or Milton Singer. That I am not entirely misinterpreting the application of Great Tradition to India as the equivalent of Hindu, Brahmanical (despite qualifications which Prof. Singer has attempted) is suggested in an article by Edward Jay, "Revitalization Movements in Tribal India" (Vidyarthi 1962:282-315). Jay, a Chicago student, states:

"In India two parallel traditions or ways of life have been described as 'Great' and 'Little,' the former being the way of life of orthodox, literate Hindus and that which is outlined in the sacred works of Hinduism—the Vedas, the Puranas, etc.; and the latter is the way of life of the simple village, the folk, and the peasant. These two traditions are often in opposition, but are always in interaction."

The simplifications of the student cannot always be visited upon the shoulders of the mentors, but as I have indicated, there is no reason to read the intent of recent statements concerning

the Great Tradition in a different way. For example, Prof. Singer (1964:102), the outstanding exponent of the Great-Little Tradition approach suggests:

“ . . . the social anthropologist who studies the very recent past needs to learn a great deal more about how the local versions of *the great tradition* (sic) are related to local behavior and to All-India models and behavior.”

To labor the point is unnecessary. If by Great Tradition is meant a single, all-encompassing system of beliefs and patterns which is by definition exemplified in different “life-styles” (Singer’s term), then it is time for a thorough discussion of the reality of *that* Tradition. One is reminded of F. G. Bailey’s (1959:91) criticism directed against a somewhat similar point of view expressed by L. Dumont and D. Pocock. Bailey writes “ . . . before we can examine this statement [i.e., that is impossible to think about Indian Society without assuming it is one] we have to fill in some of the empty spaces in the rhetoric of India is one . . . we might translate ‘The whole of Indian society can be understood as a single system of ideas or values.’ . . . But the editors are in fact concerned with only one system of values—Hinduism.” In my argument, I suggest, as does Bailey, that it is not yet certain *a* Great Tradition exists as such in Indian culture; unlike Bailey I am willing to concede that there is such a thing as Indian culture, and that it has a structure. I suggest that the structure of Indian culture is composed of multiple traditions, each tradition utilizing components (groups, centers, items, relationships) found throughout India. But I would insist that each tradition is of *equal* status on an all-India scale, and that our attention must be directed to the system which is dominant in any time, region or locality to assess which is the “Great Tradition” of the moment.

Given this approach, it may well appear that ‘unity’ is a thing devised for convenience of investigation and presentation rather than being objectively present. Perhaps for too long we have tended to become part of the system in our attempts to analyse it—and by stepping outside, we can see such community-wide traditions as those of the Mahar not as a variant of *the* system, but as an entirely different system in itself. In a complex culture

such as India represents, this would suggest that shared components are *not* the indicators of participation in a *single* system—or tradition. It is the perceived relationship between components, the organization of the meaning of these relationships and components which gives body to a “tradition.” One example may clarify the above: to the observer today, Mahars who go to the temples at Pandharpur for worship are performing an act which their fathers and grandfathers performed as ‘Hindus.’ But Pandharpur, in their new tradition and system represents not the residence of the diety Vithoba—it has become the alien container of an image of the Buddha. Pilgrimage is legitimized by making the journey on Buddhist ritual days and by the fact that Babasaheb Ambedkar accepted and propagated a theory about the Pandharpur image not strongly supported in fact. Pandharpur and its image, pilgrimage, and the *samadhi* (apothesis) of a Mahar saint at that place are all used by Mahars, ‘Hindu’ or Buddhist. Yet the relationship between these components and the systems (social and religious) of which they are a part are significantly different. Coincidence is not the same thing as identity. It has been the proponents of “Brahmanical” systems in India (note: not necessarily the ‘machinations of the Brahmins’) who have extended their perceptions of relationships to include “all-India” in their tradition. It is time we began to ask of *our* ‘traditionalists’—whose tradition are you expounding?

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